

MARSHALL GANZ

WHY DAVID SOMETIMES WINS

*Leadership, Organization, and Strategy in  
the California Farm Worker Movement*

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*To the organizers who,  
with hopeful heart,  
critical eye,  
and skillful hand,  
bring us together  
to change ourselves,  
our communities,  
and our world.*

# Introduction

## *How David Beat Goliath*

ON EASTER SUNDAY morning, April 10, 1966, Roberto Roman, walking barefoot, bore his heavy wooden cross triumphantly over the Sacramento River Bridge, down the Capitol Mall, and up the steps of the state capitol of California. Roman, an immigrant Mexican farm worker, was accompanied by 51 other *originales*—striking grape workers who had walked 300 miles in their *perigrinación*, or pilgrimage, from Delano to Sacramento. They were met by a crowd of 10,000 people who had come from throughout the state to share in their unexpected victory.

For seven months, striking grape workers organized by the fledgling National Farm Workers Association (NFWA) had endured picket lines, strike breakers, arrests, economic uncertainty, and, at times, despair. But they had also been buoyed by the support of religious leaders, students, civil rights groups, and trade unionists. Many supporters had traveled to Delano to bring food, clothing, money, and messages of solidarity, and they had begun to respond to the farm workers' call for a nationwide consumer boycott of Schenley Industries, a national liquor distributor and major Delano grape grower. In the winter of 1966, as the new grape season approached, NFWA leaders decided to conduct the 300-mile *perigrinación* from Delano to Sacramento in order to mobilize fresh support for the strike among

farm workers, to call attention to the boycott among the public, and to observe Lent.

The farm workers began the *perigrinación* on March 17, carrying banners of Our Lady of Guadalupe, patron saint of Mexico, portraits of the Mexican *campesino* leader Emiliano Zapata, and placards proclaiming *peregrinación, penitencia, revolución*—pilgrimage, penance, revolution. They also carried signs calling on supporters to boycott Schenley. Roberto Roman carried his six-foot-tall wooden cross, constructed with two-by-fours and draped in black cloth. Of the strikers selected to march the full distance, William King, the oldest, was 63, and Augustine Hernandez, the youngest, was 17. Nearly one-quarter were women.

Launched the day after Senator Robert Kennedy had visited Delano to take part in hearings being conducted by the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Migratory Labor, the march attracted wide public attention from the start. Televised images of a line of helmeted police blocking the marchers' departure—calling it a “parade without a permit”—evoked images of police lines in Selma, Alabama, just the year before. As the marchers progressed up the valley from town to town, public interest grew. A crowd of more than 1,000 welcomed the marchers to Fresno at the end of the first week. Daily bulletins began to appear in the San Francisco Bay Area press, chronicling the progress of the march. Reporters profiled the strikers, discussed why they would walk 300 miles, and analyzed what the strike was all about. Roman Catholic and Episcopal bishops urged the faithful to join the pilgrimage, and the Northern California Board of Rabbis came to share Passover matzo. The march powerfully expressed not only the farm workers' call for justice, but also the Mexican-American community's claims for a voice in public life. As Cesar Chavez, the NFWA's leader, later described it, the march was also a way, at an individual level, of “training ourselves to endure the long, long struggle, which by this time had become evident... would be required. We wanted to be fit not only physically but also spiritually.”<sup>1</sup>

On the afternoon of April 3, as the marchers arrived in Stockton, still a week's march south of Sacramento, Schenley's lawyer reached Chavez on the phone. Schenley had little interest in remaining the object of a boycott, especially as the marchers' arrival in Sacramento promised to become a national anti-Schenley rally. Schenley wanted to settle. Three days of hurried negotiations followed. The result was the first real union contract in California farm labor history—a multi-year agreement providing immediate improvements in wages, hours,

and working conditions and, perhaps most important, formal recognition of the NFWA. Chavez announced the breakthrough on Thursday. By Saturday afternoon, some 2,000 marchers had gathered on the grounds of Our Lady of Grace School in West Sacramento, which was on a hill looking across the Sacramento River to the capital city that they would enter the next morning. During the prayer service that evening, more than one speaker compared them to the ancient Israelites camped across the River Jordan from the Promised Land. That night, Roberto Roman carefully redraped his cross in white and decorated it with spring flowers. The next morning, barefoot, he carried it triumphantly into the city.

How did California farm workers achieve this remarkable breakthrough? And why did a fledgling association of farm workers achieve it rather than the AFL-CIO or the Teamsters, its far more powerful rivals?

