**What is Fiedler’s Contingency Theory?**

Fiedler’s Contingency Theory, also known as Fiedler’s Contingency Model or Fiedler’s Theory of Leadership, states that there is not one best style of leadership. Rather, the most effective leadership style for any given situation is one that aligns with the situation at hand.

The theory was developed in the 1960s by Austrian psychologist, Professor Fred Fiedler. He studied leaders’ personalities and characteristics and came to the conclusion that leadership style, since it is formed through one’s life experiences, is incredibly difficult, if not impossible, to change.

For this reason, Fiedler believed the right leader must be chosen for each job based on their skill set and the requirements of the situation. In order to best match leaders with situations, each leader must first understand their natural leadership style. Then, they need to evaluate whether their leadership style is right for the situation. To put it simply, Fiedler determined that a leaders’ ability to succeed rests on two factors:

* Natural leadership style
* Situational favorableness

**What are the elements of Fiedler’s Contingency Model?**

As you’ve probably realized, Fiedler’s Contingency Theory is pretty simple. All it requires is a comparison of one’s leadership style with the demands of the situation. Let’s take a closer look at how the model breaks down these factors.

**Leadership style**

To help you determine your leadership style, Fiedler developed the Least Preferred Coworker (LPC) scale. The scale asks you to describe the coworker you least prefer to work with.

The more positively you rate your least preferred coworker on a variety of different criteria, the more relationship-oriented you are. The less favorably you rate them on the same criteria, the more task-oriented you are.

Essentially:

* If you’re a high LPC leader, you’re a relationship-oriented leader.
* If you’re a low LPC leader, you’re a task-oriented leader.

Relationship-oriented leaders are great at building relationships, facilitating [team synergy](https://asana.com/resources/what-is-synergy), and managing interpersonal conflict. Task-oriented leaders tend to be skilled at organizing projects and teams to accomplish tasks [efficiently and effectively](https://asana.com/resources/efficiency-vs-effectiveness-whats-the-difference).

The rationale behind these two [leadership styles](https://asana.com/resources/leadership-styles) is pretty straightforward:

* Rating your least preferred coworker favorably means that you see the best in people—even those who you wouldn’t necessarily choose to work with.
* Rating your least preferred coworker unfavorably suggests that you struggle to see their contributions, since you value efficiency and effectiveness over other attributes.

There isn’t one “right” way to lead. While task-orientation may be preferable to the organization at large, teammates themselves tend to prefer relationship-orientation. In fact, [79% of people](https://www.octanner.com/content/dam/oc-tanner/documents/global-research/White_Paper_Performance_Accelerated.pdf) who quit their jobs cite lack of appreciation as a primary reason for leaving.

**Situational favorableness**

Next, Fiedler’s model requires you to assess the situation at hand. Situational contingency theory, also known as situational leadership, states that every situation that requires leadership is different and requires a specific type of leader. The favorability of a situation depends on how much influence and power you have as a leader.

Situational favorableness is determined by three variables:

* Leader-member relations
* Task structure
* Position power

**Leader-member relations** are all about trust. Does your team trust you as a leader? The more they do, the higher your degree of leader-member relations and the more favorable the situation is.

**Task structure** refers to the clarity of the tasks required to complete a project. Higher task structure results in a more favorable situation. The more clear-cut and precise tasks are, the higher the situation’s task structure—whereas the vaguer they are, the lower the situation’s task structure.

Finally, **position power** refers to the authority you have over your team as a leader. If you can reward them, punish them, or tell them what to do, your position power is high. As you can imagine, higher position power makes the situation more favorable.