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## Receptivity as the Core of Biblical Decision Making

Stephanie Sheehan M.A.  
ssheehan@southern.edu

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**Abstract**

Receptivity implies an openness to emotions, ideas, people, and counsel. For Christian leaders receptivity is a key component which allows God to work more fully through the leader to accomplish His purposes. Leaders inevitably make decisions. Within the realm of Christian leadership, decision making should be undergirded by Biblical foundations. Within this gap there is need for increased discussion that highlights the biblical principles from which to operate as well as development of context and potential antecedents. This contribution to the discussion addresses the importance of establishing a Biblical perspective for facilitating greater understanding for self and others with regard to decision making and its inclusion within an integrated context of Scripture, Christian leadership theology, and leadership theory. The influence of leader character with regard to embodiment of humility or hubris is proposed and vulnerabilities of decision making identified and discussed within this context. The Biblical theme of receptivity is then explored through the lived experiences and decisions of two Biblical leaders, Pharaoh and Saul/Paul.

**Key words:** decision making, biblical decision making, commitment escalation, power

### Receptivity as the Core of Biblical Decision Making

The concept of receptivity evokes various images based on setting, such as home, the workplace, the ball field, and the like. Within a biblical context receptivity may evoke thoughts such as a seeker accepting new bible truths, receiving Jesus into one's heart, or being receptive to the leading of the Holy Spirit. The latter is critical for maintaining a relationship with Christ and allowing Him to fulfill His purposes in and through oneself. And as such it is imperative for Christian leaders to have and demonstrate receptivity in the workplace through positive leader-member exchange and an openness to ideas and counsel when making decisions and demonstrating a willingness to heed counsel that differs approach or stance. The Bible narrative contains numerous examples of decision making and the ensuing outcomes, some negative, some positive. Within these narratives a theme typically emerges surrounding the degree of receptivity of counsel or instruction, whether from God or man. Perhaps most notable is brought to life in Lucifer's story (Rev 12:7-9). Lucifer lacked receptivity to God's goodness and counsel, choosing to make decisions purely based on self-focus in hopes of achieving his objective of ascending to the throne and ruling God's heavenly organization (Isa 14:13, 14). The fallout from Lucifer's decisions continue to reverberate as the Great Controversy dominates the landscape of our earthly saga and manifests as the battle for individual hearts and minds. Decisions are important. Many have eternal consequences. Thus the need to explicate the core elements of decision making and the inherent role of receptivity. Proverbs states that "a wicked man hardens his face but as for the upright he establishes his way" (21:29), acknowledging the one or the other paradigm. The one who hardens his face is represented represents hubris; and the upright represents humility. The folly of hubris manifests in an individual being fully committed to self and pursuit of self-identified decisions about which counsel is declined—this ends in death (Prov 14:12). The opposite, humility, manifests in wise receptivity to Godly counsel (Prov 12:15). Receptivity directly impacts decision making, a critical concept and skill that needs greater focus within the realm of education.

Among the many subjects covered within the realm of undergraduate business studies with regard to management and leadership, decision making stands quietly by awaiting attention as the pages turn. It does garner mention with regard to business processes and some textbooks provide an overview of decision-making models within a specific context such as accounting, marketing, project management, etc. In a general context, threats to good decision making are identified and briefly explained, but not always. Just as it is important to understand decision making and its inherent cyclical nature (process model), it is also important to understand the antecedents to manifestation of decision making vulnerabilities. If business textbooks touch on contributing antecedents at all it is superficial compared to the true depth of the topic, especially for the Christian leader. Additionally, classroom resources typically lack intentional and overt inclusion of Biblical foundations for leadership and the inherent influence of such in responsibilities such as decision making and combatting associated vulnerabilities. For Christian educators seeking to go beyond the textbook to establish and integrate Biblical foundations in decision making and facilitating deeper and biblically based understanding of the factors that contribute to a leader's decision and its quality, there remains a gap—a gap of resources and a gap of established interrelatedness of the topic at hand to the larger context of Christian leadership. Proverbs provides a context from which to effectively teach fundamentals and nuances of decision making from a Biblical perspective and assists in recognition that there are deeper issues involved in decision making and that these reside within one's core. The following discussion presents decision making theory, associated vulnerabilities, and the impact of character and receptivity, specifically hubris and humility upon a leader's choices and evaluations with regard to making decisions. It concludes with examining decision making and its vulnerabilities in the lived experiences of two Bible characters: Pharaoh and Saul/Paul.

