

Understanding Political Success: Unethical but Effective Political Leadership

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A Senior Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for graduation
in the Honors Program
Liberty University
Spring 2023

Acceptance of Senior Honors Thesis

This Senior Honors Thesis is accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation from the Honors Program of Liberty University.

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Abstract

This research answers the question of how unethical people can still manage to be effective political leaders. To understand the implications of rhetoric in political leadership, the research presents artifacts and sources from those impacted or influenced by such leadership. Adolf Hitler's ethical values, traits, leadership style, use of rhetorical devices and communication theories, and his most famous speech will be analyzed to aid in understanding how he packaged evil ideologies in such an appealing and believable manner. The findings from the research support the claim that successful political leadership is influenced by the use of rhetoric, leadership styles and theories, and leadership traits, but successful leadership does not equal ethical leadership.

Keywords: communication, politics, political leadership, Adolf Hitler, political power, unethical leadership, effective leadership, communication theories

Understanding Political Success: Unethical but Effective Political Leadership

People become leaders in one of three ways. They are appointed to a position of leadership by someone else, they naturally emerge as a leader within a group, or they seek out the position of leadership. Once someone is in a position of leadership, they tend to adopt leadership philosophies and styles. When it comes to political leadership, politicians seem to be extremely skilled at utilizing leadership communication theories to advance their political careers.

Many examples of rhetorical and leadership communication theories can be found in the world of politics. From the campaign trail and rise to power, to the holding of public office, political leaders are constantly putting communication theories to work. As they seek to accomplish their goals, the first of which is to win over the public, they practice various elements of leadership communication. Many political leaders have found immense success in that they secure a significant following, but practice extremely unethical behavior in their leadership. The results of this research, based on the rhetorical criticism of artifacts from the reign of political leaders in the past, aid in the understanding of why unethical people still manage to be effective political leaders.

This research, based on a case study of Adolf Hitler and a rhetorical criticism of one of his most famous speeches, aids in the understanding of why unethical people still manage to be effective political leaders. It will add to the field of communication as it relates to the use of leadership and communication theories in political leadership. This project seeks to answer the question, “How do unethical people still manage to be effective political leaders?” Before analyzing the success of political leaders, it is important to define words such as “success” and

“good” in terms of political leadership. This project seeks to answer the following research question:

RQ: How do unethical people still manage to be effective political leaders?

Rationale

Distinguishing the Difference Between Effective and Ethical

Before analyzing the success of political leaders, it is important to define words such as “success” and “good” in terms of political leadership. Effective political leadership does not always mean ethical political leadership. Many people have different definitions of ethics, resulting in controversy or offense over almost all political decisions. Therefore, many political leaders, no matter their level of success, will be viewed in an unethical light by at least some populations. Making this distinction is critical to the application and understanding of the research because the primary leader analyzed in this research, Adolf Hitler, was not ethical or good in nature. However, his manipulative strategies for gaining and maintaining power were extremely effective.

Aristotle believed that power was afforded to individuals that acted in virtuous ways that promote the greater good. Machiavelli, nearly 2,000 years later, argued to great effect that power could be taken through the use of manipulation, coercion, and strategic violence. (ten Brinke & Keltner, 2022, p. 1)

Being able to discern between the true intention of a leader and the persuasive tactics they use can reduce the risk of another evil leader being successful with his or her propaganda.

There are certain things that make a leader “successful.” Effective leaders motivate a specific audience to join in an effort toward a goal. Authors Ulrich and Smallwood (2012) explained effective leadership in an organizational manner as someone who knows what is

expected and does it (p. 1). The authors went on to explain that the best leadership takes place when an organization prepares future leaders to continue to carry the organization to success (p. 1). The overall level of success in leadership can be measured by the volume of people who will follow an individual or an ideology, as well as the leader's ability to train up other leaders that can continue towards a mission with or without the leader.

For example, "Hitler carefully cultivated his image as the Nazi Party leader as he came to see the propagandistic value of photographic publicity" ("The Nazi Rise to Power", n.d., para. 2). He cared about and focused on the details that would make him a more convincing leader. Meanwhile, he was responsible for killing 6 million Jews. Researchers have said, "Operation Reinhard (1942–1943) was the largest single murder campaign of the Holocaust, during which some 1.7 million Jews from German-occupied Poland were murdered by the Nazis" (Stone, 2019, p. 1). In no way does this analysis endorse leaders such as Adolf Hitler, but it will provide insight into how such leaders were so effective in their leadership communication.

In a cross-cultural and cross-sectoral analysis on ethics in leadership, two perspectives on ethics are defined. Eisenbeiß and Brodbeck (2013) explained that a compliance-oriented perspective is held when a leader follows a law or set of rules only because they are "professional policies or organizational codes of conduct" (p. 353). This applies to leaders who only do what is right when others are watching, or they simply want to stay out of trouble. The second perspective is a value-oriented perspective, described as a distinct set of moral values from which a leader operates and makes decisions (Eisenbeiß & Brodbeck, 2013, p. 353). The compliance-oriented perspective makes it harder for subordinates to buy in to the values because it seems they are only upheld because someone else is enforcing it, not because it is actually important to the leaders. Meanwhile, the value-oriented perspective does not leave room for

change as the moral scale of the world changes daily; instead, it requires standing firm in the values the individual or organization holds.

