

Chapter 26 Septet Theatre of Leadership and Situation

Situation in Contingency (or Situation) Leadership Theory is a mechanistic positivism, a materialist gestalt of leaders and followers moving and colliding in a highly determinant world. Leaders and Followers in traditional leadership theory are theorized as objects in the Situation that move according to mechanical pathways. The theatrical Grammar moves leadership out of its mechanistic Grammar into more dynamic understanding of Situation.

[Traditional Situation leadership](#) is a material, mechanistic project where one merely works out the salient contingencies. This is the case for the major theories of situational contingency. For example, Fiedler's Contingency Theory of Situation Leadership assumes that if the Situation is low on control (i.e. the path to accomplish task/goal is not clear) then be Directive and Task-Oriented (initiate lots of structure). However, if the Situation is high on control (path is clear) then be Supportive and just remove obstacles, and just stay out of the way of your subordinates. For Vroom and Yetton's Contingency Model of Normative Leader Decisions, if commitment of group is necessary then be Consultative or use a Group decision process. But, if the you got all the necessary information, then be an Autocrat, make the decision for everyone, and move along. The Substitute for Leaders model (Kerr & Jermier) says forget leaders, when you have an experienced team, the task initiates it own structure or when the leader just is a powerless anyway. Some tasks they argue are so standardized and formalized, who needs a leader? And if coworkers provide their own support and empathy, who needs a leader? In Burke's terms, the Situation has Agency, so the Agent (leader) is redundant. to take another example in the Leader Member Exchange (LMX) theory (Graen), the Situation is made up of dyadic relationships between leaders and followers (and tasks). In LMX, the leader behavior and Situation divides the group into the In-group and the Out-Group. In-group has high quality exchanges with the leader, get all the great assignments, and are satisfied with their great performance (and rewards). Out-group is in a Situation, where they get less opportunities, are treated as less motivated, and are therefore handed more formal job descriptions and treated like they are not committed to their job or to performance. In short, a self-fulfilling Situation. We can also bring in the Path Goal theory of Situation Contingency at this point (Vroom, Porter, Lawler). Path Goal builds on Expectancy theory. Leaders work on two Pathways (1) The path that subordinate has the requisite skills, talents, and confidence to do the task; (2) The path that says if they do a task there is some kind of valued (instrumental) reward that will be theirs. The leader (agent) analyzes the situation (scene) and changes his or her behavior (acts) to match. The leader (agent_ may analyze the situation and decide followers (co-agents) need more guidance, challenge, or autonomy. And like LMX the leader may decide that each follower (co-agent) is different (with different expectancy of doing a task or getting a valued reward) and come up with different relationship to each one.

OK, does this sound like traditional theories of Situational Contingency are really overly mechanistic, deterministic, and positivistic? Let's try to get more rigorous in defining what is a Situation? Back to Sartre and Burke.

Situations have what Sartre (1963: 170) calls "Reciprocal Comprehension." We try to read the Situation, to take into account opposed characteristics between all that expresses existence (existents). We try to take into account the opposed characteristics. Yet the Situation is not static, it is constantly changing, as the opposed characteristics are dialectic. Leadership Situation theory assumes the situations are not dialectic, and are quite determinate, where leaders' have the ability to accurately read the situation (scene), the means or substitutes (agency), and enact appropriate behaviors (acts).

For Sartre this would only be accurate in Totalizing Situations, where life is quite ordered. In the Totalized Situation, of say a prison or some McDonald's restaurant:

1. actors are assigned specific work.
2. people have relations to the product of their work (marking time or guarding prisoners or fries).
3. there is a relation between production and other members (centering around prison life or fries work).

The Situation determinants are sustained, internalized and lived (and accepted or refused) by followers (and leaders). The Totalized Situation is therefore very comprehensible; the Situation is explicit; the game rules of the Scene are available and known. Leaders (agents) can explore the givens in the Situation (scene) and trace its signifying activity to leaders and followers (co-agents) as they read the Situation and make their moves (acts) navigating the resources (agencies) accordingly.

In Burke's terms the Situation has a readable scene-act ratio (The scene is the Situation and the act is the action chosen by leaders and followers). A scene-act ratio where scene is more important than act is unresponsive to leader behavior. A scene-act ratio where act is more important is more malleable to leader behavior. Up to this point we have successfully integrated Pentad theatrical Grammar with traditional Leadership Grammar. Now the problems emerge.