Since 1900, repeated attempts to organize a farm workers' union in California had failed because the farm owners—or “growers”—had vigorously resisted farm labor organizing, often violently. Their large-scale, specialized, and integrated agricultural enterprises required large numbers of seasonal workers to be available whenever and wherever they were needed.<sup>2</sup> At harvest time, these workers held the economic well-being of these enterprises literally in their hands. So the growers protected themselves—and held labor costs down—by recruiting a particularly powerless workforce of impoverished new immigrants who lacked the political rights of other Americans and who, as people of color, faced racial barriers in all spheres of life. For farm workers, the result was low wages, poor living and working conditions, and a lack of security for themselves and their families.

At three junctures, however, between 1901 and 1951, a tight farm labor market created a brief opportunity for workers to turn their labor resource into economic power. At each of these junctures, ethnic labor associations, networks of radical organizers,<sup>3</sup> and the American Federation of Labor (AFL) attempted to seize the opportunity to create a union. Indeed, their strikes often won short-term gains for specific groups of farm workers, as well as some degree of outside support. But each effort failed before a farm workers' union could be established. At each juncture, a wartime mobilization afforded growers the political support they needed to suppress the organizing and once again flood local farm labor markets with new immigrants.

A fourth major wave of organizing activity, which began in the late 1950s, seemed unlikely to end any differently. It was prompted by

erosion in political support for the *bracero* program, which supplied California growers with workers from Mexico. Yet, as the civil rights movement got under way, farm worker advocates found they could stir public concern for the plight of migrant workers of color. In addition, political rivalries within organized labor rekindled interest in unionizing the 250,000 workers employed in California's \$3.5 billion agricultural industry. Once again, the AFL (by then merged with the CIO) launched an organizing drive. Two years later, the International Brotherhood of Teamsters—at the time the largest union in the United States, already representing 50,000 California cannery, packinghouse, and food-processing workers—launched its own effort. In 1962, the FWA, a small, independent, and uncertainly funded ethnic community association, entered the fray. So when the *bracero* program finally came to an end in 1965, each group was poised for a new round of organizing in the fields.

Leaders of Filipino grape workers persuaded the AFL-CIO's farm worker organizing committee to authorize a strike by 800 workers to raise their wages to \$1.40 an hour. It was a strike much like those of the past. But one week later, the NFWA led 2,000 Mexican workers out of the fields to join the strike, and the game began to change. The NFWA began turning the strike into a kind of civil rights struggle, which engaged in civil disobedience, mobilized support from churches and students, boycotted growers who recruited strike breakers, and transformed itself into La Causa, a farm workers' "movement."<sup>4</sup> On Easter Sunday morning of 1966, it was not the AFL but the NFWA that marched into Sacramento to celebrate a breakthrough union contract with Schenley Industries, the owner of 4,000 acres of grapes and the employer of 300 farm workers.<sup>5</sup>

But the struggle had only begun. When the NFWA tried to build on its success at Schenley by boycotting another major Delano grower, it found itself in a far more complex and threatening world. The powerful DiGiorgio Fruit Corporation, which had defeated three earlier organizing attempts in the 1930s and 1940s, launched a major counterattack in concert with the Teamsters union. Nevertheless, within a year, the NFWA regained the initiative, winning the first union representation election in the history of California agriculture. It reorganized as the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee, absorbed the AFL-CIO group into itself, and drove the Teamsters from the fields. These successes cleared the way for an international grape boycott, which brought the entire table grape industry under union contract in July 1970.

Ups and downs continued after that, including another seven-year battle with the Teamsters. But by 1977 the United Farm Workers—the UFW, as the union was now called—had successfully negotiated more than 100 union contracts, recruited a dues-paying membership of more than 50,000, and secured enactment of the California Agricultural Labor Relations Act, the only legislative guarantee of farm workers' collective bargaining rights in the continental United States. The UFW also played a major role in the emergence of a Chicano movement in the southwestern United States, recruited and trained hundreds of community activists, and became a significant player in California politics. And although the UFW would suffer decline during the 1980s and 1990s, it had already made a far greater difference in the lives of farm workers than any earlier organizing effort had.

Why did the UFW succeed at such a daunting task—a task at which other far more powerful organizations had repeatedly failed? To some, the answer seems obvious: the favorable political environment of the 1960s weakened the growers and gave organizers access to new resources. A national liberal coalition had formed to end the *bracero* program, while the civil rights movement effectively mobilized urban support for claims based on racial justice.<sup>6</sup> But that explanation doesn't answer the question of why it was the UFW, and not the AFL-CIO or the Teamsters, each with far more resources, which translated these opportunities into success.