Leadership Development

A common debate about leadership is whether someone must be born with leadership traits. If you are not a natural born leader, can you develop leadership skills? One way to answer this question is to research past leaders. Many of them naturally possess some elements of leadership; however, there are still many examples from those that did not. Enlow (2015) wrote “It is precisely because leadership is a gift that those who have been so gifted must dedicate themselves to growing their proficiency in exercising this gift and realizing the full capacity with which they have been endowed” (para. 3). Leadership is a skill toward which some people are naturally inclined; but this does not mean that those who have it, have it, and everyone else has no chance.

Leaders often possess natural traits such as charisma, intelligence, sociability, determination, and integrity. Northouse (2021) explained, “A trait is a distinguishing quality of an individual and defining leadership as a trait means that each individual brings to the table certain qualities that influence the way they lead” (p. 1). Each leader has strengths and weaknesses in these categories, but most leaders at least have a natural tendency toward these traits. One author illuminated the idea that the public often views the “greatest leaders” as heroic and “greater than life”; but people forget that such leaders are human as well and have limitations (Blondel, 1987, p. 10). More often than not, the rest of their leadership development comes from experience in leadership roles.

The story of God using and developing Moses in the Old Testament of the Bible is a prime example of this. In Exodus chapter 3, when God calls upon Moses to help free the

Israelites from slavery in Egypt, Moses had been hiding from previous sins he had committed. The Bible says Moses had a speech impediment (*New International Bible*, 1978/2011, Exodus 4:10) and felt as if he was the last person to take leadership over his people, given that he has just killed someone (*New International Bible*, 1978/2011, Exodus 2:11). Moses tells God that he does not speak well, and he does not have the authority to lead. This characteristic of humility could have been rooted in fear, but God was able to develop his other characteristics such as sociability, confidence, and charisma. In Exodus chapter 3:10, God says to Moses, “So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt” (*New International Bible*, 1978/2011). Moses ended up being used by God to free the Israelites, and he is an example of a Biblical political leader whose skills were developed through experience, on-the-job-training, and coaching.

Developing leadership skills may be harder for some than it is for others. In a lot of ways, leadership can be like athleticism; it can be taught and developed, but it provides an advantage to someone who has some natural ability. “Athletic performance is a complex trait that is influenced by both genetic and environmental factors” (“Is Athletic Performance Determined by Genetics?”, n.d., para. 1). It is harder to study leadership through genetics than physical strength and skill, but leadership traits are evident in children even at a young age.

Hitler’s upbringing had a significant impact on who he became. This is further explored in this research, but it can be noted that Hitler’s anti-semitic agenda was shaped from his childhood.

Hitler created an ideology in which he was the predestined savior to rescue his nation from the Jewish nemesis, implementing a system based on fear and spite, prioritizing obedience and promoting violent struggle. This system allowed Hitler to heal

psychological trauma from childhood disputes with his father, to the suspicion that his father was tainted with Jewish blood, and finally to his mother's fatal disease. Another perspective is that Hitler's childhood was hindered by a lack of trust building, and mistrust became the quintessential characteristic of his government and the culture of Nazi society. (Husain & Liebertz, 2019, p. 25)

Hitler's example shows that his method to leadership was gradually developed throughout his experiences. While he may have naturally possessed leadership characteristics, the way in which he approached leadership can be related back to the trauma he endured from his father's authoritarian leadership in the home.

The Use of Rhetoric in Politics

Rhetoric is the art of effective public speaking, in which speakers utilize figures of speech or other communication techniques to enhance the effectiveness of persuasive speaking. Political rhetoric deals with the approach and tactics uses to persuade an intended audience toward a political opinion (Condor, et al., 2013, p. 262). This type of language is intended to persuade or impress the audience. Politicians consistently utilize tools and techniques of persuasion to accomplish their goal. Fisher (2021) explained this need for viewing all communication as if it tells a story. "In sum, to view communication through the perspective of narrativity is to focus on message, on the individuated forms that constitute it, and on the reliability trustworthiness, and desirability of what it said—evaluated by using the tests of narrative rationality" (p. 143). Viewing communication in this way makes it easier to see the big picture and to discern the truth when a narrative is presented.

One common rhetorical device is the use of plural pronouns in reference to the audience as well as the speaker. Kennedy repeatedly used words like "we", "us", "our", etc. in his

inaugural address (*President John F. Kennedy's Inaugural Address*, 1961). Each president chooses this language to make the American people feel as if they are on the same team as the speaker.

