

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

A Comprehensive Technical Analysis of Leadership Dynamics: A Study in Brokenness Based on A Tale of Three Kings

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Theoretical Foundation: The Architecture of Spiritual Authority

In the domain of leadership literature, few works offer as profound a psychological and structural analysis of power as Gene Edwards' **A Tale of Three Kings: A Study in Brokenness**. This work serves as a technical framework for understanding the lifecycle of authority, the mechanics of submission, and the inevitable friction that occurs within hierarchical systems—specifically within religious and mission-driven organizations. At its core, the text examines three distinct archetypes of leadership represented by the biblical figures of **King Saul**, **King David**, and **Absalom**.

The central thesis of the study posits that true leadership is not derived from positional power or external validation, but from an internal state of 'brokenness.' In this context, **brokenness** is defined as a technical process of character refinement where the leader's ego, self-will, and desire for self-preservation are systematically dismantled to make room for a higher objective—divine or organizational alignment. This process is critical for preventing the 'Saul-like' degeneration into tyranny or the 'Absalom-like' descent into reactionary rebellion.

The Mechanical Definition of Authority

To analyze these dynamics, we must first establish a technical taxonomy of authority as presented in the study:

- Assigned Authority: Power granted by an external system or institution (The Saul Archetype).
- Emergent Authority: Influence developed through character, suffering, and proven competence (The David Archetype).
- Usurped Authority: Power seized through the exploitation of institutional weaknesses or the manipulation of popular sentiment (The Absalom Archetype).

The Saul Archetype: The Dynamics of Institutional Insecurity

King Saul represents the 'Empty Vessel' of leadership—a figure who possesses the crown (formal title) but lacks the internal structural integrity to manage the pressures of the position. From a technical standpoint, Saul's leadership model is characterized by **Negative Feedback Loops**. As

his insecurity grows, he perceives any internal excellence (represented by David) as an existential threat rather than an organizational asset.

The Spear-Throwing Mechanism

Edwards introduces a poignant metaphor for lateral and vertical workplace violence: the throwing of spears. When a 'Saul' identifies a subordinate who exhibits higher competence or divine favor, the reaction is often a sequence of technical assaults designed to neutralize the perceived threat. These may include:

1. Character Assassination: Undermining the subordinate's reputation within the hierarchy.
2. Resource Withholding: Denying the tools or support necessary for the subordinate to succeed.
3. Direct Hostility: Openly aggressive acts intended to force the subordinate into a reactive stance.

The study argues that a leader enters the 'Saul Phase' when they begin to prioritize the protection of their position over the fulfillment of the organization's mission. This creates a toxic ecosystem where the primary KPI (Key Performance Indicator) becomes 'Loyalty to the Individual' rather than 'Alignment with the Vision.'

The David Archetype: The Engineering of Submission

David represents the most complex leadership model: the leader in training through **Active Non-Resistance**. The technical challenge David faces is how to maintain integrity while operating under a dysfunctional and abusive authority. This is often the most difficult stage for high-potential leaders within any organization.

The Adullam Workflow

When David is forced out of the formal structure by Saul's hostility, he enters the 'Cave of Adullam' phase. This is not merely a period of hiding; it is a critical phase of **Organizational Bootstrapping**. David manages a group of 'distressed, indebted, and discontented' individuals, transforming them into a high-functioning team (the Mighty Men) without the benefit of institutional resources. The technical requirements for this transformation include:

- Resilience Engineering: Building internal fortitude that does not depend on external validation.
- Relational Trust-Building: Establishing authority based on shared suffering and mutual respect.
- Strategic Patience: Refusing to accelerate the leadership transition through unethical means (i.e., refusing to 'kill Saul').

The Non-Retaliation Protocol

One of the most significant technical insights in Edwards' study is David's refusal to retaliate. In a modern organizational context, this is equivalent to refusing to engage in corporate sabotage or whistleblowing for personal gain. David's logic is structural: *If I overthrow my leader through rebellion, I establish a culture where rebellion is the standard method of transition.* By waiting for a natural or legitimate transition, David ensures the stability of his own future reign.

The Absalom Archetype: The Mechanics of Rebellion

Absalom represents the 'Reactionary Reformer.' His rise is a direct consequence of both Saul's tyranny and David's later administrative failures. Absalom uses a specific **Social Engineering Framework** to undermine the existing authority. He positions himself at the 'gate'-the point of entry for grievances-and systematically alienates the populace from the leader.

The Four Stages of the Absalom Cycle

Stage	Technical Action	Objective
1. Empathy Mapping	Listening to grievances with feigned superior empathy.	Building a base of discontented stakeholders.
2. Subtle Undermining	Implicitly suggesting the current leader is 'too busy' or 'out of touch.'	Eroding trust in the formal hierarchy.
3. Alternative Visioning	Promising a 'better way' without presenting a concrete operational plan.	Capturing the imagination of the frustrated.
4. Overt Coup	Seizing power during a moment of leadership vulnerability.	Institutional takeover.

