

## When Should A Leader Be Directive Or Empowering? How To Develop Your Own Situational Theory Of Leadership

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The situational theory of leadership describes adapting one's leadership style according to the circumstances. In this article, Sims, Faraj, and Yun reveal their five step strategy for matching various leadership styles to specific situations. Sims et al. examine the idea of adapting one's leadership style to the needs of the environment using the specific case of a medical trauma center. After revealing the situational theory of leadership in the context of the medical trauma center, the article explains how to generalize the strategies to other leadership cases.

As a starting point for the article, Sims et al. recognizes the fact that in order for a leader to influence his followers he must adopt a leadership style that adapts to the needs of the situation: contingent leadership. This adaptation occurs after one has evaluated the different factors that make up the situation and the various types of leadership that could be used.

To provide concrete examples to the broad definition of leadership, Sims et al. list and explain the various leadership types. The authors reference earlier research (Pearce et al., 2003), and present the list of leadership styles. These styles include Aversive, Directive, Transactional, Transformational/Charismatic, and Empowering. The article briefly describes each style by providing information on what each leadership style would entail. An aversive leader accomplishes his goal through punishment, intimidation, and threats. The directive style involves command and top-down direction while not being as abrasive as the aversive style. In the transactional style, the leader creates a relationship of exchange with others in which she influences others by means of rewards. The transformational leader is able to use motivation to create a vision for his followers to pursue. Finally, the empowering leader helps others learn to lead themselves.

Sims et al. conducted research at a prominent medical trauma center to evaluate this leadership phenomenon, wondering what types of leadership would be used, when the leader would give instructions to the follower, and when he would let the follower make his or her own decision. The research was conducted on the basis of observing the different leadership styles of attending surgeons as they handled their medical teams. The attending surgeon is the team leader who is in charge of directing the other team members. Attending surgeons have balance two goals: 1) providing quality health services to the patient and 2) providing medical learning opportunities for team members.

After conducting the research, the findings revealed what leadership styles were common, why they were common, and how the attending surgeons practiced the situational leadership theory. The article explains how in the medical trauma center there

was no transformational leadership while transactional leadership and aversive leadership were rare. The research showed that the common leadership styles were directive and empowering. Each of these styles was used to accomplish a different goal for a different situation. When the severity of the patient's medical need was low and the experience of the attending surgeon's team was high, he used a more empowering leadership style to foster learning among his team members. On the other hand, when the clinical severity of the patient was high and the team members' experience was low, he resorted to directive leadership in order to conduct proper health care services on the patient.

In observing this difference in leadership styles in the medical trauma center, Sims et al. concluded that their strategy for situational leadership theory was practiced in the trauma center. Their strategy consists of five steps: 1. Identify important outcomes, 2. Identify leadership types/behaviors, 3. Identify situational conditions, 4. Match leadership to conditions, 5. Making the match between leadership style and the situation. The study concluded that this strategy could be applied to other organizations of teams in training.

The article concludes with an analysis of each of the five leadership types. It assesses the advantages, disadvantages, and situation for using each leadership style. Aversive leadership is unpleasant and to be used as a last resort. Directive leadership is appropriate for accomplishing an important goal with less experienced followers, even though it decreases much team innovation. Transactional leadership can be used in a situation where the leader holds control, yet it will not result in high motivation among followers. Transformational leadership is useful for a crisis or when high performance is needed. Finally, empowering leadership is useful to help followers expand their skills, even though it may cause some frustration.

Ultimately, this article provided the theory and an example of research for the idea that different situations required different leadership styles.