We assembled here today our issuing a new decree to be heard in every city, in every foreign capital, and in every hall of power, from this day forward: a new vision will govern our land, from this day forward, it's going to be only America first. America first.
(Trump, 2017, 5:12)

This rhetoric is used intentionally to make the president seem like a man of the people. The audience automatically will feel like they have some value or say in what will happen in America in the next four years, whether or not that is true.

Another similar tactic that politicians often use is tailoring their speeches exactly to the audience. They often incorporate extremely intentional vocabulary or “buzz words” to help the audience hear what they want to hear.

For example, when speaking to businessmen, the Nazis downplayed antisemitism and instead emphasized anti-communism and the return of German colonies lost through the Treaty of Versailles. When addressed to soldiers, veterans, or other nationalist interest groups, Nazi propaganda emphasized military buildup and return of other territories lost after Versailles. Nazi speakers assured farmers in the northern state of Schleswig-Holstein that a Nazi government would prop up falling agricultural prices. Pensioners all over Germany were told that both the amounts and the buying power of their monthly checks would remain stable. (“The Nazi Rise to Power”, n.d., para. 4)

In his 1939 speech to the Reichstag, this tactic can be identified. He is addressing other German leaders, so he speaks about fighting back to regain the things they lost after World War I.

Leadership Styles and Philosophies

Leadership philosophies are the core motivation behind the way that leaders think and lead; in fact, there are varying philosophies that seem to be repeated over time. Theory X and Theory Y have been derived from trends in leadership philosophy throughout many decades. These two main philosophies drive the three main leadership styles that can be seen in history. These styles are known as Authoritarian, Democratic, and Laissez Faire. Theory X involves a more hands-on approach to leadership. Leaders that practice this theory tend to have a negative, or pessimistic, view of their subordinates. Northouse explained that a Theory X leader believes that their leadership role is necessary for subordinates completing the job (Northouse, 2021, p. 59). This leadership style does not bestow a lot of the leader's trust on the subordinates. Theory X leaders feel as if workers need to be constantly supervised; if not, nothing will be accomplished.

In contrast, leaders that practice theory y have greater trust in their followers or subordinates. They believe that people are happy to work on their own initiative and will take responsibility for their work. When explaining theory y, Northouse (2021) said that leaders who use this leadership style view people as "capable and interested in working" (p. 61). He went on to say, "Even though theory y leaders may define work requirements, they do not control their workers" (p. 61). This creates space for workers to feel a sense of autonomy in their work.

The power that a leader possesses is determined by the people under a theory y structure. In the same way, democratic or laissez-faire leadership styles mean that the leader has given power to his or her subordinates. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary (n.d.) defines laissez-faire leadership as: "A doctrine opposing governmental interference in economic affairs beyond the minimum necessary for the maintenance of peace and property rights" (para. 1). Therefore, if the

people choose to rise up against the leader and disregard his or her power, the leader will lose power. This is the design and intention of the American democratic structure of government.

That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to affect their Safety and Happiness. (Jefferson, 1776, para. 2)

This statement was intentional, in hopes that the United States would never be trapped under a tyrannical leadership.

The opposite is true in theory x structures. Under authoritarian leadership, the leader does not give any power to the people, so the amount of power that the leader has is not decided by the people. In these situations, the leader has an increased opportunity to abuse the power. Therefore, they seek to “control followers and what they do” (Northouse, 2021, p. 62). This style was adopted by Hitler.

As previously mentioned, Hitler’s authoritarian approach to leadership can likely be explained by understanding his experience with his father.

Hitler’s father was a cruel and emotionally distant alcoholic who abused his family, physically and verbally. The relationship of father and son was further hindered by the fact that Hitler did poorly in school and aspired to be an artist/painter, to which Alois responded, ‘Not as long as I live. Never!’ (Husain & Liebertz, 2019, p. 24)

His disjointed relationship with his father pushed him into a close and dependent relationship with his mother. As his mother became ill and died of cancer, Hitler was deeply affected in many ways. “Hitler wrote about her death repeatedly throughout his life. Her death also emotionally and financially affected him. He ran out of money to live his carefree lifestyle, forcing him to

live in shelters and hostels” (Husain & Liebertz, 2019, p. 25). Adolf Hitler practiced theory x and extreme authoritarianism in his leadership over Germany. At the very core of extreme authoritarianism, or totalitarianism, is that every subordinate will follow exactly what the leader requires, or there will be extreme punishment. His leadership throughout the Holocaust proves this to be true.

The Rise to Power

Some of the most influential leaders in history seemed to have a natural rise to their appointment or election to power, while others fought ruthlessly to achieve a level of power. In America, Presidents are elected through a voting system, but some presidents’ elections have been influenced by conflict, division, manipulation, or distress in the nation or even the world. The first way that someone could be in a position of leadership is if he or she is appointed or elected. Winston Churchill is an example of an appointed leader. “Following Neville Chamberlain’s resignation in 1940, Churchill was chosen to succeed him as Prime Minister of an all-party coalition government” (“Sir Winston Churchill”, n.d., para. 4). Appointed or elected leaders may be those that have worked toward a certain position for many years, but still cannot hold the position without the approval, votes, or appointment of another individual or group of people. They also often have some sort of checks and balances because they cannot come to power on their own.