Some observers point to the distinctive framing of the UFW “message.” Farm workers, they say, responded to a call rooted in their religious, ethnic, and political culture more readily than to a “straight trade union” approach. And the general public responded more positively to the portrayal of the grape strike as an extension of the civil rights movement than as a routine conflict over wages, hours, and working conditions. While true, this observation too offers no insight into why it was only the UFW that articulated its message in this way.<sup>7</sup>

Students of strategy point to the UFW's innovative redefinition of the arena of conflict, which linked farm workers to supporters through consumer boycotts.<sup>8</sup> But why did the UFW alone employ this strategy? The AFL-CIO and the Teamsters could have done the same. They were well established in urban areas where agricultural produce was sold, and their members served as key links in the distribution chain. Moreover, although the Taft-Hartley Act banned secondary boycotts by these unions, no legal constraint kept them from organizing *consumer* boycotts as the UFW did.

Most popular accounts attribute the UFW's success to the charismatic leadership of Cesar Chavez.<sup>9</sup> It is true that, in times of crisis, particularly talented leaders may become symbols of hope, sources of inspiration for their constituents. But this is not the same thing as achieving successful outcomes.<sup>10</sup> And although the effects attributed to charismatic leaders—attracting followers, enhancing their sense of self-esteem, and inspiring them to exert extra effort—can be invaluable organizational resources, they are not the same as outcomes either.<sup>11</sup> As scholars of religion have found, many groups have charismatic leaders, but few achieve stability, much less become successful social movement organizations.<sup>12</sup>

So why *did* the UFW succeed? In this book, I will argue that the UFW succeeded, while the rival AFL-CIO and Teamsters failed, because the UFW's leadership devised more effective strategy, in fact a stream of effective strategy. The UFW was able to do this because the motivation of its leaders was greater than that of their rivals; they had better access to salient knowledge; and their deliberations became venues for learning. These are the three elements of what I call *strategic capacity*—the ability to devise good strategy. While I do not claim that strategic capacity guarantees success, I do argue that it makes success more probable. The greater an organization's strategic capacity, the more informed, creative, and responsive its strategic choices can be and the better able it is to take advantage of moments of unique opportunity to reconfigure itself for effective action.<sup>13</sup> An organization's strategic capacity, I argue further, is a function of who its leaders are—their identities, networks, and tactical experiences—and how they structure their interactions with each other and their environment with respect to resource flows, accountability, and deliberation.

## UNDERSTANDING STRATEGY

Strategy is how we turn what we have into what we need to get what we want. Strategy is intentional—a pathway that we shape by making a series of choices about how to use resources in the present to achieve goals in the future. Strategy, thus, requires the courage to venture into the unknown, risk failure, say no to current demands, and commit to a course of action that we can only hypothesize will yield the desired outcome.

Why do we have to strategize? In our world of competition and cooperation, achieving our goals usually requires power.<sup>14</sup> To act on

our interests successfully, we must mobilize and deploy our own political, economic, or cultural resources to influence the interests of others who hold the resources we need. In 1955, for example, in Montgomery, Alabama, the site of the bus boycott that launched the modern civil rights movement, black community members held few resources. But everyone who rode the bus to work, most of whom were black, had the resource of bus fare. As long as each person used this resource individually, it gave its holder a ride on the bus, but no power. By mobilizing this resource collectively—and withholding it—community leaders found that they could make the bus company dependent on the community, thus transforming its resources into the power to require the company to desegregate its buses.

Three critical elements of strategy are targeting, tactics, and timing. *Targeting* requires a focused choice to commit resources to specific outcomes that have been judged likely to move one closer to one's goal. By focusing on desegregating the buses, leaders avoided spreading their resources too thinly and chose a target that could engage the resources of the entire community. One chooses *tactics* that can make the most of one's own resources and, at the same time, limit the value of the opponent's resources. As recounted by Herodotus, for example, when the Athenians drew the Persians into the narrows of Salamis, they could take advantage of their greater seamanship and limit the value of the Persian advantages of numbers of men and vessels.<sup>15</sup> *Timing* matters because some moments, often fleeting, promise greater opportunity than others.<sup>16</sup> Opportunities occur when environmental change increases the value of one's resources, the way an impending election increases the value of a swing voter's vote. Opportunities arise not because we acquire more resources, but because resources that we already have acquire more value. A full granary acquires greater value in a famine, for example, thus creating opportunity for its owner. Opportunities often occur at moments of unusual structural fluidity, such as the beginning of a project or at times of "role transition" in the lives of individuals or communities.<sup>17</sup> At these moments—which combine uncertainty with significance—we have a great deal of choice, and our choices have a great deal of consequence. A breakthrough event, such as the Schenley contract, creates just such an opportunity. Although it appears to be an end point, a simple victory, its occurrence may so alter the environment that prior expectations are thrown up for grabs, creating an opportunity to reconfigure the whole struggle. Opportunities thus are critical—but in themselves do not create outcomes. One strategizes to turn opportunities into outcomes. So timing,