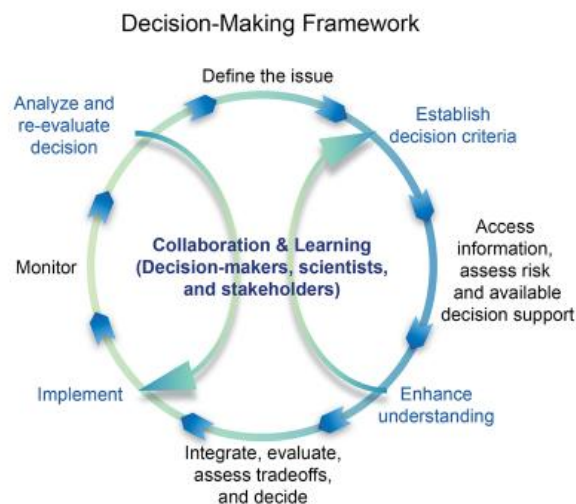
### Building Context from Integrated Biblical Perspectives

Bridging the gap for educators and practitioners necessitates a holistic approach to the integration of scripture, Christian leadership theology, and leadership theory. This provides a Scripture-based foundation from which the fundamentals of and ancillary issues within the broad context of Christian leadership and leadership theory may be understood and application become apparent and relevant. The complexity of such lends itself to illustrative explanation through consideration of the molecular design of deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA). DNA is a molecule that contains genetic code for the development, functioning, and reproduction of all living organisms. It is described by Alberts, Bray, Hopkin, Johnson, Lewis and Raff (2013) as composed of two biopolymer strands of polynucleotides coiled around each other to form a double helix, with each strand composed of nucleotides. Each nucleotide is composed of a nucleobase and a sugar, and connected in chain-like fashion by covalent bonds, which

join the sugar of one nucleotide with the phosphate of another to form the backbone of the helix. The two strands run in opposite directions and are thus anti-parallel. The complexity of structure, interdependence, and function of the various components of DNA portray the dynamic context in which the juxtaposition of Scripture, Christian theology, and organizational leadership coexist. The dynamic nature of DNA represents the dynamic nature of scriptural interpretive methodologies as they continue to evolve and expand (Combrink, 1999; Osborne, 2006; Robbins, 1996a and 1996b); theology continues to be identified, clarified, and/or refined (e.g. Ayers, 2006; Mayhue, 2011; Niewold, 2007); and theories of leaders and organizational leadership expand or are revised, as so well documented in numerous leadership journals. The two strands in this hypothetical DNA-like structure represent Scripture and organizational leadership. As with DNA, these two strands are ascribed directional anti-parallelism. The strand of Scripture is depicted as traveling downward, from the Source of all creation and knowledge. The strand of organizational leadership is depicted as traveling upward, representative of leaders' dedicatory service to and reliance upon the Source of all life and wisdom. The strands are never static, rather in perpetual interactive motion. The connectors (bonds) represent various aspects and tenets of Christian theology which connect at multiple junctures to the double strand and serve to bridge the gap between Scripture and leadership. At the junctures with Scripture, Christian theology is formed and influenced through ongoing forms of exegesis and criticism. At the juncture with organizational leadership, the aspects/tenets of Christian theology metamorphose from axiological to ontological; and thus, ideally, a receptivity to and embodiment of that which was set forth in Scripture. Scripture can stand alone; and secular organizational leadership can stand alone; but the binding and blending agents are the development and exercise of the tenets of Christian leadership theology.

As the DNA resides in the nucleus of the cell, so Christ, His Word and leadership reside within us, and us within the world. As the DNA contributes to the life of the cell, so we are called to share Life to the world through integration of His Word in every aspect of our lives and evidenced in our daily walk as we fulfill our vocation and calling. As academicians we are called to continue deeper intellectual exploration, integration, and heart-felt

application of Scripture in all aspects of life and leadership—and teaching. From this vantage point, educators are positioned to effectively bridge the educational gap for learners with regard to integration of faith and learning, faith and leading, faith and living. This discussion explores these junctions through the intersection of leadership theory, specifically decision making, and the Scriptural and spiritual dynamics that influence it.



### Decision Theory

Decision theory can be classified as classical and non-classical. Classical decision theory is based on a rational model of decision making that is sequential and methodical, following a prescribed set of steps in order to reach an optimum decision (Eisenhardt & Zbaracki, 1992; Simon, 1979). In this