In contrast, force or violence is also used to obtain their power. This often results in an authoritarian style of leadership. An example of a leader that forced his way into the role is Napoleon Bonaparte. Through a coup in 1799, Napoleon seized political power; he then declared himself Emperor Napoleon I of France in 1804. Leaders like Napoleon ignore or destroy the system that is previously in place in order to receive total power.

Some leaders have had a natural rise to leadership through appointment or election but used force and manipulation to obtain more power. After a series of electoral victories for the Nazi Party, Hitler was appointed to be the Chancellor of Germany in 1933. Following his appointment, Hitler capitalized on the political and economic instability that left Germany in turmoil. He did so by giving the public the two things that people cling to most in times of distress: something to hope for and someone to blame. “Nazi electoral propaganda promised to pull Germany out of the Depression” (“The Nazi Rise to Power”, n.d., para. 3). The author went on to explain that Hitler was successful in using Nazi propaganda to direct “the population's anger and fear against the Jews; against the Marxists (Communists and Social Democrats); and against those the Nazis held responsible for signing both the armistice of November 1918 and the Versailles treaty, and for establishing the parliamentary republic” (para. 3). His successful manipulation is why Hitler was able to proclaim himself Führer und Reichskanzler (Leader and Reich Chancellor), taking full control of the German armed forces.

Fear Appeal and Media Framing

There are two main theories that can be applied to Hitler's speaking style. The first is the fear appeal theory. Williams (2012) explained, “Fear appeals rely on a threat to an individual's well-being that motivates him or her toward action, e.g., increasing control over a situation or preventing an unwanted outcome” (p. 1). This theory is utilized when the audience can be “bullied” into making a certain decision. It is capitalizing on someone's fear of the alternative option, so he or she will choose the speaker's desired option. Hitler often did this by reminding the German people of the hardship and economic struggle they have experienced as a result of World War I. He would talk about where they have been and then tell them his plans to make

Germany a worldwide powerhouse so they would never struggle again. Their fear of continued economic depression motivated them to follow his lead.

The second theory evident in the Chancellor's speeches is media framing theory. Media framing theory "acknowledges media's effect on public opinion while taking into account the factors that influence individual interpretation" (Blunt, 2015, para. 18). In this time period, the media mainly consisted of radio and newspaper. At this time in Germany, he controlled the media, and it was filled with propaganda. Throughout Hitler's speeches, which were broadcasted on the radio and printed in the newspaper, he would often blame other countries or the Jews for the turmoil they were facing. In contrast, he would paint himself to be a perfect and caring leader and a seemingly credible source. This research will analyze examples of these theories in one of the Chancellor's most famous speeches to provide context for how he became such an effective leader with such unethical motives.

Methodology

This study will take a rhetorical criticism approach to analyze the political rhetoric, leadership communication styles, and the overall success of a leader. The specific artifact chosen for this research is one of his most influential speeches, as it was given in the middle of his reign. Examining Adolf Hitler's famous speech at the German Reichstag on January 30th, 1939, will help to provide insight and examples of leadership traits, styles, and communication theories at work in his political reign. This speech will be analyzed to understand his strategic use of communication theories and rhetorical devices to persuade the audience to follow his leadership. This case study will explore the way Adolf Hitler managed to be an effective leader while being an unethical person.

The primary artifact included in this research is Hitler's famous Reichstag speech at the German parliament on January 20, 1939. In this speech, he predicted that the mass execution of the Jews would cause a world war but continued to paint them in such a negative light that people still supported his plan. He is a phenomenal subject to study to answer the research question because he was somehow able to get over 800,000 people to join the Nazi party as he encouraged, ordered, and was responsible for the death of 6 million Jews. This speech was given at approximately the middle of the timeline of the Holocaust. At this point, he had been in leadership and persecuting Jews for six years, and the execution of Jews by the masses was under way. This speech was instrumental in convincing the audience that they were on the right track to doing what is best for the Germans, and that the execution of the Jewish race was necessary, despite the fact that it would bring another world war. The artifact is a full transcription of his speech, translated to English in the Washington Post newspaper by the Associated Press. This newspaper went out the following day, January 31, 1939.

Results

Hitler's address to the German Reichstag on January 30, 1939, was designed to keep everyone on board with the continued persecution of the Jews, and to motivate them to take it a step further: extermination. Adolf Hitler was extremely intentional in the way he wrote and delivered speeches; he did so in a way that made his audience see the extermination of the Jews as the only option to protect their country. This speech capitalized on the foundation that had already been laid, but encouraged the Germans that, while genocide would cause another world war, it was necessary to fight and take back what they lost in World War I.