recognizing opportunity and acting on it quickly, is often at the heart of good strategy.

Strategy is a verb—something you do, not something you have. An ongoing interactive process of experimentation, learning, and adaptation, we strategize as we act. Because the unknown is almost by definition such a big factor in social movements, we often can't get the information we need to make good strategic choices until we begin to act. As community organizer Saul Alinsky put it, most often the "action is in the reaction."<sup>18</sup> Any single tactic thus has limited influence. So, in discussing effective strategy, I refer not to a single tactic, but to a whole series of tactics through which strategists may turn short-term opportunity into long-term gain. And long-term gain is most securely won when one not only acquires more resources (higher wages, for instance), but also generates new institutional rules that govern future conflicts in ways that privilege one's interests.<sup>19</sup> Effective labor strategy, for example, can turn short-term labor market advantages into long-term gains if they are institutionalized as formal organizations, collective bargaining agreements, and/or legislation.

## STRATEGIC CAPACITY

Although strategy is the work of leaders, it is neither random nor a mere reflection of the environment. Leaders do make strategic choices, but these choices are situated within a biographical and organizational context.<sup>20</sup> The biographical context includes who the members of a leadership team are, whom they know, and what they know—their identities, social networks, and tactical repertoires. The organizational context includes the organization's deliberative process, the sources of its resources, and its accountability structure. Furthermore, although we tend to think of leadership as individual, strategy is the output of a leadership team far more often than organizational myths acknowledge.<sup>21</sup> The individual leading the team plays a uniquely important role, especially in forming, coaching, and sustaining the team.<sup>22</sup> But strategy—like innovation—is often a result of interactions among the individuals authorized to strategize on behalf of the organization.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, in complex, changing environments, devising strategy requires team members to synthesize skills and information beyond the ken of any one individual, like a good jazz ensemble.<sup>24</sup> And good strategy, like good jazz, is an ongoing creative process of learning to achieve

a desired outcome by interacting with others to adapt to constantly changing circumstances.

So why should one strategic team outperform another, especially when the latter enjoys an advantage in resources? Because strategists, especially social movement strategists, operate in highly uncertain conditions, I answer this question by focusing on factors shown by social psychologists to foster creativity: motivation, salient knowledge, and learning—or heuristic—practices.<sup>25</sup> A comment from a friend reminded me, however, that my question had been addressed long before the beginning of modern social science. When I mentioned that California farm workers were not the only unlikely group that had won a major victory against great odds, that social movement history offered many such examples, my friend responded, “Oh, sure, just like David and Goliath.” So, I wondered, what did the Bible actually say about how David, a mere shepherd boy, could defeat such a powerful warrior? The account is remarkable:

And there went out a champion out of the camp of the Philistines, named Goliath . . . whose height was six cubits and a span. And he had a helmet of brass upon his head, and he was armed with a coat of mail . . . and he had greaves of brass upon his legs . . . and the staff of his spear was like a weaver’s beam; and his spear’s head weights six hundred shekels of iron. . . . And he stood and cried to the armies of Israel . . . “Choose you a man for you . . . If he be able to fight with me, and to kill me, then will we be your servants; but if I prevail against him, and kill him, then shall ye be our servants. . . . Give me a man that we may fight together.” When Saul and all Israel heard those words of the Philistine, they were dismayed and greatly afraid.

And David said unto Saul, . . . [I] will go and fight with this Philistine. And Saul said to David, Thou art not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him: for thou art but a youth, and he a man of war from his youth. . . . David said . . . The Lord that delivered me out of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine. And Saul said unto David, Go, and the Lord be with thee.

And Saul armed David with his armour, and he put an helmet of brass upon his head; also he armed him with a coat of mail. And David girded his sword upon his armour, and he assayed to go. . . . [But then] David said unto Saul, I cannot go with these; for I have not proved them. And David put them off him. And he took his staff in his hand, and chose him five smooth stones out of the brook, and put them in a

shepherd's bag which he had . . . ; and his sling was in his hand, and he drew near unto the Philistine . . .