We can say there is a Grammar of the Leadership Situation, and that the language of Contingency and Situation is quite mechanistic and positivist. It is the Grammar of leader terms such as, behaviors like initiating structure, consideration, supportiveness, and autocracy. The leader reads the Situation using the requisite Grammar of Leadership Contingency, and effectuates changes in human reality. Contingency Theory of the Situation ends up being an "entirely rational process" (p. 172) where the leader regressively designates each act (behavior) in a fully comprehended human situation (scene), understanding as well the praxis (agency) of individuals, collective, and task structure. In Burke's terms"

1. Leader comprehends the act (or plot).
2. Leader comprehends the Situation in all agency (means and resources).
3. Leader is able to unveil the existential structures explicitly (agency-scene).

4. Leader constructs behavior (acts) to achieve goals (act-purpose).
5. Leader sees the practical operation (agency) by which existence performs (act-agency-scene).

In short, the Leader is aware of important dramatic ratios in the Situation. Yet it is all rather mechanistic. The leader is an object acting about other objects (followers and tasks). Situation Leadership Theory gives names to its terms (Grammar), so the Situation is comprehended as knowledge in a material (and mechanistic) environment (Synthetic Totality). We exist in Situations (scenes) and our knowledge comprehension is incommensurate with what Leadership Theory proposes (that we treat people as objects or things).

The problem with the Leadership theory of Situation, is many situations are not so comprehensible; some are downright incomprehensible. The Scene is not so easy to decipher. We can not always see the plot (the acts unfolding in the story) nor can we easily read the agency (means) that underlies the Situation (act-scene ratio). Aristotle would call it the Plot-Spectacle ratio (he used act instead of plot and spectacle in lieu of scene).

How can we develop a more dynamic theory of the Situation? We can look at Sartre's idea that life is a human adventure, then apply Burke to say we do not have total knowledge of the Situation (scene, the purpose (theme) or the frame (ideology)). Sartre also integrates well with Burke. Sartre, for example, sees a dialectic between human-as-agent and human-as-object in the Situation (scene).

Situation in our new approach becomes unstable, dynamic rather than static, changing rather than fixed and mechanical. We can now apply Frame. Frame and Situation are not the same for Burke. **Frame** is for Burke (1937 *Attitudes Toward History*) a dialectic between "Frames of Acceptance" and "Frames of Rejection." The frame of situation leadership is too narrow, down to the level of the small group scene, types of technology (agency), the characteristics of followers (counter-agents), etc. For Burke, Frames are grander, more about the paradigm or **grand narrative** in which something happens. Frames of acceptance include tragedy and comedy. We accept the Situation as tragic and temper our acts accordingly or we accept the situation as comedic and act accordingly. Or, we can be more Marxian, says Burke and focus on Frames of Rejection have all to do with the Grotesque and the Burlesque. The Grotesque is "something like humor-with-the-laughter-omitted" (Burke, 1937: cf p. 76). Marx and critical theorists set about debunking and de-veiling the Frame to expose the Grotesque and Burlesque. Burke preferred the more Comic Frame of motives that could "show us how an act can 'dialectically' contain both transcendental and material ingredients, bot imagination and bureaucratic embodiment, both 'service; and 'spoils'" (Burke, 1937: 166-167). Attending to the Comic Frame of Acceptance in dialectic with the debunking Frame of Rejection could, as Burke says give us a fuller understanding of "the full operation of 'alienating' processes" (p. 167).

Let's look at another Contingency Theory, that of Hume. For Hume Contingency is the disorder (chance) of a situation. For Hegel the human adventure is a Spiritual quest (for Marx it is a material existence), and for Leadership Theory it is a mechanical existence of reading and comprehending contingencies. For Marx as we go about our human adventure we become area of our alienation, exploitation, fetishism in each Situation. We are enchained by alienation, estrangement, and separation. Frames of Acceptance are more apt to see the heroic aspects of leadership while Frames of Rejection see the more anti-heroic difficulties of *delegated* authority (cf, p. 167). For example, when Napoleon was to be the new unifier of Europe (after Augustus), his strategy was to establish a political monopoly that would "force into line the clashing minor monopolies" (cf, p. 167). But by what agency? Should he be sanctioned as divinely inspired like the hereditary kings or by some human voting? Napoleon, says Burke, established his appointment to the role of leader by balloting the heavens.

With so many instrumentalities now on the side of privilege, we hold a comic frame must detect the lure of such incentives, must make people conscious of their operation, if they are not to be victimized by such magic (Burke, 1937: cf p. 167-168).