Rhetorical Question

It seems that Hitler's favorite rhetorical device to include in his speeches is the rhetorical question. This is effective because it leads the audience to come to the desired conclusion on their own. Before he explains that he believes the Jews are the cause of all of their problems, Hitler asks: "What is the cause of all our economic difficulties? In the overpopulation of our habitat!" (Hitler, 1939, p. 6). Then, he goes on to ask this follow up question: "And the question: Which of our so-called big democracies would be able to accomplish the same feat?" (Hitler, 1939, p. 6). These questions help to make the case for why it is necessary to carry out his plans.

Another example of Hitler's use of the rhetorical question is when he references his lack of sympathy for others because of the oppression he and his party faced. "For when was there a stronger opposition in Germany than the National Socialist?" (Hitler, 1939, p. 6). He wants the people to come to their own conclusion that their party is the most oppressed and needs to stand up for itself. Rhetorical questions are often more effective than just stating the point because it causes the audience to feel as if it is an obvious answer. Without mulling over the statement, their minds fill in the blank with the answer they know the speaker is looking for and accept it as fact.

Theme of Unity

Throughout this speech, Hitler used certain words or phrases to inspire unity among the Germans. He did this in several ways, beginning with the recent struggles that they had been through as a result of World War I. He then encouraged the audience to take pride in their country and to be willing to stand up for Germany in the expected upcoming conflicts. Each of these themes promote a sense of unity among the Germans and inspires them to get on board with his plans to "restore Germany" no matter the cost.

First, he references “how far they have come” and the adversity they have overcome since he proclaimed himself Führer und Reichskanzler (Leader and Reich Chancellor, 1939). For example, he begins his speech referencing that this is the six-year anniversary of his leadership in Germany. “On January 30, 1933, I entered Wilhelmstrasse, filled with deep concern for the future of my people. Today - six years later - I can speak to the first Reichstag in Greater Germany!” (Hitler, 1939, p. 6). He goes on to explain that this is “a turn of God’s providence!” (Hitler, 1939, p. 6). This phrasing is very intentional; to bring God’s providence into it automatically denotes a positive connotation.

Again, Hitler refers to this moment as six years in the making. He explains, “Six years were enough to fulfill the dreams of centuries. A year to bring our people into the enjoyment of that unity that was the futile aspiration of many generations” (Hitler, 1939, p. 6). He then appeals to the leaders by mentioning their responsibility to represent the German citizens.

As I see you today gathered around me as representatives of our German people from all parts of the empire and know among you the newly elected men of the Ostmark and the Sudetenland, I again relishes the tremendous impressions of the events of a year in which centuries were realized. (Hitler, 1939, p. 6)

This moment in his speech is designed to restore or build a sense of unity among these leaders given that they have overcome so much together and have a lot to do ahead of them.

After Hitler describes Germany’s past and current struggles, he motivates the audience toward the future. He says, “My honorable Members, we are still facing tremendous, enormous tasks! A new leadership layer of our people must be built” (Hitler, 1939, p. 6). This is an appeal to the members of the Reichstag by first referring to them as honorable, reminding them that they should “maintain their honor” by supporting the advancement and reign of Germany. He

encourages the need for Germans to be involved in this. They need to indoctrinate others and join together to help with the task of eliminating the “threat”.

The Chancellor explains that the goals of his rule have changed since he first took power. In the beginning, the goal was to take care of the unemployment issue in their economy. Now, he prepares the audience for his next goal—to restore the broken economy through the advancement of the working conditions.

While the goal of our economic management in the first six years of our seizure of power was to bring all idle labor into some useful employment, it is the task in the years ahead to undertake a careful survey of our workforce, to regularize their use by one Rationalization and, above all, technically better organization of our working conditions with the same work effort to achieve increased benefits and thus also save labor for new additional productions. (Hitler, 1939, p. 6)

The point of constantly referencing what is to be done in the future is to motivate the audience towards this greater and brighter future that Germany has. This promotes a strong sense of Nationalism, because the leaders and citizens will feel excited and willing to participate in whatever should be done to advance their economy and overall power.

Fear Appeal Theory

Hitler was also known for using fear appeal to encourage people to follow him, and this speech is certainly not an exception to that tactic. This theory is evident in many of Adolf Hitler’s speeches, as he often described the danger that the Germans would find themselves in if they did not get on board with him. He often did this by making himself or Germany out to be the victim. If he could be the victim, then the audience would feel a sense of empathy for him or even themselves as Germans. This theory plays on the emotions of the individuals.

For example, in this speech, he referred to the German lives that have been lost. “Countless blood-covered dead and injured in all German districts are the witnesses of the fight” (Hitler, 1939, p. 6). In this case, Hitler is referencing the loss of life to scare the audience by the potential of it happening again. Later on in his speech, he describes the “infamous persecution and terrorization” of the Germans (Hitler, 1939, p. 6). He follows this by explaining what he is doing in response to this. “I gave on May 28: The order to prepare the military intervention against this state with the date of 2 October, I ordered the massive and accelerated expansion of our defense front in the West” (Hitler, 1939, p. 6). The use of the words terrorization and persecution here are absolutely intentional to instill fear in the Germans. He is compelling them to choose violence because they fear their safety if they do not.