And [when] the Philistine looked about and saw David, he disdained him: for he was but a youth, and ruddy, and of a fair countenance . . . And then said David to the Philistine, Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield; but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts . . . and David put his hand in his bag, and took thence a stone, and slang it, and smote the Philistine in his forehead . . . and he fell upon his face to the earth. (Samuel 17:4-49, King James Bible)

Plainly, David is courageous. But it takes more than courage to defeat Goliath. David wins the battle because he thinks about it differently. At first, he accepts the shield, sword, and helmet that conventional wisdom deems necessary. He then realizes, however, that he cannot use these weapons effectively against a master of them. Instead, he conceives a plan of battle—a strategy—based on the five stones he notices in a creek bed, his skill with a slingshot, and the giant's underestimation of him.

Why is he, unlike everyone else on the battlefield, so strategically resourceful? First of all, because he is more *motivated*. Angered that no one will respond to Goliath's insults to the "ranks of the living God," he feels "called" to act and commits to the outcome before he knows how he will achieve it. Unlike the frightened soldiers, his commitment to act does not depend on his knowledge of a feasible strategy. Rather he devises a feasible strategy based on his commitment to act. His decision to fight moves him to figure out how he can do so successfully.

Researchers have found much the same thing: motivation enhances creativity by inspiring concentration, enthusiasm, risk taking, persistence, and learning. We think more critically when intensely interested in a problem, dissatisfied with the status quo, or experiencing a breach in our expectations.<sup>26</sup> And when we have small successes, they can enhance our creativity, in part because they generate greater motivation.<sup>27</sup>

The research also shows that the intrinsic rewards associated with doing work one loves to do, work one finds inherently meaningful, are far more motivating than extrinsic rewards.<sup>28</sup> For social movement leaders, whose work is deeply rooted in what moral philosopher Charles Taylor calls their "moral sources,"<sup>29</sup> their work is not a job but a "vocation" or a "calling."<sup>30</sup> As such, its rewards are intrinsic and highly motivating. Motivational differences can account in

no small part for differences in resourcefulness among leadership teams. As I will show in this book, a key difference between the UFW's leaders and those of the Teamsters and the AFL-CIO was in the depth of each team's collective commitment to the enterprise.

In the story of David and Goliath, a second key to the shepherd boy's strategic resourcefulness is his access to salient knowledge, both of both skills and information. When David notices the five smooth stones, he recognizes them as something he knows how to use—and use well—and his competence frees him to consider novel applications of this skill.

Similarly, scholars find that creativity in a craft is linked to mastery of its tools<sup>31</sup>—that is, to the craftsperson's relevant knowledge and skill. Comparable organizational elements are the leadership team members' tactical skills and their knowledge of domains within which the organization acts. In the volatile circumstances of a social movement, in which the environment changes as a result of one's strategic initiatives, quick access to both kinds of knowledge can be critical.<sup>32</sup> In this light, the links of UFW leaders to the worlds of farm workers, churches, students, unions, and others gave them far more—and far quicker—access to salient knowledge than their rivals, who were largely limited to their own union world.

A third element of creativity is learning how to solve novel problems by reflecting on the results of one's own experience—what researchers call a “heuristic process.” David's salient knowledge, his skill with sling and stones, proves useful because he can reimagine the battlefield. But he comes to this solution only after he has tried the conventional wisdom of the sword and shield and found that he cannot use them. An outsider to battle, he sees resources others do not see and opportunities they do not grasp. In contrast, Goliath, military insider that he is, fails to recognize that a novel problem has even presented itself. He can't imagine that a shepherd boy could be a threat.

Creativity scholars make much of just such a difference. Key to solving a novel problem is recognizing that the problem *is* a new one, at least to us, and thus requires a new solution. Creative thinkers find ways to turn the problem around and reconsider it from different angles—to “recontextualize” it.<sup>33</sup> They use their capacity for analogy to conceive novel interpretations and new pathways, often employing a kind of bricolage to combine familiar elements in new ways.<sup>34</sup>

Furthermore, encounters with diverse perspectives—whether within one's own life experience (David's perspective as a shepherd among soldiers) or within the combined experience of team members

(the UFW team's capacity to see things through the eyes of farm workers, religious leaders, political activists, and so on)—facilitate innovative thinking.<sup>35</sup> Such encounters contribute a “mindfulness” that multiple solutions are possible.<sup>36</sup> The variety of solutions proffered in such circumstances can have its own value: the more ideas a creative individual or team generates, the greater the chance there will be good ones among them.<sup>37</sup>

The effective strategy of the UFW leadership team can be traced to its realization, largely unshared by its rivals, that it had to come up with a new way to organize farm workers. At the same time, the diverse but highly relevant backgrounds of team members facilitated recontextualization, bricolage, and an unusually unconstrained approach to learning—in part, because they were highly accustomed to learning from experience.