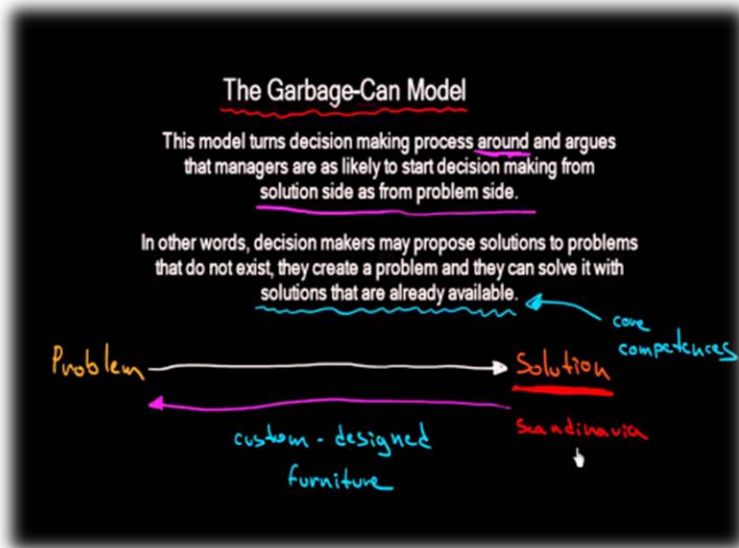
scenario the problem is clearly defined, all needed information is obtained and all outcomes weighed in order to make an optimal decision (Eisenhardt & Zbaracki, 1992; Ivancevich et al, 2011). According to Simon (1979), however, this theory has never reflected the day-to-day reality of organizational decision-making. Thus the construction of theory to describe decision-making within the inherent movement of an organizational environment—an environment often constrained by time and information (Barros, 2010; Simon, 1979). Decision-making in such an environment is behavioral in nature (Schermerhorn, Osborn, Hunt, 2003 and is rationally bound by limited knowledge of problem origination, alternatives, and information by which to evaluate outcomes (Eisenhardt & Zbaracki, 1992; Simon, 1979). In this scenario, the rational process is bound by these constraints and is aptly termed bounded rationality (Schermerhorn, Osborn, Hunt, 2003; Simon, 1979). Bounded rationality recognizes the cognitive and knowledge based limits, acknowledges inability to reach an optimal decision, and evaluates options based on meeting the immediate need, or satisficing (Eisenhardt & Zbaracki, 1992; Ivancevich et al, 2011; Simon, 1979). Satisficing was proposed by Simon to simplify the decision making process and it entails choosing an option that meets a minimum outcome threshold (Barros, 2010). Barros (2010) posits a

complement to bounded rationality: procedural rationality. Barros describes the relationship as bounded rationality rejects what could be known for what is known and procedural rationality is the method through which that happens. When considering the human factor at the center of the process, it is understandable how decisions made using bounded rationality are directly impacted by the individual(s) making the decision (Schermerhorn et al., 2003).

Cohen, March, and Olsen (1972) posited a decision theory model more detached from decision-makers,

problems, and solutions—the garbage can model. In this model decisions are outcomes of independent organizational events rather than a systematic process (Eisenhardt & Zbaracki, 1992). These outcomes (i.e. solutions) often pre-exist problems they solve, thus when a problem arises, going through the garbage can may result in retrieval of a solution already in existence (Cohen et al.). Eisenhardt and Zbaracki (1992) state bounded rationality and the garbage can model as more appropriate when more rapid decisions are needed due to situational urgency or quick environmental pace.

Decision-making is a complex process and will vary among organizations. The method of decision-making utilized depends upon several factors including,



organizational culture and structure, type of decision needed, and attributes of individuals participating in any given decision-making process.

### Individual model

Eisenhardt & Zbaracki (1992) assert that individual decision-making is primarily done by leaders/managers within their respective areas of control and that these decisions are predominantly tactical or operational in nature. Individuals often make these decisions with bounded rationality, employing satisficing and heuristics (Eisenhardt & Zbaracki, 1992; Ivancevich et al., 2011). Satisficing is the process of opting a decision that is good enough rather than continuing to search for optimal decisions. This involves an intuitive process of option evaluation that results in a faster decision being made and is referred to as heuristics (Eisenhardt & Zbaracki, 1992; Ivancevich et al, 2011). Individuals, especially managers/leaders may make decision via authority (due to position) without seeking input, or individuals may use a consultative approach wherein input is sought from others prior to the individual making the decision (Schermerhorn et al., 2003).

Individuals tend to make decisions either cognitively or intuitively. The cognitive process progressively builds decisions based on sequential cognitive processing using heuristics to deal with limited information and unknown degree of uncertainty (Schermerhorn et al., 2003). Intuitive decisions are, as one might surmise, based on individual intuition that occurs at the subconscious level (Ivancevich et al., 2011). The degree of creativity in decisions is affected by individual personality and organizational environmental factors that either encourage or suppress creativity (Schermerhorn et al., 2003). Individual values also affect every aspect of decision-making, including objectives, identification and selection of alternatives, implementation, and evaluation (Ivancevich et al., 2011). Given the complexity of decision making it stands to reason there are inherent vulnerabilities associated with individual decision making.

### **Vulnerabilities in Decision Making**

Organizational decisions determine the company's trajectory; and poor decisions have the power to negatively impact organizational trajectories and outcomes (Ivancevich, Konopaske, & Matteson, 2011; Mellahi & Wilkinson, 2004). For organizations with a powerful leader and without external or board governance poor decisions can be catastrophic, as individuals make decisions within the context of self—self needs, abilities, perception of organizational environment, and social structure (Sharpansky, 2009). With a predisposition toward self-focus, individual decisions are vulnerable to overconfidence (Fast, Sivanathan, Mayer, & Galinsky, 2011), commitment escalation, and risk (Ivancevich et al., 2011).

