Situational leadership essay

SituationalLeadership– Situational leadership theorists observed that a variety of leadership styles could be used simultaneously in response to changing situations. Hershey and Blanchard believed that leaders are flexible and can change according to need and hence developed this three-dimensional model of leadership. According to them the behavior of the leader depends on a mix of directive and supporting styles. It is primarily based on the interaction among the degree of leader task behavior, relationship behavior and the followers' readiness to perform.

However, the theory is not based on any level of research, rather there is virtually no evidence to substantiate its fundamental tenets, which is surprising considering the wide popularity of the theory among personnel managers and training directors. Situational Leadership is based on distinction of two types of leadership behavior. First one is the relationship behavior which concerns meeting the personal needs of group members and concentrates on increasing the cohesiveness of the group, reducing interpersonal conflict and boosting group's morale.

The second is the task leadership, which concerns the task the group is facing rather than member satisfaction. It involves behaviors aiming at coordinating actions, proposing solutions, setting sub-tasks, removing barriers, disseminating information and allocating resources. The third dimension of this model is how ready the follower is to perform the task. This is termed as readiness and once the leader is able to identify how prepared is the follower to perform the task, the model can be used to select the most appropriate style andcommunicationpattern for that follower (Bates, 2007, p. 7).

According to Hershey and Blanchard, during the initial formation stage the group life-members work best with a high-task/low relationship leader. As the group matures, the leader should aim for a high-task/high relationship behavior. As the maturity increases leader can trust on the subordinates enough to go for low-task/high relationship behavior. Finally for a fully mature group, low-task/low relationship behavior is appropriate (Bryman, 1986, p. 147). Hence an effective leader needs to demonstrate four different leadership styles during the group's development process.

First is the telling style, which entails proving task orientation with a clear explanation necessary at the start of a group life cycle. Here, the employees are able but lack the knowledge needed to do a job and need detailed instructions for doing a job. Second is the selling or coaching style where employees receive structured but supportive instruction. This type of leadership is needed when the employees are neither willing nor able to do the job. Third is the participative style where employees and leaders share in decision making.

This style works best when the employees have the ability but require encouragement to do the task. Fourth is the delegating style where employees make and implement decisions on their own. This style works best when employees are both willing and able to do the job (Goethals, Sorenson, Burns, 2004, p. 1433). The leadership style to be used can be negotiated by the leader and the subordinates. As is said earlier the research has yet o prove the theory, but companies like Xerox, Caterpillar and Mobil

Oil have found it a successful tool in their leadership training (Goethals, Sorenson, Burns, 2004, p. 1433).

i. Vroom and Yetton's Normative Model – Victor Vroom and Philip Yetton in 1973, developed a Normative Model according to which leadership style is a consequence of choice. The theory was proposed by Vroom and Yetton and was later modified by Vroom and Jago. The model is more focused on situations and how leaders respond than on leader's characteristics and how they interact with the situation. Normative model focuses on the interaction of the between a leader's choice of decision making strategies and decisions situation, which predicts the quality of the decision and subordinate commitment to the decision.

It is a prescriptive model of leader's decision-making process. The model is known by multiple names such as participative leadership model, Vroom and Yetton's normative model and the Vroom-Jago model (Goethals, Sorenson, Burns, 2004, p. 1432). According to the theorists Vroom and Yetton, one of the primary functions of leadership is decision making. When making a decision a leader must wigh up two considerations. The first one is the quality of decision which the second is the acceptance of the decision by those who must implement it.

Vroom and Jago identified five leadership processes for decision-making which are to be chosen based on 11 heuristics. The five strategies are on a continuum from autocratic types I and II to consultative types I and II to full group participation. These processes represent solo decision making by the leader, the inclusion of subordinates at some level and full involvements of

the subordinates in the decision. The decision heuristics describe the decision based on four criteria: improve the quality of the decision, improve subordinate involvement, reduce the time spent and develop the subordinates.

These criteria also form the basis for measuring the effectiveness of the decision (Antonakis, Cianciolo, Sternberg, 2004, p. 159) ii. House's Path-Goal Theory of Leadership – Some theorists consider this theory of leadership as a contingency theory while some others consider this as a situational leadership type of theory. No what which type the theory falls under, this is one of the most studied and tested theories of leadership. The theory was proposed by Robert House, who says that effective leaders motivate employees by helping them to understand that their needs and expectations can be fulfilled through the performance of their jobs.

The better an employee performance, the greater the need fulfillment. The leader matches a subordinate's perceptions and behavior with a desired outcome by matching the appropriate style to situational factors which results in a more satisfied and productive subordinate. The path-goal theory is related to the exchange theory ofmotivationwhereby the behavior of individual is matched by the likelihood of achieving a desired goal and the resulting award that will follow (Clegg, Kornberger M, Pitsis T, 2005, p. 239).

The path-goal theory views the function of leader as a supplemental one. The theory focuses on the member's personalgoals, their perceptions of the organizational goals and the most effective paths related to these goals. In other words the theory attempts to specify how leadership should clarify the

path of members to desired goals or rewards. The theory was developed to predict subordinate's satisfaction, motivation and performance as outcomes resulting from four types of leader behavior.