Burke is proposing a Comic Analysis of exploitation, a look at the subtle ways that scene (situation) and frame (ideology) interact. The Comic Frame counteracts the dangers of "mystification." He proposed a comic syntheses to the antithetical emphases of *man in society*, and we can add our interest in the dialectic of Leader and Society. The Comic synthesis looks at how the rules of the game get subtly changed, as for example when Enron uses accountants from Arthur Anderson to make "assets" out of "liabilities" (Burke, 1937: 171). "In sum, the comic frame should enable people *to be observers of themselves, while acting* (p. 171). It resituates and relocates the irrational and the non-rational duality by noting the non-rational (such as the non-heroic acts of the heroic leader, cases where we guard ourselves against that sort of action). Doonsebury and Dilbert are Comic Frames that open us to an understanding of the non-rational. We see the incongruity of the scenes as they are framed and reframed in comic frames of acceptance. The Comic frame translates the acts, agents, scenes, agencies, and purposes, and we get the opportunity for criticism and critical consciousness of both the non-rational and the Grotesque.

Like Sartre, Burke saw that we inhabit a Grotesque Frame, one that stifles the human adventure, but one that the Comic Frame in dialectic antithesis could abate some of the worse ills. For example, we must earn a living, and do end up in incredible jobs where the sun does not shine, or our bodies and minds wrap around sedentary regimentation in McDonalds and the University) and our devotion is Grotesque to very unadventurous tasks like filing and recording, frying and serving; then there are those who work in cubicle offices, or become wage slaves acting roles with the incongruity of Dilbert's characters. Or look to Emerson, Blake or Dickens to see the Grotesque Frames of Rejection in dialectic with Comedic Frames of Acceptance. When the "imaginative" ingredients of the Situation become "bureaucratized" then the "grotesque" becomes "natural" part of the conventional norms and purposes of the efficient Situation (Burke, 1937: 70).

What does this tell us about Situation? Situations are a dialectic of frames of acceptance and frames of rejection. They are oppositions of tragic/comedic and grotesque/burlesque. The Situations are rational, irrational, and non-rational. Situations change unfold, in dialectic processes that we do not fully comprehend or control. Situations have dark and light sides, part comedic, mostly grotesque. "The incongruity of the grotesque-mystical comes to a focus in the oxymoron: one hears silence, peoples loneliness feels distance, and sees in the dark" (Burke, 1937: 59).

With each experience of a Situation, each act, we change the form (agency), relations of the Situation, and sometimes its purpose (ends) but it is not such a rational scene as the Situation Leadership theorists portray. Rather, I assume Situations to be in constant change and motion, partly Grotesque, and rich in emergent chaos. To deepen our understanding of Situation, we turn now to Hegel, who had a very different view of Contingency than the Situational Contingency leadership theorists.

What is Contingency? Hegel, for example, recognized that chance occurrences (His view of Contingencies) are part of our worldly existence, and part of history. He thought contingencies are important to unfolding a Spiritual purpose (idealist). Hegel sought a synthesis of contradictions, stemming from Situations that have both order and disorder (the contingency of chance). The problem I see in traditional Leadership theory of the Situation, is that contingency is defined as mechanistic formulae (if task is unclear, then initiate structure; if followers are committed professionals, then act with consideration). It is a Leadership Grammar that is too mechanistic, and leaves out the Grotesque as well as non-rational. Followers and leaders become theorized as chained objects to static situations.

The contingencies of chance are for Hegel aberrations in the Situation, part of the dialectic struggle of positions as human adventure gets perfected. That was Hegel's worldview (frame). Hegel's view is that Contingency is the chance and disorder in our world that is the antithesis to the prevailing thesis. Hegel argued that contingency was necessary to the dialectic. Destroy contingency and the dialectic dissolves its agency. Note how different Hegel's theory of Contingency is from the Situational Leadership theory of Contingency. Chance and disorder have no place in the rational view of Contingency in the Situational Leadership school. Ironic, but we can conclude that Hegel and Situational leadership are antithetical. Yet, both Hegel and the Situation Leadership school share the frame of "rational necessity." But for Hegel it is Contingency that arises from the Absolute Necessity of Nature (to contain the negation of Contingency, the antithesis).