In sum, I argue that the likelihood that a leadership team will devise effective strategy depends on the depth of its motivation, the breadth of its salient knowledge, and the robustness of its reflective practice—on the extent, that is, of its strategic capacity. Differences in strategic capacity can explain not just why one tactic is more effective than another, but why one organization is more likely than another to develop a whole stream of effective tactics.<sup>38</sup>

## SOURCES OF STRATEGIC CAPACITY

A leadership team's strategic capacity derives from two sources: biographical and organizational. As shown in table 1.1, the biographical sources lie in the identities, social networks, and tactical repertoires of team members. The organizational sources are deliberative processes, resource flows, and accountability mechanisms.<sup>39</sup>

### *Biographical Sources*

The motivation, knowledge, and learning practices of a leadership team grow in part out of the combined *identities* of its individual members. By identity, I mean the way each person has learned to reflect on the past, attend to the present, and anticipate the future—his or her “story.”<sup>40</sup> Demographic categories, such as ethnicity, gender, religion, occupation, age, marital status, etc., are useful indicators of the life experiences that shape a team member's way of thinking. In turn, members' ways of thinking influence each aspect of the team's strategic capacity. For example, the more team members see themselves as “called” to their

TABLE I.I. Sources of Strategic Capacity

Sources of Strategic Capacity	Elements of Strategic Capacity		
	Motivation	Salient Information	Learning Practices
<b><i>Identities</i></b>			
Insiders and Outsiders Personal, Vocational Commitment	Intrinsic Rewards Personal, Vocational Commitment	Diverse Local Knowledge	Broad Contextualization
<b><i>Social Networks</i></b>			
Strong and Weak Ties	Personal Commitment Reputation	Diverse Local Knowledge Feedback	Broad Contextualization
<b><i>Tactical Repertoires</i></b>			
Diverse Repertoires	Competence Feedback	Diverse Local Knowledge	Sources of Bricolage or Analogy
<b><i>Organizational Deliberation</i></b>			
Regular, Open, and Authoritative	Commitment Autonomy	Diverse Local Knowledge	Heterogeneous Perspectives Periodic Assessment

*(Continued)*

TABLE 1.1 (Continued)

Sources of Strategic Capacity	Elements of Strategic Capacity		
	Motivation	Salient Information	Learning Practices
<b><i>Resource Flows</i></b>			
Multiple Constituencies	Autonomy		
Task Generated	Feedback	Feedback	Heterogeneous Alternatives
Reliance on People	Commitment		
<b><i>Accountability</i></b>			
Constituency Based	Commitment		
Elective or Entrepreneurial	Intrinsic Rewards Feedback	Diverse Local Knowledge Feedback	

*Note: This chart illustrates the leadership and organizational sources (left column) of strategic capacity (right three columns). The influence is meant to be simultaneous not sequential.*

joint project, the greater their collective commitment—and therefore the greater the team's motivation—will be. The more diverse the team members' life experiences, the greater the range of relevant knowledge from which the team can draw. And the greater the diversity of identities, the more innovative the team's approach to problem solving can be. In particular, teams composed of individuals who are insiders to some constituencies and outsiders to other constituencies can approach their undertakings with both an insider's motivation and deep knowledge of local circumstances and an outsider's ability to recontextualize those circumstances within broader frames of reference.<sup>41</sup>

The leaders' *social networks* can similarly feed the team's strategic capacity. Strong ties to people whose lives one affects and whose regard one wishes to earn can be powerfully motivating.<sup>42</sup> And the more diverse the relevant social networks with which members of the leadership team interact, the broader the range of useful information and feedback to which the team has access. This too increases the team's salient knowledge and enhances its approach to problem solving.<sup>43</sup>

The same benefits accrue when team members have access to a diversity of *tactical repertoires*.<sup>44</sup> When different team members know how to get things done in different settings and by different methods, they add to the whole team's skills, its flexibility, and its capacity for bricolage. One result, as community organizer Saul Alinsky saw many years ago, is a team that can transport tactics familiar to its own constituency into other realms—a church-style vigil into a courtroom, for instance. Such a team enjoys an advantage over its opposition. At the same time, when leaders use tactics familiar to their constituency, they are likely to receive affirming feedback, which enhances their motivation. In all of these ways, a leadership team's strategic capacity grows out of who its members are.

