

SECTION 4

Today, I want to talk about self-regulatory focus theory and how the actions of leaders can affect the way followers approach different situations. Self-regulatory focus theory is a theory developed by Tori Higgins. He says that a person's focus at any given time is to either approach pleasure or avoid pain. These are two basic motivations that each and every one of us has, and they cause us to have different kinds of goals. Promotion goals in different life situations emphasise achievement. Prevention goals are oriented towards the avoidance of punishment. Q31

In a specific situation, our thoughts might focus more on promotion goals or more on prevention goals. The theory suggests that two factors affect which goals we are focusing on. First, there is a chronic factor. This factor is connected to a person's personality and says that each person has a basic tendency to either focus more on promotion goals or focus more on prevention goals as part of his or her personality. Second, there is a situational factor which means that the context we are in can make us more likely to focus on one set of goals or the other. For example, we are more likely to be thinking about pleasure and to have promotion goals when we are spending time with a friend. In contrast, if we are working on an important project for our boss, we are more likely to try to avoid making mistakes and therefore have more prevention goals in our mind. Q32 Q33 Q34

Research has shown that the goals we are focusing on at a given time affect the way we think. For example, when focusing on promotion goals, people consider their ideal self, their aspirations and gains. They don't think about what they can lose, so they think in a happier mode. They feel more inspired to change. Q35

When people are focusing on prevention goals, they think about their "ought" self. What are they supposed to be? What are people expecting from them? They consider their obligations to others. As a result, they experience more anxiety and try to avoid situations where they could lose.

Now that I have talked about the two focuses and how they affect people, I want to look at the idea that the way leaders behave, or their style of leading, can affect the focus that followers adopt in a specific situation. In talking about leadership, we often mention transformational leaders and transactional leaders. Transformational leaders, when interacting with their followers, focus on their development. In their words and actions Q36 Q37

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transformational leaders highlight change. Their speech is passionate and conveys a definitive vision. All of these things can encourage followers to think about what could be. In other words, they inspire a promotion focus in their followers. Q38

In contrast, transactional leaders focus on developing clear structures that tell their followers exactly what is expected of them. While they do explain the rewards people will get for following orders, they emphasise more how a follower will be punished or that a follower won't get rewarded if his or her behaviour doesn't change. In short, they emphasise the consequences of making a mistake. This emphasis will clearly lead followers to focus on avoiding punishment and problems. This is clearly a prevention focus. Q39

In conclusion, it is important to understand that one focus is not necessarily better than the other one. For a designer who works in a field where a lot of innovation is needed, a promotion focus is probably better. In contrast, a prevention focus which causes people to work more cautiously and produce higher quality work might be very appropriate for a job like a surgeon, for example. The main point of the research, though, is that the actions of leaders can greatly influence whether people approach a situation with more of a promotion focus or more of a prevention focus. Q40