The four leadership styles are: directive leader who provides the employees with a detailed understanding of the expectations, a plan to accomplish those expectations, and resources to achieve the tasks; supportive leader who shows concern for the people, ensuring that the workenvironmentdoes not impede specific tasks that lead towards organizational goals, and creates a supportive atmosphere; participative leader who seeks into from a multiplicity of internal sources including the technical core of employees to assist in the decision making process; and the achievement-oriented leader who establishes stimulating goals and expects high levels of performance in achievement of the stated goals (Borkowski, 2005, p. 194).

The path-goal theory is more advanced and complex than any other earlier theories. The theory is one of the most influential theories around in recent times and is used as a guidingphilosophyfor human resource management in many companies. b. Transactional leadership – Transactional theory explains leadership as a series of exchanges between leaders and followers Leaders use various versions of carrot-stick approach to achieve the goals of the organization.

Leaders set the goals and offer incentives to workers who carry out the work to achieve the goals. Transactional theory of leadership explains that transactions are the most common forms of leadership behavior. It is a task-oriented leadership theory and emphasizes on the role of the leader to

accomplish a finite goal. The theory dominated the attention of researchers who studied the field until the 1980s. This type of leadership theory is also based on the assumption that leaders are superior to the followers in every way and followers essentially depend on the leaders. Hence, leaders delegate task to the followers and set a reward-punishment style of environment for their subordinates (Tosi, Mero, Rizzo, 2000, p. 472).

Transactional leadership theory is considered to be a rational form of leadership where the leadership equating with the management of systems and processes rather than the management of people. Hence the approach is concerned largely with structures emphasizing organizational purposes rather than people. The role of the transactional leader is to focus upon the key purposes of the organization and to assist people to recognize what needs to be done in order to reach the desired outcomes. However, the leader follows a laissez-faire type of leadership with his subordinates at the time of work. It is seen that if parameters are well-defined, transactional leaders are very successful. In terms of situations, transactional leadership succeeds where conformity rather than creativity is the norm (Tosi, Mero, Rizzo, 2000, p. 473). i.

Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) Theory – LMX theory is transactional theory of leadership. Originally called the Vertical Dyad Linkage model, it arose in the earlier 1970s in reaction to the dominant behavioral and contingency models of leadership. VDL researchers believed that leaders adopt different styles of leaderships with different subordinates. That is to say leaders develop different dyadic exchange relationships with different subordinates.

These relationships vary from a leader treating his subordinates as a closed and valued in-group member of the group to leaders treating his subordinates in a remote manner considering the subordinate as a out-group member of the group.

As the VDL model evolved into LMX theory, this leader-member relationship style i. e. in-group and out-group concept, disappeared and has been replaced with a continuum quality of exchange relationships (Goethals, Sorenson, Burns, 2004, p. 836).. LMX researchers focus on the quality of dyadic leader-member exchange relationships. The continuum relations can range from high-quality LMX relationships which are based on mutual trust, respectand obligation to low-quality LMX relationships which are simply based on the terms of formal employment contract between leader and subordinate. LMX relationships develop over a period of time within groups.

The LMX theory predicts that effective leadership requires leaders to develop high-quality LMX relationships with their subordinates because these relationships would enhance subordinates' well-being, and hence their performance (Goethals, Sorenson, Burns, 2004, p. 1433). h. Transformational leadership – Transformational leadership theory explains how leaders develop and enhance the commitment of followers. In this theory leaders and followers transform each other to achieve high levels of performance. Transformational leadership is based on the leader's effects on the followers' values, self-esteem, trust and their confidence in the leader and motivation to perform above and beyond the call of duty.

Transformational leaders motivate other people by behaving in accordance with values, providing a vision that reflects mutual values, and empowering others to contribute. At the organizational level, transformational leadership is about innovation and change. Transformational leader uses vision based on shared values to align people and inspire growth and advancement. Both the inspiration and the empowerment aspects of transformational leadership are necessary to lead a subordinate to perform beyond self-interest. These factors are also responsible for commitment to a vision which when transformed into action leads to change (Goethals, Sorenson, Burns, 2004, p. 98).

Transformational leadership is many times called as the fifth generation of leadership and builds upon the works of earlier researchers like Kurt Lewin and Douglas MacGregor. Effective transformational leaders identify themselves as change agents, are courageous, believe in people, are value driven, are life-ling leaders, have the ability to deal with complexity, ambiguity and uncertainty and are visionaries. However transformational leadership can be demonstrated by anyone in the organization regardless of their position in the company (Tosi, Mero, Rizzo, 2000, p. 473). Peter Northouse transformational leaders are those who set out to empower followers and nurture them in change. They attempt to raise the consciousness of individuals and get them transcend their own self-interests for the sake of others.

Northouse gives the examples of transformations leadership in an organization as a manager who attempts to change his or her company's

corporate values to reflect a more human standard of fairness and justice (Northouse, 2007, p. 142). Northouse has also criticized this type of leadership one certain points. First of all he says that this type of model has a very broad approach that is difficult to succinctly define and is many times viewed from a simplistic perspective. Since it focuses on the leader's dimensions, the approach is more trait-centric than behavior centric. There is also a possible potential of abusing subordinates through control and power (Northouse, 2007, p. 143).