### *Organizational Sources*

Organizational sources of strategic capacity are perhaps less obvious, but they exist in the structures of legitimacy, power, and deliberation established by founders. These structures shape leaders' interactions with each other and with their constituents, supporters, opponents, and the public.<sup>45</sup> Whatever the founders' intentions, once established, these structures have a profound influence on subsequent behavior.<sup>46</sup>

In terms of strategic capacity, leadership teams that conduct regular, open, and authoritative *deliberations* to devise strategy benefit synergistically from team members' knowledge and motivation in ways

that organizations in which a “lone ranger” decides strategy cannot. The participation of a variety of team members linked to a diversity of constituencies contributes feedback that enables a team to evaluate changing circumstances swiftly, enhancing its facility in recognizing and solving novel problems.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, team motivation is enhanced when members can contribute to making strategic choices upon which they then act.<sup>48</sup>

Sustaining a creative deliberative process, however, is challenging and requires leadership with a high tolerance for ambiguity.<sup>49</sup> We know that deliberation that is open to “deviant”—that is, contrary—perspectives enhances learning, innovation, and the performance of cognitive tasks in general.<sup>50</sup> But because minorities tend to conform to majorities, and persons with less authority tend to conform to those with more authority, a group’s tendency over time is to lose its diversity. Particular organizational practices are thus required to preserve diverse perspectives. For brainstorming to give way to decision making, deliberative practices that encourage divergent thinking must also allow for convergent thinking. Conflict resolution by negotiation accompanied by voting is thus preferable to decision making by either fiat or consensus, because negotiation and voting make collective action possible while preserving the differences that are so useful in deliberation.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, if a leadership team strategizes and acts at the same time, as is the case in a rapidly unfolding social movement, managing these two deliberative modalities—divergent and convergent—poses a special challenge.<sup>52</sup>

A second important structural influence on strategic capacity derives from the kind of *resources* on which the organization relies.<sup>53</sup> For example, organizations that depend on constituency-based, task-generated resources (e.g., members’ dues) must devise strategies to which their constituents respond. By contrast, organizations that rely on outside resources (e.g., grants) can be less responsive to the constituencies that are critical to their strategic success. It is often the case, for example, that reliance on outside resources can discourage learning—in fact, as long as the bills keep getting paid, leaders of such organizations can keep doing the same things wrong.<sup>54</sup> An organization generates the most strategic capacity, however, by drawing resources from multiple salient constituencies. This arrangement allows leaders the most room to maneuver while at the same time affording them the benefits of feedback from a diversity of constituencies.<sup>55</sup>

Finally, *accountability structures* can affect strategic capacity. Self-selected leadership teams and those elected by their constituencies are likely to be more motivated, enjoy greater access to salient information,

and possess greater political skills than those chosen bureaucratically.<sup>56</sup> Similarly, leaders chosen bureaucratically—such as those fielded by the AFL-CIO—are more likely to possess skills and motivations compatible with bureaucratic success than with strategic innovation. Bureaucratic accountability, especially to superiors only remotely connected to the constituency of interest, insulates leaders from a particularly important source of motivation and salient new ideas.<sup>57</sup>

## CHANGE

Attending to the sources of strategic capacity suggests how an organization might cultivate it, and also how it can erode. Organizations can grow more strategic capacity if they reconfigure participation in their leadership team to reflect changes in the environment. For example, should churches become relevant to the project, organizations might add people with ties to the church world to their leadership team. Multiplying the venues for strategic deliberation as an organization grows in scale and scope can generate more strategic capacity. Continued accountability to key constituencies, as the organization continues to derive resources from them, can also grow capacity. Moreover, an organization that relies more on people than on money as a source of power—and which therefore must develop more leaders as it grows and must teach them how to strategize—will increase its strategic capacity as its leadership circle expands.<sup>58</sup> Finally, as strategy teams continue to work together over time, they can become more effective problem solvers as they learn more about each other, determine how they can best work together, and become more attuned to the commonalities and differences in the pattern of problems they are trying to solve.<sup>59</sup>

On the other hand, as I will show in the epilogue, organizational changes that increase homogeneity, reduce accountability to constituents, suppress deliberative dissent, and disrupt cycles of learning can diminish strategic capacity, even as an organization's resources grow. But because organizations tend to institutionalize resources upon which they rely for power, their loss of resourcefulness may only become apparent when faced with new challenges. This helps to explain not only why David can sometimes win but also why Goliath can sometimes lose.