Absalom's failure is technical: he builds his authority on the **Resentment Vector**. Leadership built on resentment is inherently unstable; it lacks a positive generative core and eventually consumes itself through internal factions. This serves as a cautionary tale for those who seek to improve organizations by first destroying them.

Comparative Analysis of Leadership Styles

The following table provides a side-by-side comparison of the three archetypes across key operational metrics:

Metric	King Saul (The Tyrant)	King David (The Broken)	Absalom (The Rebel)
Source of Power	Positional / Appointment	Character / Trial	Manipulation / Charisma
Response to Criticism	Paranoia / Violence	Silence / Self-Examination	Opportunism / Exploitation
View of Subordinates	Threats to be managed	Brothers to be developed	Tools to be utilized
Organizational Output	Stagnation & Fear	Long-term Stability & Growth	Chaos & Division
Method of Transition	Failure and Replacement	Natural / Divine Timing	Hostile Takeover

The Logic of Brokenness: A Field Guide for Modern Leaders

For a leader to move from the 'Saul' or 'Absalom' archetypes toward the 'Davidic' model, they must undergo a technical 'refactoring' of their ego. This involves several procedural steps that are often painful but necessary for long-term effectiveness.

Step 1: Identifying the 'Saul' Within

Leaders must perform a regular audit of their reactions to perceived threats. **Diagnostic questions** include: Am I threatened by the success of my subordinates? Do I withhold information to maintain power? Do I react with anger when my authority is questioned? If the answer is yes, the leader is operating in a Saul-like feedback loop.

Step 2: The Practice of Silence (The Davidic Response)

In the face of unfair treatment, the technical recommendation is the 'Protocol of Silence.' This is not passivity; it is a strategic conservation of energy. By not defending themselves, the leader allows the 'Saul' to exhaust their own resources and exposes the dysfunction of the system without becoming part of it.

Step 3: Guarding the Gate (Preventing Absalom)

To prevent the rise of an Absalom, an organization must have robust **Grievance Resolution Systems**. Absalom thrives in the gap between a leader's vision and the people's reality. Closing this gap through transparent communication and genuine empathy removes the 'social surface area' that rebels use to gain traction.

Implementation Challenges and Failure Modes

Applying the principles of *A Tale of Three Kings* is not without operational risks. Technical writers and strategists must account for 'Edge Cases' where these principles might be misapplied.

Common Failure Modes:

- The 'Martyr Complex': A leader uses the 'David' archetype to justify staying in a truly dangerous or illegal situation. It is important to distinguish between 'Spiritual Brokenness' and 'Institutional Negligence.'
- Weaponized Submission: Subordinates use the concept of 'not touching the Lord's anointed' to avoid holding leaders accountable for ethical failures. Submission should never be a cover for complicity in wrongdoing.
- Forced Brokenness: Attempting to 'break' others. Brokenness is an internal process; when imposed externally by a leader onto a subordinate, it is simply abuse, not character

development.

Case Study: The Corporate Merger Conflict

Consider a scenario where Company A merges with Company B. The CEO of Company A (a Saul archetype) feels threatened by the innovative CTO of Company B (a David archetype). The CEO begins to sideline the CTO, removing them from key committees.

Solution 1 (The Absalom Path): The CTO begins a whisper campaign among the developers, highlighting the CEO's lack of technical knowledge, eventually leading to a mass resignation or a board-level coup. *Result:* The company's stock plummets, and the culture is permanently scarred.

Solution 2 (The David Path): The CTO continues to deliver high-quality code, remains respectful in meetings, and refuses to engage in the political fray. Eventually, the Board of Directors notices the discrepancy between the CTO's performance and the CEO's claims. *Result:* The CEO is eventually replaced due to poor performance, and the CTO is promoted with a clean reputation and a loyal team.

Synthesis: The Long-Term Viability of Character-Based Leadership

The technical study of *A Tale of Three Kings* reveals that the most resilient leadership structures are those that prioritize the internal character of the leader over the external mechanics of power. While the Saul model offers immediate control and the Absalom model offers immediate change, only the Davidic model offers long-term sustainability.

The process of brokenness acts as a **Stress Test** for leadership. It filters out those who seek power for self-aggrandizement and promotes those who view authority as a stewardship. For the modern professional, whether in a religious, corporate, or civic capacity, the lessons of these three kings provide a roadmap for navigating the complexities of human hierarchy with grace, integrity, and ultimate effectiveness.

By understanding the mathematical certainty that 'those who take the sword shall perish by the sword,' a leader can choose the more difficult, yet more rewarding, path of the 'Broken King.' This path leads not just to a crown, but to a legacy of healing and hope for those they lead. The ultimate goal of leadership is not the acquisition of a throne, but the development of a heart that is worthy of it.