#### **Overconfidence**

Overconfidence describes an individual's self-magnified knowledge superiority and accuracy (Fast et al., 2011). Fast et al. state that power results in overconfidence, an inflated sense of being able to personally affect and/or manage outcomes through personal action or ability. Hubris is essentially defined by overconfidence and serves to perpetuate repetition of belief in self and accuracy of self-knowledge, and continuation of the decision-making logic, and subsequent reinforcement of invincibility (Delbecq, 2006). In contrast, the antitheses of hubris experience a lack confidence and often fail to have or demonstrate confidence even in a leadership position. In essence this serves to perpetuate the lie that one cannot affect and/or manage outcomes, thus reinforcing negative self-perception, negative self-talk, and negative reactive behaviors, whether via reaction or retreat. The assumptive confidence and its opposite both serve to perpetuate repetition of belief in or about self, the accuracy of self-knowledge, thus contributing to the continuation of the decision-making logic being exercised (Fast et al., 2011). In a meta-analysis of extant literature on decision-making, Slesman, Conlon, McNamara, and Miles (2012) found that overconfidence in decision-making is an antecedent to escalation of commitment.

#### **Commitment Escalation**

Geiger, Robertson, and Irwin (1998) describe escalating commitment behavior as when an individual continues pursuit of an objective or decision despite indicators that failing results will not change. Leaders feel compelled to have decision consistency and therefore remain committed to a decision in spite of evidence indicative of its failure, as though the initial decision had been correct (Sinha, Inkson, & Barker, 2012). This arises from a sense of self-justification manifesting in hubris about the current or previous decision and leads to internal pressure to continue commitment to the decision to prove its correctness (Geiger et al., 1998) even in the face of new information and/or undeniably negative outcomes when clearly new decisions should have been made (Maner, Gailliot, & Butz, 2007).

In these situations, hubris will fashion the outcomes in such a way that acts as Teflon to poor decisions and outcomes, and conveniently casts blame on anyone other than self (Delbecq, 2006). Self-denigration is likely to invoke self-doubt in the area of decision making. This may contribute to over-analyzation of each decision and as well as the inability to make decisions, or inability to stay with a decision once it is made. Delay or failure to make necessary decisions potentially exposes the organization to market or environmental risk and/or potentially reduces organizational morale. The tendency to waver or demonstrate fickleness about decisions may create dissonance, inefficiencies, and disrespect when the leader will not stand on a good decision. Humility provides the balanced approach of recognizing that no one is infallible and no one has all the answers. This serves to provide a backdrop against which new information can be objectively evaluated in light of the current decisions and desired organizational outcomes—and changes made as necessary. Overconfidence and commitment escalation often come along with risk aversion and power.

#### **Risk Aversion and Power**

When decision makers are afraid of risk, decisions tend to be risk averse. This is in contrast to a general perception of a person with power being more likely to take action, increase risk-taking, and portray a high level of outcome control (Fast, Sivanathan, Mayer, & Galinsky, 2011; Maner et al., 2007). Risk aversion and/or avoidance can stem from fear of losing power and/or position due to negative outcomes from risky decisions and manifests primarily out of fear over potential loss of legitimate power and/or position by someone exercises coercive power (Ivancevich et al., 2011; Maner et al., 2007). Fast et al. found that power drives confidence; and individuals in power want to keep those positions. This potentially indicates a cycle of power exertion and power maintenance driven by the need to be powerful and fear of losing such power. Within the context hubris, fear of losing a position of power isn't likely, as hubris operates from a place of self-importance and self-aggrandizement, rendering the leader vulnerable to misreading environmental and social cues. Risk aversion would be experienced

differently through the lens of self-deprecation. In this context, a decision maker would most likely be averse to risk and likely averse to power, though in a position of such. This would create a predilection toward inaction even when beneficial or necessary for the organization. Thus the inability to act by one prone to self-deprecation stands in direct contrast to the one driven by hubris, acting whether or not it is prudent to do so and refusing to change course even when the need becomes undeniably evident.

The degree to which risk aversion and power, overconfidence, and/or commitment escalation manifest in decision making rests within the core of the leader—character, and the leader’s ability to have or develop receptivity to counsel.

### **Character of the Decision Maker**

A leader’s character strongly influences the ability to effectively execute the steps of the decision-making model. The degree to which overconfidence, commitment escalation, and/or risk aversion affect decision making is influenced by a leader’s core ethical principles and the degree of a leader’s humility—or lack thereof. The focus herein is rooted in the core elements of ethical leadership, though issues of character transcend any one leader type (e.g. ethical, servant, transformational, authentic, et. al.) such as those identified by Resick, Hanges, Dickson, and Mitchelson (2006) of “character/integrity, ethical awareness, community/people orientation, motivating, encouraging and empowering” (p. 346); and those identified by Yukl (2013) as values of ethical leadership: “integrity, altruism, humility, empathy and healing, personal growth, fairness and justice, and empowerment” (p. 348). Yukl defines humility as a value: “treats others with respect, avoids status symbols and special privileges, admits limitations and mistakes, is modest about achievements, emphasizes the contributions of other others when a collective effort is successful” (p. 348). Though Yukl defines humility as a value, others have defined it as a virtue (Falk & Blaylock, 2012; Vera and Rodriguez-Lopez, 2004). Positing that values and virtues are separate and distinct constructs, Riggio, Zhu, Reina & Maroosis (2010) identify values as “guiding principles in our lives with respect to the personal and social ends we desire” (p. 237) versus virtue, “a pervasive trait of character” (Vera & Rodriguez-Lopez, 394), “something practiced at all times” (Riggio, et al. (p. 237) and that which “reflects a relatively stable character trait” (Falk & Blaylock, p. 74). Agreeing with Falk and Blaylock, Vera and Rodriguez-Lopez, and Winston and Tucker (2011), this paper assumes the stance of humility as a virtue modeled on Winston and Tucker’s identification of virtues existing between vices in the context of the Beatitudes.