There are competing views of what constitutes a Dialectic. Among the earliest is Aristotle, who believed that in the dialectic frame, actors approach godly perfection. This is different than Hume, who had a generative theory of God, as the Spiritual Hand guides the evolving acts, scenes, and characters (agents). For Hegel the synthesis is the victory of the Absolute over the antithesis (contingencies). For Aristotle, Contingency got in the way of harmony and would be deselected to achieve progress. For Hegel, Contingency was the engine of progress. Hegel recognized that chance occurrences (contingencies)

emerge as part of our world existence and as a means to continue the dialectic of history to achieve the unfolding Spiritual purpose. Marx wanted a view of dialectics that focused on the material conditions. For Marx, Hegel was standing on his head, putting Spirit ahead of the material conditions of the Situation. Marx's view was that as the material conditions of the Situation changes, then the Spiritual consciousness follow along. Marx had his own progress myth: that the bourgeoisie class would rot from within, and that the oppressed labor class would commit revolution.

Sartre and Burke did not buy into the pre-existing structure or into the progress myth of Hegel (that a Spiritual Force is guiding History to become better and better all the time). Nor did they buy into the progress myth of Marx, that out of the class struggle the material conditions would be transformed through worker-controlled industry into something more progressive than exploitative capitalism with its sweatshops and hierarchies of control. Sartre, argued that we comprehend the Situation out of our experience, as each improv Contingency emerges to reorient our comprehension, and we improv our actions. But, the revolution has yet to happen. Burke took a position that was between Hegel and Marx: with a Comedic Frame he sought to avoid the progress myth of both Marx and Hegel. Sartre modified Marx to include an existential appreciation. We understand the Situation out of our acts (actions).

If I have made no other point, I want to make this one. That the Situational Contingency approach to Leadership is not precise enough about what is Situation and what is Contingency. To go deeper, I have sought to redefine Situation as a dialectic, and Contingency not as rational choice, but as chance and disorder that stimulate our improv and reflection. Secondly, I have tried to resituate the Grammar of Leadership into a more Theatrical terminology. To continue our exploration of the situation, there are several Grammar options. We can continue with the empiric generation of behaviorist terms like initiating structure, consideration and Situational ones like task ambiguity, follower commitment, etc. Or, we can turn to a Theatrical Grammar. I propose a combination of Burke and Aristotle, what I derive as a Septenary:

Table 1: The Septet Grammar of the Leadership Situation

| SEPTET |
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| <p>1. Plot – (or Fable) - to “act” says Aristotle is “<i>dran</i>” (1448b: 35).¹[i] Plot is “the incidents of the story” (1450a: 15) and the “construction of a story” (1450a: 36); the “combination of the incidents, or things done in the story” (1450a: 4-4). Plot is the way stories are framed (1449b: 5). In tragedy, included incidents arouse pity and fear in the spectators (1453b: 1), who then purge themselves of tragic flaws viewed in the play (e.g. seeing the suffering by some deed of horror or error of judgment). In comedy, the bitterest enemies walk off good friends at the end of their conflict. Episodic plots are not as tightly wound.</p> |
| <p>2. Character – (or Agent) - “agents” says Aristotle, are “either good men or bad – the diversities of human character being nearly always derivative from this primary distinction, since the line between virtue and vice is one dividing the whole of mankind” (1448a: 1). Agents are the “personages” [that] act the story” (1448b: 30). Agents are the actors who “act the stories” (1449b: 31). “Character is what makes us ascribe certain moral qualities to the</p> |

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| agents” (1450a: 5). “Character in a play is that which reveals the moral purpose of the agents, i.e. the sort of thing they seek or avoid...” (1450b: 8; also 1454a: 18). |
| 3. Theme – (or Thought) – Like purpose for Burke, “Thought is shown in all they [agents] say when proving a particular point” (1450a: 6, bracketed additions mine). “Thought, i.e. the power of saying whatever can be said, or what is appropriate to the occasion” (1450b: 5). A tragic theme is a catharsis of the emotions of pity and fear in the spectators (1449b: 25). Thought (theme) says Aristotle is already developed elsewhere in “Art of Rhetoric” (1456a: 35). |
| 4. Dialog – (or Diction) – Dialog is the “means of their [i.e. stories’] imitation” (1449b: 31, bracketed addition mine). Dialog (and Rhythm) for Burke are agency. Dialog means “merely this, the composition of the verses” (1449b: 34), the “expression of their [agent’s] thoughts in words” (1450b: 14, bracketed additions, mine). Dialog for Aristotle is the Rhetoric of persuasion. |
| 5. Rhythm – (or Melody) is “what is too completely understood to require explanation: (1449b: 35). Rhythm is the “means of their [i.e. stories’] imitation” (1449b: 31, bracketed addition mine); i.e. it is agency. It is the “greatest of pleasurable accessories of Tragedy” (1450b: 15). We know it now as self-organizing, as chaotic perturbations, or repetitive cycles. |
| 6. Spectacle – “stage appearance of the actors” (1449b: 31). It is “an attraction, is the least artistic of all the parts, and has least to do with the art of poetry... the getting-up of the Spectacle is more a matter for the costumier than the poet” (1450b: 16-20). “The tragic fear and pity may be aroused by Spectacle...” (1453b: 1) but producing the effect by Spectacle rather than choice of acts in a plot, “is less artistic, and requires extraneous aid” (1453b: 6). Once the least important, it is now the most important. |
| 7. Frame - For Aristotle, the spectators have "frames of mind" that characters and plots seek to persuade through dialog and rhythm. For Burke (1937) Frame is a worldview, what we now call grand narratives. For burke the Frames of Acceptance and Frames of Rejection are in dialectic interaction. |