The Chancellor appeals to the leaders, explaining that the other world leaders will come for them, and they must be prepared.

If we defend ourselves against such war apostles as Mr. Duff Cooper, Mr. Eden, Churchill or Mr. Ikes, etc., then this is considered an interference in the sacred rights of democracies. In the opinion of these gentlemen, they have the right to attack other peoples and their leaders, but no one has the right to resist it. (Hitler, 1939, p. 6)

This statement also makes Germany look like the victim because it adds that leaders such as Churchill or President Eisenhower think that they can attack anyone without resistance.

Another example of Hitler playing the victim is his description of others mocking him for his prophecies. “And one thing I would like to say at this perhaps not only for us Germans memorable days: I've been a prophet in my life very often and was mostly laughed at” (Hitler, 1939, p. 6). He explains that it was mainly the Jews who “only accepted my prophecies with laughter” (Hitler, 1939, p. 6). He concludes with this prophecy:

Once in Germany I would take over the leadership of the state and thus of the entire people and then, among many others, the Jewish problem Bring solution. I believe that this laudable laughter, meanwhile, has stifled Judaism in Germany already in the throat.

(Hitler, 1939, p. 6)

Once again, Hitler uses the word “struggle for power” to victimize himself by expressing that it was not handed to him. He then mentions that the Jews laughed at him, making them look bad. Hitler ends with a description of what he plans to do in leadership, which is to “take care” of the so-called “Jewish problem.”

Hitler continues by blatantly predicting that he will be killing the Jews and it will probably cause another world war.

Today I want to be a prophet again: If international financial Jewry in and outside Europe should succeed in plunging the peoples once again into a world war, then the result will not be the Bolshevization of the earth and thus the victory of Judaism, but annihilation the Jewish race in Europe. (Hitler, 1939, p. 6)

At this point he has been brainwashing the German citizens for six years, so they are on board with eliminating “the problem”. There is an element of fear appeal in this because he wants his audience to know that if they decide not to be on board with his plans, he is willing to get rid of anyone that stands in his way. This portion of his speech is what makes this speech such an influential address. It shows his years of grooming coming to fruition, because he was forward with his intent to eliminate the Jews, yet he was still able to continue with his plans.

Hitler takes the fear appeal theory a step further by describing one thing after another that the people have endured. He does so with the connotation that they did not deserve any of it,

despite the fact that it all happened as a result of World War I, the war for which Germany is universally blamed.

We have seen that, after more than 800,000 children died of hunger and food shortages at the end of the war, almost a million pieces of dairy cows were driven away after the cruel paragraphs of a dictate imposed by the democratic, humane world apostles impose us as a peace treaty. We have seen that one year after the end of the war, more than one million German prisoners of war were detained without any reason in captivity. We had to endure that far more than one and a half million Germans from their frontier areas were being wrenched from their belongings and whipped almost exclusively with what they carried on their bodies. (Hitler, 1939, p. 6)

Shortly following this moment, he summarizes that he could add “dozens of the most gruesome examples to those examples” (Hitler, 1939, p. 6). He expresses that without interference, this will happen again, and it will impact the German people.

In an attempt to play the victim once again, he goes on about the way Germany would be dictated or governed by a foreign people if they do not put up a fight. “The German people do not want their interests to be determined and governed by a foreign people. France to the French, England to the English, America to the Americans and Germany to the Germans!” (Hitler, 1939, p. 6). This makes it seem as if France, England, or America are out to get the German citizens. The “Germany to the Germans!” portion of this statement inspires unity and pride in their country as well. These themes of fear and defense can be found all throughout his speech as he effectively convinces the Germans that they will experience nothing but pain and oppression again if they do not fight fire with fire and continue in his plan to exterminate the Jews.

Media Framing Theory

Lastly, his speech to the Reichstag supports and exemplifies media framing theory. Adolf Hitler utilizes this tactic by repeatedly framing the scene to look exactly how he would like it to, in order to best support his ideologies. In this case, speeches and addresses to the people were the media. This was how the citizens heard what was going on. Then, the event or speech would be reported in the newspaper. His ability to filter propaganda so the citizens only knew what he wanted them to play a big role in the way the Holocaust unfolded.

He does so by claiming to be credible and calling out others for not doing so. For example, he claims, “In a few sentences I give a factual account of the historical events of the memorable year 1938” (Hitler, 1939, p. 6). Later, he goes on to say, “If certain newspapers and politicians in the rest of the world now claim that Germany had thereby threatened other peoples with military blackmail, this is due to a gross distortion of the facts” (Hitler, 1939, p. 6). In another instance, Hitler mentions that Germany’s relationship with the North American Union is in deteriorating due to “a campaign of slander on the pretext that Germany is threatening American independence or the freedom to oppress an entire continent in the service of transparent political or financial interests against the popular-minded states of Europe” (Hitler, 1939, p. 6). Directly calling out other news outlets or individuals for being fictional was one of the ways Hitler coerced the citizens of Germany to only listen to him regarding these topics.

