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# Different Leadership Styles Depending On The Situation

There are a number of management and leadership theories, applying them to practical situations can be challenging however certain scenarios lend themselves better to some styles/theories.

One theory that can work in multiple situations is the Leadership Continuum Theory developed by Robert Tannenbaum and Warren Schmidt in 1958. These styles are the Tell, Sell, Consult, Join and Delegate. They recognise that management style is dependent on a number of factors including the experience and seniority of staff, levels of trust, the sort of relationship the manager has with employees, the culture of the organisation, policies and procedures and the managers own personality and ability to change their style.

Tannenbaum and Schmidt further explained that when leaders choose decision-making options they should consider especially three sets of pressures, situational pressures, Inner psychological pressures and Pressure coming from subordinates.

## 1. 1. Situational pressures:

- The complexity of the problem.
- The importance of the decision.
- The time pressure.

## 1. 2. The leader's inner pressures:

- The leader's preferences around decision-making (his values, beliefs, behavioural habits).
- The leader's confidence in his or her team colleagues' knowledge and experience.
- How important or risky the decision is to him/her or her personally.

## 1. 3. Pressures coming from subordinates:

- The leader's colleagues' (the group members) desire to 'have a say in the decision.
- The group's willingness to take responsibility for the outcomes.
- The group's ability to reach decisions together.
- The group's readiness and ability to accept and follow orders.

This model provides a linear approach for management and employee involvement that includes an increasing role for employees and a decreasing role for managers in the decision-making process. The theory is that you are able to adapt your style for the factors in your workforce and work.

The Tell style represents top-down, dictatorial decision making with little employee input. This is the manner in which traditional, hierarchical organisations manage employees. Similar to the autocratic style of leadership, the manager makes the decision and tells employees what they are going to do. The Tell style is a useful management style when there isn't much room for

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employee input, or used with new employees being trained. Though it is the best choice in certain extreme environments, this leadership method does little to encourage employee creativity and facilitate growth. It also carries with it substantial planning, communication, and oversight costs. This directive leadership style can suit your team when members have little or no experience or in high-risk situations (emergencies) where instructions must be followed. If your situation calls for an authoritative management style, use the path-goal method of leadership. Set (and communicate) clear and immediate goals for your team. Ensure they know exactly how to carry out your instructions – and have all the resources they need. Everyone in your team should understand their roles and responsibilities – and how to handle any obstacles that may arise. Depending on the work environment, you may find this leadership style works well in small doses – and in specifically targeted cases. This is a style that was used recently during the Covid-19 pandemic, with high numbers of staff redeployed or self-isolating and the country in lockdown the model of delivery of our service needed to be adjusted. A decision was made to move to a Hub model of working with small teams of Health Visitors (HVs) working together to cover all the essential work carried out by HVs including safeguarding children and birth visits. This change in the style of working was a top-down decision with very little employee input. It was necessary as a short term measure to continue safe service delivery in an unprecedented pandemic.

In the Sell style of leadership, similar to the persuasive leadership style, the manager has made the decision and then attempts to persuade employees that the decision is correct. The decision is chosen by the manager only but he understands that there will be some amount of resistance from those faced with the decision and therefore makes efforts to persuade them to accept it. The Sell management style is used when employee commitment and support is needed, but the decision is not open to very much employee influence. Employees may be able to influence how the decision is carried out. Recently I have used this style of leadership in the decision to move from GP attached to Geographical working for Health Visitors. This decision has been made as it reduces costs (travelling and time) and ensures that HVs work in communities and areas that they are familiar with. Selling the idea has been a challenge and some degree of persuasion has been needed however, the HV team leads are involved in the planning of the change.

The Consult management style is one in which the manager requests employee input into a decision but retains the authority to make the final decision. The key to using the consult management style successfully is to inform employees that their input is needed, but that the manager will make the final decision. Similarly, with the above scenario, the decision has been made to change the way in which HVs work to save costs and this is non-negotiable however, it has been made clear to the HVs that their input is valued and needed to ensure a smooth transition. If you choose to ask for employee input when making a decision, give them an explanation of the reasoning for your decision when you make it, if there is time. This lets them know that their input was valuable, and whether it influenced the decision or not. It is important that employee input is treated as valuable when asked for. If they are continuously asked for input, but never see it used, they will cease to give constructive input. A recent example of where this style did not really succeed was during discussions about HVs wearing uniforms, traditionally HVs wear their own clothing to work but during the Covid-19 pandemic a number of HVs requested 'scrubs'. There were a lot of mixed feelings about this subject so it was decided that further consultation was required but that management would make the final decision. Each team leader was asked to consult with their team and inform management of views. This resulted in a large number of emails and phone calls being received by managers on this matter with very polarised views apparent. It was almost impossible to make a decision as there were

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valid arguments for and against and relatively equal numbers on each viewpoint. Therefore the idea was abandoned (for now). Some staff then felt that their views had not been listened to and resulted in some discontent amongst managers and staff.

In the Join management style, the manager invites employees to join him or her in making the decision. The manager considers his or her voice equal to the employees in the decision-making process. You sit together around the same table and every voice is key in the decision. The Join management style is effective when the manager truly builds agreement and commitment around a decision. The manager must also be willing to keep his or her influence equal to the degree of influence that other employees who provide input exert. The joint management style can be effective when a manager is willing to share authority. Once you use the join management style, you should be aware that your team will come to expect it. This is not necessarily a bad development, as long as you instil the fact that you are the leader and do not need a group session to make decisions. I have tried this once before when I tried to introduce geographical working to one of my teams, the disadvantage (for me) was that the 'joint' decision was not to move to this way of working.

Delegation is at the far right of the continuum where the manager turns the decision over to the group. This type of leadership of the Tannenbaum-Schmidt Leadership Continuum model is one of the extreme types of leadership in which the manager gives complete freedom to the team. In this case, the leader is also responsible for all decisions made but he or she encourages the team to identify and solve problems themselves instead of involving the manager. Many times, the manager expects the team to research potential problems and take measures to mitigate risks. This type of leadership many times occurs in the top management of organisations because it enables them to design and execute the strategies of organisations. An example of this style of management is linked to social distancing within the office, staff have been supplied with technology that allows them to agile work. Each team has been tasked with managing social distancing within their office, they must work within the law (2 metres) and Health Board policy and procedures but have been asked to manage this themselves with feedback each month to their Line Manager in terms of who is working office-based/agile working each day etc. The decision making has been given over to the employees as a team that can consider the best way of working for themselves.

The Leadership Continuum Theory believes that as your team members progress in proficiency and competency, you are able to move to different leadership styles depending on the situation and projects. In my experience as a Manager, it is true that your style and approach needs to be reflexive to the situation and the staff that are being managed. Different scenarios require different approaches and whilst this can sometimes be difficult it is essential.