I want to extend a project that Burke began. Burke (1945: 231) aligns Aristotle’s (350BCE) six *Poetics* elements with the five dramatic terms of the *Pentad*. Burke’s “*plot* would correspond to *act*,” “*character* would correspond to *agent*,” *theme* to *purpose*, *dialog* and *rhythm* combine in *agency*, and *spectacle* is classed under *scene*. In Table 1, I show ways in which Aristotle and Burke overlap. In addition, I keep Aristotle's Rhythm, since it has more importance now that Burke gave it credit. Dialog is more than agency, it is rhetoric. And I try to stay faithful to Burke's wish that his Pentad be extended by one by adding Frame. Burke (1972: 23) says that "many times on later occasions: he "regretted" not adding a sixth element (Frame) to his Pentad (act, scene, agent, agency, & purpose), and turning it into a Hexad. I have added Frame in Table 1. This all adds up to seven elements of the Theatrics of Leadership, or the *Septet*.

Now with the Grammar of Septet, we can define Situation as Scene within competing (dialectic) Frames. And contingency is the antithesis of the dialectic. The Septet is a system of seven terms that define the dynamics of the leadership Situation. Leaders and followers are agents, performing acts within the scene, but this scene is embedded in

Frames. To change the world, is to change the Frames, by unleashing some new plot that takes hold of the creative imagination.

The Septet elevates Scene to Spectacle, no longer an accessory to the dramatic execution, but now a ubiquitous aspect of what Guy Debord (1967) terms *Society of the Spectacle*. Debord once again modifies Marx's dialectic, this time, focusing upon accumulation through consumption (of Spectacle), not by industrial accumulation of production. Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* (1967) is theatrically and dialectically opposed to what Bakhtin (1981, 1984) calls "the carnivalesque of resistance." The Septet seeks to turn to a more critical postmodern perspective of theatre and organization life.

The turn is like an Omega, a return to the character and plot of Aristotle's (premodern) theatre, noting the transition in contemporary theatrics, where the actor is no longer separate from the spectator (Boal, 1992). Debord notes how in late modern capitalism, Spectacle as theatrics is a form of social control, celebrating manic consumption and production as a masquerade of social progress. Beneath the masquerade is the exploitation of labor and the devolution of the ecology by unsustainable business practices. The postmodern theatre, such as "Tamara" (Boje, 1995) is another disruption of the one stage model of theatre where actors are in their seats and actors are on the other side of the proscenium arch, on stage. In Tamara, the actors and spectators mingle and network across a dozen stages. There are other ways that Boal (1992) proposes as ways to entice spectators into becoming actors and blurring any line between stage and audience. I develop this area in other venues (See [Boal study guide](#)). I theorize a dialectic of Situation that is the opposition of Spectacle and Carnival theatre ([Boje, 2001](#)).

Mikhail Bakhtin's writings on the feudal carnival feast as a moment of time where there is a temporary liberation from the established order, a "suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms and prohibitions" (1984, p. 10).

Carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people. While carnival lasts, there is no other life outside it. During carnival time life is subject only to its laws, that is, the laws of its own freedom (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 7).

Bakhtin (1981, 1984) used the term "carnival" to identify an atmosphere of revelry that allowed a space to critique rigid social authority. True carnival is a questioning of the prevailing norms of society through loving parody (Boje, 2001).

In the Grammar of the Septet, the Situation is the spectacle opposed by carnival (a counter-scene), in which leaders are characters, and the plot and counter-plot mingle within frames and counter-frames. The encounter by Carnival is an accent on the Grotesque, in ways that raise critical consciousness. Boal (1992) develops three forms of theatre that can raise critical consciousness: Image Theatre, Invisible Theatre, and Forum Theatre. See more references and guides.