The timeline of the Holocaust shows that starting in 1933 when Hitler was first appointed Chancellor, the Jews were being persecuted. At the time of this speech, it seems that people either were not aware of the persecution, or they were so sold on his convincing propaganda that they were willing to overlook it. This is evident because he was able to confidently proclaim that: “Today's German People's State knows no social prejudices. He therefore knows no social

special morality. He only knows the laws of life and necessities conceived by reason and knowledge of man” (Hitler, 1939, p. 6). However, despite his efforts to reiterate that the German State did not show favoritism or oppress anyone, further research of his leadership would obviously show otherwise. The reason why he managed to get away with it was because he framed his actions as a necessary and logical step to save Germany from further economic depression until everyone bought into it.

In a similar sense, Hitler insisted that his actions were in the name of justice. He set it up as if this was the final and only solution to the issues they were facing.

However, a final solution to this problem, and in a reasonable sense, will only come when general human reason prevails over the greed of individual peoples, that is, when one has come to understand that insistence on injustice is not only political also economically useless, indeed insane. (Hitler, 1939, p. 6)

His reference to injustice being useless and insane turns the blame away from himself and onto others. This example shows Adolf Hitler’s effort to frame himself as a just and thoughtful leader.

Another example of media framing theory at work in Hitler’s Reichstag speech is his sympathetic reference to the “poor and tormented Jewish people”. In contrast, he explains his lack of pity for democracy. “It is a shameful spectacle to see today how the whole world drags pity on democracy, and how hardhearted it is for the poor and tormented Jewish people in view of the obvious duty to help” (Hitler, 1939, p. 6). Hitler goes on to address major cases used to “apologize for non-assistance” in the Jewish immigration problem and how they only speak for the Italians and Germans. His first argument describes the issue of overpopulation that Germany is currently facing. He says, “We’ the democracies - 'are not in a position to take in the Jews!” (Hitler, 1939, p. 6). He goes on to explain in his second argument, “We cannot take you unless

you get from Germany a certain amount of capital to immigration” (Hitler, 1939, p. 6). Hitler disputed these arguments by stating the following:

However, Germany was good enough to absorb these elements for centuries, even though they had nothing but contagious political and sanitary diseases. What this people has today, it has acquired at the expense of the not so cunning German people through the worst manipulations. Today we only make up for what has caused this people themselves. (Hitler, 1939, p. 6)

This series of remarks regarding the Jewish immigration crisis is extremely hypocritical as he refers to other countries being unkind or unwelcoming to the Jewish people. However, he continues to explain that they are a problem, and they cannot handle them in Germany. Thus, priming the people to see them as an issue.

Finally, Adolf Hitler includes a few instrumental phrases in his concluding thoughts that plead for unity, and nationalism due to the inclusion of fear and framing. He says, “As far as Germany is concerned, I know from my own experience that the tasks assigned are so great that they almost exceed the capacity of the insight and energy of an individual man” (Hitler, 1939, p. 6). Shortly after he explains that he needs others to aid him in this task to “save Germany from the Jews”, he explained:

Without blood sacrifice we have finally succeeded in establishing the great empire of the German people. Nevertheless, we do not want to forget that this process was also associated with painful sacrifices for some. Many beloved traditions, some expensive memories and symbols had to be eliminated by us. Countries have been extinguished, their flags confiscated, their traditions have become less important, but it may help to

reassure all that no generation, which has worked on Germany in our history, has been spared similar painful feelings. (Hitler, 1939, p. 6).

In this moment, he is reminiscing on the times they were “oppressed” and how far they have come since then under his leadership. He expresses that this came to be “without blood sacrifice” which is not true, as he has been continuously persecuting and executing the Jews in the name of German freedom. He also expresses certain things that “had” to be eliminated by the Nazi Party, once again, in the name of German success.

Adolf Hitler’s final thoughts provide a perfect summary of all that he accomplished with this speech. “By embracing them in grateful reverence in this great empire, the glorious wealth of German history opens up to us. Let us thank God the Almighty for having blessed our generation and us to experience this time and hour” (Hitler, 1939, p. 6). He is concluding with a reference to the call to unity and nationalism. He brings the Lord into it once again, to leave the audience with a positive connotation of his efforts. This speech is tied up with a nice little bow of the need to fight for the freedom, prosperity, and success of Germany.

Discussion

This study provides the opportunity for further debate about more recent political leaders. Are they following in the footsteps of leaders such as Adolf Hitler? Are citizens falling into the trap of being enticed by smooth talkers, impressed by catchy taglines, so much that they leave logic behind to follow such a leader? If the problem of effective but unethical leadership is ongoing—and if it is a problem, how could it be solved? Is this an indefinite struggle or can it be ended? These are all questions that should be considered and could be answered through comprehensive case studies on other leaders across various time periods.