The premise of Winston and Tucker (2011) is based on Aristotle’s definition of a virtue, described as “a passion or action that lies at the mean between two vices—a balance between defect/neglect and excess” (p. 15). Within this model, humility is presented as the virtue between the vices of hubris and self-denigration. Humility therefore acts as the “balance between two extremes” (Riggio, 2010, et al., p. 237). The power of humility and hubris have been studied within leadership contexts (Owens, Johnson, & Mitchell (2013), however, there remains a need for further identification and explication of these concepts as they appear within the biblical narrative. Within the characters of the various stories it becomes clear that decision making is influenced by the virtue of humility or its absence, which manifests as hubris or self-denigration.

### **Humility**

Riggio et al. assert Aquinas’ stance and propose humility is the core of temperance, through which one is able to assess and accept one’s strengths and weaknesses, and those who cannot or do not are either too self-absorbed or lack investment in self. Falk and Blaylock hold similar perspectives, without embedding humility in temperance. Falk and Blaylock describe humility as the ability to objectively assess success and failure, and the ability to distinguish between self-confidence and an over indulgent sense of self that is narcissistic in nature. Chang and Diddams (2009) describe humility as including “an openness to concede mistakes, imperfections, gaps in knowledge and limitations in a way that is not a form of self-abasement, humiliation or low self-esteem (p. 5).” Chang and Diddams also state “the practice of humility” (p. 3) comprises an orientation towards others while moving away from self-preoccupation. It includes a willingness to respect, listen to and serve others, which in turn allows one to be “open to new ideas, contradictory information, and advice (p 4).” Owens, Johnson, and Mitchell (2013) identify healthy, expressed humility as associated with “adaptive behaviors (p. 1532),” which manifest as openness to neutral self-assessment, openness to feedback, and better decision making. Falk and Blaylock (2012) strongly assert “humility is the opposite of hubris (p. 74)” as does Delbecq; however, Vera and Rodriguez-Lopez (2004) identify humility as “the mid-point between the two negative extremes of arrogance and lack of self-esteem.” Austin (2014) positions humility as a virtue between pride and self-denigration. This paper agrees with

and yet presents a similar perspective, that humility is a virtue situated between the vices of multi-faceted hubris and that which is antithetical to hubris.

### **Hubris**

Hubris, according to Hiller and Hambrick (2005) has roots in Greek mythology, similar to its cousin, narcissism. Hubris has been colorfully described as “the great distortion associated with organizational leadership” (Delbecq, 2006), p. 100 “exaggerated self –confidence or pride, often with the connotation that retribution will follow (Hiller & Hambrick, p. 306);” “outrageous arrogance that inflicts suffering upon the innocent,” “belief that success is an entitlement and blindness to the important factor,” “the source of illogical decisions (Falk & Blaylock, 2012, p. 71;” “self-pride rather than pride in accomplishments (Chang & Diddams, 2009, p. 3;” that which is comprised of only arrogance and dominance (Delbecq); and that which “blocks informational input and causes decision makers to act on their excessive pride, fail to get the right help, fail to evaluate the reality” and causes leaders to “fail to face the consequences of a mistaken policy or action; (Falk & Blaylock, p. 71)” and spurs “retaliatory behavior (Chang & Diddams, p. 3).” Clearly, hubris is detrimental to every aspect of organizational life, as it inflates capacity for self-adulation and lifts self far above the realm of reality, exposing leaders to vulnerabilities in the decision-making process.

### **Antitheses of Hubris**

Like a gemstone, hubris is multi-faceted, and its direct opposite on the vice continuum is fodder for discussion. As noted earlier, Vera and Rodriguez-Lopez (2004) categorize hubris as arrogance and its direct opposite as low self-esteem. However, given the complexity of hubris, there is room for further delineation of its antithesis. Consideration was given to the following seemingly synonymic terms: self-accusation, self-blame, self-condemnation, self-criticism, self-defeatism, self-denigration, self-depreciation, self-devaluation, self-distrust, self-hatred, self-incrimination, self-accusation, self-pity, self-reproach, lack of self-esteem, lack of self-efficacy, negative self-image, and negative self-perception. These are all similar, yet each with unique aspects. For example, self-deprecation is defined as “belittling or undervaluing oneself,” “disparagement or undervaluation of oneself and one’s abilities (American Heritage Dictionary, 2011)” and is antithetical to the facet of hubris which embraces self-aggrandizement. Self-reproach is “the act or instance of charging oneself with a fault or mistake; the act of finding fault with or blaming oneself; (American Heritage Dictionary )” and is antithetical to the facet of hubris that prohibits ownership of poor decisions and/or mistakes due to inflation of pride. Though this paper will not delineate on each lowly antonymic phrase, it becomes clear that behaviors antithetical to hubris plummet to an equally undesirable place, negatively impacting leaders, followers, decision making, and organizational outcomes. Humility and hubris ultimately feed or combat vulnerabilities associated with decision making: overconfidence, commitment escalation, and risk aversion.

