

Case Study Applications: Situational Leadership Theory

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Introduction:

Commissioner Anthony Batts of the Baltimore Police Department was faced with a complex leadership challenge in the riots of 2015. Batts had a political backdrop to contend with and a police department that was not wholly supportive of his management style (Weichselbaum, 2015). This report will contrast Batts' management style with the Hershey and Blanchard Situational Leadership Model and contends if Batts applied the concept, he might have garnered more support from his officers (Cote, 2017).

Situational Leadership Theory:

The Hershey and Blanchard Situational Leadership model utilizes the two variables of task and relationship orientation. Task orientation involves a leader's commitment to directing subordinates toward goal attainment, and relationship orientation is the connection between a leader and a follower. The model specifies when a leadership style should be employed and considers the associated developmental level of the individual (Cote, 2017).

The leadership style component is composed of four quadrants comprising S1 through S4. S1 is Directing, S2 is Coaching, S3 is Supporting, and S4 is Delegating. Looking more closely at the quadrants, S1 has High Directive and Low Supportive behavior, S2 is High Directive and High Supportive, S3 is High Supportive and Low Directive, and S4 is Low Supportive and Low Directive. The maturity levels of the individual are D1 through D4; D1 is Low Competence and High Commitment, D2 is Low Competence and Low Commitment, D3 is Moderate to High Competence and Variable Commitment, and D4 is High Competence and High Commitment (Brown & Barker, 2001).

Accordingly, leaders can implement a method of Directing, Coaching, Supporting, or Delegating in response to the follower's maturity level. As a follower's maturity level increases, the leader's behavior becomes less structured (Cote, 2017).

Commissioner Batts' Actions in Comparison to the Model:

On April 25, 2015, Batts addressed his police officers and gave direction as to the response he expected with the protesters. Batts said that officers were not to engage any protesters and allow them to have room to destroy property. The officers were explicitly told, "The Baltimore Police Department would not respond, until the protestors burned, looted, and destroyed the city so it would show that the rioters were forcing our hand (Baltimore City Fraternal Order of Police, 2015)."

Comparing Batts statement in the context of the model, one can see that Batts employed a Directing Style (S1). This method is to be employed with subordinates who have Low Competence and High Commitment (D1). It is unknown if Batts assumed that his officers were not capable. However, it is apparent that he did not attempt to ascertain this and did not include mid-level management personnel by giving such an order (Brown & Barker, 2001). D1 also assumes a High commitment; however, the after-action reports and interview of officers found this not to be the case. Afterward, many officers said that they were disillusioned with the city and department leadership (Baltimore City Fraternal Order of Police, 2015).

Commissioner Batts most likely would have been aware of the low morale of the department, due to the news media focus of the Freddie Gray incident, where a suspect died in custody (Weichselbaum, 2015). In the worst-case scenario, it would have been safe to assume that his officers were Low Competence and Variable Commitment. In this case, Batts should have employed S2, which is Coaching and a High Directive, High Supportive behavior (Brown &

Barker, 2001). Batts' misdiagnosis of his officer's ability and commitment resulted in his implementation of the S1 Directing Style. Consequently, his officers became accurately aware of what their boss thought of their capability.

Furthermore, Batts should have had more faith in his command staff who were probably at a D4 level, or High Competence and High Commitment. Nonetheless, the after-action report revealed that his managers were not allowed to exercise managerial authority on-scene and were frustrated with the micromanagement from the commissioner. Batts may have been more successful had he employed a Delegating Style with his managers which is D4, High Directive, and Low Supportive behavior (Brown & Barker, 2001).

Conclusions:

Anthony Batts was unfortunately under political pressure from city hall; and the evidence to prove this is the statement by Mayor Rawlings-Blake who said: "We also gave those who wished to destroy space to do that as well (Baltimore City Fraternal Order of Police, 2015)." Generally, Batts should have taken a Supporting (D3) or Delegating (D4) method of implementing oversight. Nevertheless, he felt that it was necessary to be on the front lines giving direct orders to line personnel (Batts, 2016). The commissioner's failure to apply the situational model to this incident aggravated already poor morale and showed his lack of pre-planning.

When faced with an impending crisis of this sort, Batts may have employed the following strategies delineated by Cote (Cote, 2017). The guidelines are: anticipate problems and prepare for them, learn to recognize early warning signs for an impending problem, quickly identify the nature and scope of the problem, confidently direct the response by the team. When underestimating or overestimating the scope of a problem, an inadequate response may occur (Cote, 2017).

References

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Appendix A

Case: Anthony Batts failure to lead during the Baltimore Riots

Anthony Batts was chosen as the chief of police for Baltimore in 2012 after leading the helm in the Long Beach and Oakland police departments. Chief William Bratton gave a glowing recommendation and said Batts was “The best in American policing today.” Batts armed with a Ph.D. in public administration was esteemed by police reformers; however, critics noted that he was unable to connect with the cities that hired him. A Baltimore Councilman in referring to Batts failures said that the city needed a someone who has the respect of the citizens, respect of the business community, and respect of the police officers (Weichselbaum, 2015).

The death of Freddie Gray in police custody ignited discontent in the minority community which signaled the beginning of the end for Batt’s police career. The local police union criticized the chief for telling officers not to engage and failing to train officers appropriately. An after-action report by the police union said that Batts told officers not to engage protestors and let them destroy property so they would appear to be the aggressors. Officers were also told during the initial stages of the unrest not to wear riot gear and to leave the equipment at the station. Officers also reported not having received training in riot control (Baltimore City Fraternal Order of Police, 2015).

This episode appears to have numerous management failures that led to widespread property destruction, over 200 injuries to police officers, and the eventual firing of the chief. The riots were widely covered in the media, and various after-action reports should provide enough references to examine the chief’s response. An advantage of reviewing this incident is that it is relevant to current times and fresh in the memory of participants. A disadvantage would be that this author is not familiar with policing protocol and procedures in the City of Baltimore.