This case study of Adolf Hitler shows that effective but unethical leadership is a problem. Most everyone can agree with the argument that the mass genocide of over six million Jews is absolutely immoral. Nonetheless, the Chancellor was effective in convincing over eight-hundred thousand people to join the Nazi party and countless others to participate in the persecution and execution of the Jewish people. Therefore, this type of leadership is a problem, and it has caused wars and significant conflict over the years. The question of “How could this be solved?” is one that this research cannot quite answer. Frankly, no amount of research may be able to answer this question because there will always be evil people. Unfortunately, there will always be individuals that are willing to follow evil people. The greatest way to eliminate this problem is to continue to study and analyze leaders like Adolf Hitler. Knowing his strategies would help to identify the same techniques in another individual before it becomes too late.

Limitations

The limitations of this study are related to the time period in which Hitler’s speech and the surrounding events took place. There does not seem to be footage of this entire speech available on the internet. However, there are clips from many of his speeches available, which do provide insight into his speaking style. Many of his speeches were broadcasted on the radio and transcribed in the newspapers. In this case, his speech to the Reichstag was printed in the newspaper the following day. The second limitation is that some things could be lost in translation from German to English. However, the fact that the entire transcript was printed immediately following the speech makes it one of the most trustworthy English artifacts that could be found. Otherwise, the sources available are mostly secondary sources as many people have researched the events of the Holocaust and have added to the depth of information and studies on this topic.

The vast number of sources available on this topic was, at times, a limitation to this study. There are so many insightful sources available on the events of the Holocaust and World War II, which is beneficial to any and all research regarding this topic. However, this is helpful in drawing conclusions about Hitler's leadership; but the significance and impact of the Holocaust makes it difficult to present an all-encompassing explanation. Because there is an abundance of research on the topic of the Holocaust, it is difficult to provide a comprehensive explanation from all sides of the events. This same study could have been conducted by analyzing members of the Nazi Party and seeking to understand why they bought into such propaganda. A study of that nature would be a phenomenal pair with this study, as they would both provide insight into Hitler's success from both angles.

Further Study

Needless to say, studying leaders such as Adolf Hitler can provide incredible understanding as to how they came to be leaders and how they managed to deceive so many. Analyzing the ways in which they operated helps to identify such unethical leadership before it claims dominion over an entire country and starts another world war. It seems as if the exact tactics are used over and over, just hidden behind different politicians and policies. Examining how these tactics are utilized again today by political leaders would be a valuable expansion of this study if time were to allow.

Political leadership can come in many shapes and sizes, but effective leaders are the ones that are remembered. Based on the varying ways to come to power, styles, philosophies, and traits, it can be concluded that effective leadership communication does not always mean ethical leadership communication. While the political reign of Hitler was full of evil, the statistics showing the size of the Nazi Party and the length of their reign show that he was arguably

effective in his leadership. Hitler makes answering the question “What defines a good leader?” a little more challenging because, after all, he was good at what he did. He was able to successfully convince masses of people to participate in the persecution and later execution of millions of Jews.

Examining leaders such as Churchill, Hitler, Stalin, and others have given perspective on what makes an effective political leader. Studying the similarities and differences between these leaders exposes which leadership styles can be used effectively and reveal the leadership traits that successful leaders possess. Moses’ story points to evidence of growth in leadership traits, meaning leaders are not always just “born”, they can be developed too. Understanding leadership development is helpful in discerning the morality of a successful leader because their beliefs and values can be traced back to the way they came to be or the things they have experienced in life.

Examining leadership of this nature also makes individuals more aware of the ideologies they are subscribing to. It is necessary to recognize that if so many Germans were capable of buying into propaganda of mass genocide, many others could be capable of following any type of philosophy. In a world full of social media influencers and “opinion setters”, people must be extremely cautious of the voices they listen to. Being self-aware enough to discern where and how an individual has built the belief system on which they operate is very important. This is necessary for two main reasons. First, without knowing the depths of the foundation of one’s opinions and beliefs, he or she can be convinced of almost anything. Second, a strong awareness of what one’s values are helps to prevent the upheaval of such belief systems by manipulation.

Lastly, the study of communication theories through the examination of leaders such as Adolf Hitler opens the door for further debate about the ethicality of communication theories. Where is the line between “marketing” or “influencing” and manipulation? At what point are

these theories used not only for the simple goal of effective communication, but for brainwashing, grooming, and indoctrinating? Many communication theories are not unethical at their core but have the potential to be used in an unethical manner. Once again, because this is incredibly difficult to define and impossible to regulate, individuals must be firmly rooted in their values and aware of instances in which someone is using rhetoric to manipulate their thoughts and opinions.

Conclusion

This in-depth study of Adolf Hitler, the Chancellor of Germany, has shown that he most effective political leaders in history may not be the most morally sound leaders. However, his traits, leadership styles, philosophies, and his use of effective rhetoric provide insight on his effective political leadership. Hitler's 1939 speech to the Reichstag is an example of fear appeal theory, media framing theory, rhetorical devices, and very intentional word choices at work to motivate the audience toward a specific goal, regardless of that goal's ethicality.

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