### **Decision Making in Biblical Leaders: Pharaoh and Saul/Paul**

The aforementioned conceptual framework of the role of hubris and humility in decision making is based on a comparative study of Pharaoh’s lived experiences during and after the plagues (Ex 7-12; 14) and the lived experiences of Saul/Paul before and after his Damascus road encounter (Acts 7 – 28). This illustrative framework of the philosophical constructs and applicability of phenomenological paradigms is based on a comparative study of Pharaoh’s lived experiences during and after the plagues (Exodus 7 – 12; 14 NKJV) and the lived experiences of Saul/Paul before and after his Damascus road encounter (Acts 7 – 28). During these times each oppressed God’s people (Ex 5; Acts 7, 8), received direct revelations from God (Ex 5 – 14; Acts 9), and experienced three days of darkness (Ex 10:21-23; Acts 9:8, 9). Within these contexts the influence of hubris and humility on decision making are illustrated and the heart of the matter becomes clear.

### **Pharaoh**

As Exodus opens in Egypt Joseph has just died (Ex 1:6), the children of Israel were highly favored and blessed, and a new king appeared—a king who did not know Joseph (Ex 2:6-7) nor all that he had done for Egypt (Gen 41: 37- 47:26); nor would he have cared. This pharaoh was of a different dynasty than the previous pharaoh and expelled the previous dynasty and its people, which had been friendly toward the Israelites; which this pharaoh was not (Nichol, 1953). This pharaoh was fearful that the multitudes of the Israelites would turn against the Egyptians and side with their enemies so he decreed the use of heavy oppression to subdue the Israelites (Ex 1:9-14) and attempted genocide of the Israelites through the killing of the of male children being birthed (1:15-22).



Against this backdrop the story of the birth of Moses through his call to rescue Israel is told (Ex 2-6). In the next seven chapters (Ex 7-14), the story of Moses and Aaron as God's mouthpiece to Pharaoh transpires. It is in God's covenantal act of freeing His people (Ex 6:1-8) that the word given to Abram regarding the time of sojourn and affliction of His people in a foreign land had fulfilled its time (Gen 15:13), the same spoken of by Paul in Galatians 3:17.

Pharaohs were all powerful in the land (Gen 41:40) and though they consulted with advisors, the pharaoh was still the decision maker for the territory and people under his rule. As Moses and Aaron approached Pharaoh with God's command to free His people, Pharaoh's sense of power and control surface in his first response: "Who is the Lord, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, nor will I let Israel go" (Ex 5:2). In defiance he exerted his power and authority and instructed that the brick makers would now need to gather their own straw for the bricks but still meet the same quota (Ex 5:6-14). As the drama unfolds in Exodus 6-14, Pharaoh demonstrates the same prideful stubbornness. At each request by Moses for Pharaoh to heed the word of God to free His people, Pharaoh resisted and made the decision not to free the Israelites (Ex 6 – 11).

Pharaoh's nature and life experiences were dominated by position, power, authority, and ethnic elitism resulting in marked and repeated demonstration of hubris. In each scene of the pre-Exodus events, including the pre-plague request by Moses and Aaron, Pharaoh is provided demonstration of a power greater than his own. Yet his decision to disregard God remained. The stakes continually heightened, yet Pharaoh did not relent. After each manifestation of God's power, Pharaoh had occasion to make a different decision. He had ample opportunities to set aside his overconfidence and commitment escalation and adopt a spirit of humility in order to see things as they really were; however, he did not.

In the scenes of first and second plagues (water becomes blood; frogs) Pharaoh justified his disbelief, disobedience, and decision since his magicians and sorcerers replicated the plague (Ex 7:22,23; 8:7, 15). During the second plague (frogs), Pharaoh told Moses he would free the people if Moses would petition God to provide relief from the frogs, but when relief was wrought, Pharaoh remained committed to his decision and reneged. The third plague (lice) could not be replicated by the magicians. They told Pharaoh it was "the finger of God;" but Pharaoh would not relent (Ex 8:18, 19). Beginning with the fourth plague (flies), and those that followed, God provided even more clarity for Pharaoh by afflicting only the Egyptians and not the Israelites (Ex 8:21-23). Pharaoh once again declared a changed decision and pled for mercy; and yet once again when relief was provided Pharaoh remained committed to his original decision (v. 28-32). The fifth plague (disease) killed all of the Egyptian's livestock; but Pharaoh did not repent (Ex 9:1-7). The sixth plague, painful boils, afflicted all of the Egyptian people; but Pharaoh did not repent (Ex 9:8-12). The seventh plague (torrential hail) destroyed crops and structures; and at this Pharaoh declared that God was righteous; that he (Pharaoh) and his people were sinners and he would let God's people go upon relief from the hail. Relief came; but Pharaoh reneged once again, remaining committed to his rebellious decision (Ex 9:13-35), causing Moses and Aaron to ask Pharaoh "how long will you refuse to humble yourself" (v. 3). Once the eighth plague (locusts) was predicted Pharaoh's advisors finally spoke up to Pharaoh, lamenting the utter destruction of Egypt and urging Pharaoh to obey God and let the Israelites go and serve the Lord to avoid further catastrophe. Pharaoh, however, only offered to compromise his decision to allow the Israelite men to go, and so the plague of locusts came as God had warned, and did so much damage that "there remained nothing green on the trees or on the plants of the field throughout all of Egypt (v. 16)." In response to the destruction Pharaoh repeated his declaration of having sinned against God and begged for relief from the locusts, which God provided; and yet Pharaoh still refused to recant his decision (vs. 16-20). The ninth plague was darkness: darkness so heavy it could be "felt" and it lasted for three days (v. 21, 22).