When faced with the crisis created by a grape strike called at the initiative of the rival AFL-CIO, the NFWA's leaders transformed their association into a social movement. This deepened their own

motivation and that of farm workers and supporters, expanded their access to a diversity of relevant information, and expanded opportunities for them to learn from experience. Leaders of the AFL-CIO's farm worker organizing committee, on the other hand, proved unable to change and, as a result, their organization ended up absorbed by the UFW. For their part, the Teamsters were well financed, well situated with respect to the industry, and persistent. They eventually tried to copy the UFW strategy, but never understood it and could not replicate the underlying strategic capacity that produced this strategy, adapted it, and sustained its effectiveness.

## METHODOLOGY

To explain why, of the three organizations trying to organize farm workers at the same time, the one with the least resources turned its effort into a historic success, I compared a sequence of concurrent choices made by the UFW, the AFL-CIO, and the Teamsters at the same critical junctures between 1959 and 1967. This research design allowed me to control for the environment while comparing outcomes, the strategies that produced those outcomes, and the contributions of leadership and organization to the development of those strategies. Moreover, by observing the organizations over time, I learned about the mechanisms that generate strategy and not just the effect of specific strategic choices on specific outcomes.

I did not test the influence of any single variable or set of variables on good strategy. Instead, I offer a grounded, theoretically informed, analytic framework to explain observed differences in outcomes, a framework that can be tested in other settings. As shown in figure 1.1, the result is the theory presented here: strategic capacity, strategy, and outcomes are all links in a probabilistic causal chain. It is my argument that over the long haul, greater strategic capacity is likely to yield better strategy, and better strategy is likely to yield better outcomes.<sup>60</sup> While more traditional studies of how the environment influences actors are important, studying how actors influence the environment helps us to understand not only how the world works, but how to change it.

In the course of this book, I will name many individuals who played various roles in a rich variety of ways. I ask readers' indulgence because one of the key points I hope to make is that particular people, their life stories, their relationships, and the choices they make in interactions with their social context make a big difference. I also will provide

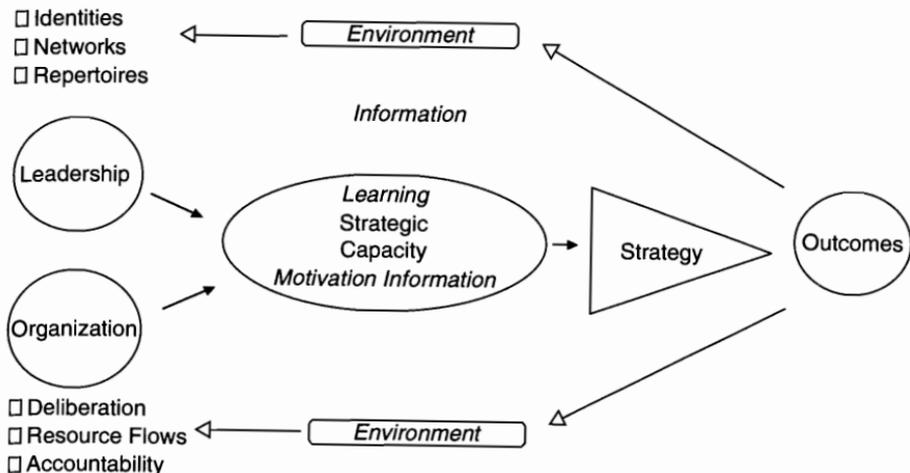


FIGURE 1.1. Strategic Process Model

readers with the details I believe are required to offer a finely tuned feel for the texture of contingency in the emergence of particular outcomes; that is, what turned out one way could have surely turned out otherwise. The telling of the layered stories of people, timing, choices, and events is an effort to portray the intricacies of a social movement as it unfolded with its many moving parts that created new opportunities, challenges, and outcomes with which purposeful actors interacted.

I will conclude this book with a brief account of more recent events. Their lesson is one that neither analysts nor organizers of social movements can afford to ignore. Understanding the sources of strategic capacity can help to explain why the powerful do not always stay powerful—and thus why David sometimes wins. But remaining David can be even more challenging than becoming David in the first place.