Practically all of Egypt had been annihilated solely because of Pharaoh's unwillingness to demonstrate humility and admit God's sovereignty was greater than his earthly power and authority. The three days of darkness provided ample opportunity, again, for Pharaoh to exercise a degree of objectivity about the events precipitated by his ego, pride, and stubbornness. It was a period of time Pharaoh could have used to reevaluate the catastrophic state of the land and people caused by his unbending, ego-centered decision--to acknowledge the evidence, his error, and reverse the decision. Pharaoh, however, was blinded by pride, overconfidence, desire for power, and hunger for control. Pharaoh once again offered Moses a compromise so that all could go except flocks and herds, yet this was still not a changed decision (Ex 10:24-28). Sadly, his choice brought about the tenth and last plague, death of the firstborn, which physically and emotionally devastated his people (Ex 11:1-10; 12:29,30). In spite of counsel from advisors and numerous tangible evidences of his unwise decision, such as obliteration of crops and structures, physical and emotional sufferings of his people, Pharaoh remained in a state of continued

escalation of commitment. Only after the death of the firstborn did Pharaoh finally acquiesce to God's instruction to let Israel go (Ex 12:31). However, he regretted giving in. Even after all that the people personally endured (thirst, frogs, lice, flies, boils, hunger from loss of crops, eerie darkness, death of children), the land and livestock suffered (frogs, lice, flies, disease, hail, locusts), he returned to his original decision, determined not to lose power and not to submit to God's sovereignty (Ex 14:5). Pharaoh's hubris and lack of receptivity to God and the counsel of men resulted in escalated commitment to the previous decision and led to additional tragic losses. Several of the antecedents to commitment escalation identified by Slesman, Conlon, McNamara, and Miles (2012) appear throughout Pharaoh's story. These are arranged based on Slesman et al.'s categories (e.g. project), sub-categorical (e.g. expected utility theory), and description of escalation determinants:



- Project: subjective expected utility theory; personal preference for decision.
- Psychological: self-justification theory: a) self-confidence results in disregard of negative results from decision due to over-confidence of self-ability to reverse probable negative outcomes; and b) ego threat in which decision maker is highly sensitized to others opinion and thus does not want to be wrong in order to guard reputation.
- Social: self-presentation theory; decision maker is concerned of others opinion and critique of the decision and wants to "save face".
- Structural: agency theory; decision maker acts in best self-interest even though not in the best interest of the organization.

These epitomize the various aspects of hubris demonstrated by Pharaoh. Yet, there's more. In Pharaoh's quest to capture and oppress the Israelites once again he led his most able military men, over 600 of them, and all of the requisite military resources (chariots, horses, support troops, weaponry, etc.) on a trajectory of death and destruction (Ex 14:27, 28). The end result of Pharaoh's immovable and irrational decision was the severe suffering and death of the people, animals, agriculture, and as a result the national economy. Hubris ruled his heart, rather than humility.

### **Saul/Paul**

Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9:11) first appears at the end of a long narrative describing the violent death of Stephen that occurred at the climax of his recounting the history of Israel and its leaders (Acts 7). This account served as an indictment against the current leaders (Wiersbe, 1989) and resulted in Stephen's stoning by a frenzied crowd. Saul is first introduced as the one in front of which Stephen's murderers laid their robes to be guarded (Acts 7:58; 22:20). Saul was highly educated as a Hebrew, a Pharisee (Acts 22:3; 26:5; 2 Cor 11:22; Phil 3:5), and also held Roman citizenship (Acts 22:28). Saul was a persecutor of the church in Jerusalem and any believers of the Way, wreaking havoc with the church by kidnapping people from their homes, beating them and putting them in prison (Acts 8:1-3, 22:4, 22:19; Gal 1:13, 14, 23). The fact that women were included in his persecution speaks to the fervor of acting on his beliefs (Wiersbe, 1989). At the time of his pivotal life experience he was on his way to perpetrate more of this persecution against the believers in Damascus, followed by arrest and imprisonment (Acts 9:1,2).

Saul's hubric state arose from a sense of elitism arising from a quality Jewish upbringing, excellent education, and dual citizenship; and led to a hubric sense of entitlement, religious fervor, pride of heritage, and leadership as a Pharisee. These culminated in his efforts to persecute all who believed in the Messiah, as Saul considered it to be the work of God. To further the work, he had obtained open warrants for "any who were of the way" and set out for Damascus intent on arresting and imprisoning more believers (Acts 9:2). Though Saul had seen and heard witness of God, he would not allow himself to consider the possibility that he might be wrong. God, however, intended to give him one more opportunity and essentially arrested him first. (Acts 9:1-4).

Saul is referred to as Paul for the first time in Acts 13:9 and Paul is used thereafter. Nichol (1953) notes there are differing theories regarding his names, the most plausible for these purposes being the degree of multi-lingual peoples at the time and having name variations. Thus Saul was his Hebrew name and Paul the Roman version of the same name (Nichols, 1953). Given Saul's ministry from this point forward is primarily to non-Jews, it



is understandable that he is referred to by his non-Jewish name except during his recounting of his testimony (Acts 22:7, 13; 26:14) (Nichol, 1953).

Saul's testimony of this event is found in Acts 9:1-10; 22:1-21; and 26:12-18. In these he recounts suddenly being amidst an intensely bright light, falling to the ground, and being questioned by the Lord about his persecution of Him (Jesus), to which he responded by asking what should he do. Saul was then without sight for three days—three days of darkness (Acts 9:9) during which his heart, once full of hubris, began to change, as evidenced by his question to the Lord inquiring for instruction, by his acknowledgement that although he thought he was working for God he was actually persecuting him (9:5; 22:7; 26:15), and by acceptance of the calling on his life to personally witness before “Gentiles,

kings, and the children of Israel” (9:15), to tell of what was and would be revealed (26:16); and, ironically, to “open their eyes (Jews and Gentiles) to turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me (26:18).” In other words, Saul was to lead others to reconsider prior decisions about Christ and His teachings. Saul heard and received the counsel that regarding his decision to persecute believers was an error. In humility Saul accepted the counsel, rescinded his decision, and changed the trajectory of his life. Saul set aside the hubric tendencies of imposition his preferences, over-reaching self-confidence, and ego. Paul's humility in response to direct revelation from God prevented escalation of commitment (26:15) and contributed to his successful work among the Gentiles and the building of the first century church. In spite of persecution for the kingdom, Paul retained a sense of effective and expressed humility in and about his newly adopted theological and ideological tenets, without being tempted to avoid the call on his life through negative self-thought and negative self-talk residing in the area of antitheses to hubris. He labored confidently and with humility to help others to see as clearly as he now did. He allowed God to remove his heart of stone (hubris) and in exchanged received a heart of flesh (humility) (Eze 36:26).

Pharaoh and Saul each oppressed God's people (Ex 5; Acts 7, 8) demonstrating hubris at the expense of others. Each received direct revelation of God (Ex 5 – 14; Acts 9) to contradict current decision-making schemas and hubric behaviors. Each was each allotted three days of darkness (Ex 10:21-23; Acts 9:8, 9) to give cause for objective reflection of intended and unintended consequences of pursuing their current path. The decisions each of these leaders made with regard to setting aside hubric traits and behaviors to see objectively view reality had vastly different results. Despite the numerous opportunities extended to Pharaoh to reconsider and reposition, pride and hubris prevented his ability to consider anything other than his power and position, regardless of the effects of his current decision-making position. Consumed by his quest for power, inflated self-image, and inability to admit mistakes, Pharaoh and his hubric heart led his empire (i.e. organization) to suffer interminable losses and be gutted of leadership and resources (Ex 7:1 -14: 28, 29). Saul, however, experienced a state of openness to new and different counsel, and chose to set aside suppositions and judgments in order to see things differently (Acts 9:5-9). As a result, he led the effort to multiply believers and build the first century church (i.e. organization).

These Biblical accounts illustrate the intricacies and potential vulnerabilities of leader decision making and the highly variable outcomes that are dependent upon leaders demonstrating obstinance and commitment escalation or humility to accept reality and rescind poor decisions. Thus, the spiritual core of one's character as manifested through hubris and humility becomes the heart of the matter with regard to decision making.

### Conclusion

Educators prepare students for life. And life is full of decisions. Utilizing familiar Bible stories to demonstrate the principle of receptivity and its effect on decision making creates powerful emotional and

intellectual connections that will transcend the classroom. For this purposes the discussion has addressed the importance of establishing a Biblical perspective for understanding and facilitating greater understanding with regard to understanding decision theory, decision making, and vulnerabilities of decision making within an integrated context of Scripture. The influence of leader character and receptivity with regard to embodiment of humility or hubris was proposed and vulnerabilities of decision making were identified and discussed within the context of hubris and humility and illustrated through the hubric lives of two Biblical leaders, Pharaoh and Saul, their decisions, and associated results.

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