THE IMPACT OF SITUATIONAL LEADERSHIP THEORY ON FOLLOWER
DEVELOPMENT IN FITNESS: AN ACTION RESEARCH STUDY WITH CAMP
GLADIATOR

A Thesis
by
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ABSTRACT

The best teachings come from stories. People can relate to given circumstances which they have gone through themselves. This study uses Action Research to do just that; tell the story of impact on an organization and grow upon it. Leadership studies continue to build and evolve over time. Different organizations depend on this leadership to promote their success. One question remains; What is effective leadership? The answer is, there is not one. Leadership style recommendations depend on the organization itself. I have conducted a study that implements Situational Leadership Theory to a transformational fitness organization; Camp Gladiator. This study sought to answer the following research questions: What impact does Situational Leadership Theory treatment have on followers’ D-level? What impact does learning and applying Situational Leadership Theory have on the trainer’s ability to lead? Twelve participants, one trainer and eleven campers involved in Camp Gladiator participated in interviews and were observed throughout the treatment. Open coding via deductive lens was used to create a thematic analysis to reach the findings. I found SLT application can make a world of difference in a boot camp setting. Follower diagnosis is a crucial part of follower growth and satisfaction. This study highlights the positive impact of SLT on the trainer, her campers, and her camp in general. Recommendations from these findings were produced from myself, as well as the trainer in the study. Researching leadership in fitness is a new notion that could provide endless support and opportunities for the industry.
DEDICATION

To my CG family that helped make this thesis possible. And to Dr. Jen, who taught me the importance of leadership theory application.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many people have contributed to my graduate experience. I would first like to thank my committee chair, Dr. Jen Strong, and committee members, Dr. Barry Boyd, and Dr. Nancy Watson. Dr. Boyd, thank you for supporting my studies and being a positive light in my graduate experience. Dr. Watson, thank you for going out of your comfort zone to support a leadership student. Your conflict mediation course changed my perspective on life, and I love your passion and charismatic nature. More people need to be like you.

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Contributors

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All other work conducted for the thesis was completed by the student independently.

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

When thinking about fitness, some may scowl and have a negative reaction, while others are empowered and excited because of the way exercise makes them feel. However, few think about the impact of leadership on fitness goals. Personal trainers are required to undergo fitness certifications to practice personal training. Williams (2007) suggested personal trainers who possess good people skills are more likely to have better relationships with clients because of the constant interaction and accountability.

“[Personal trainers] excel by treating clients like close friends and developing successful training relationships into strong, loyal bonds that produce many valuable referrals” (Williams, 2007, p. 40). The personal training certification exam entails anatomy, math, and science, but fails to mention leadership skills necessary to successfully run a successful training business. There is a need for personal trainer leadership development to enhance trainees’ development and improve overall fitness goals and experiences.

Why is Fitness Important?

Physical fitness is a component of healthy lifestyle goals and overall life satisfaction (Gacek, 2017). Fitness embodies many different types of workouts that increase heart rate and burn calories. Without it, people can become lazy and inefficient. Not only does fitness physically impact people, but mentally as well. Depression, anxiety, and stress symptoms can all be reduced via physical activity (Orvidas et al., 2018). Engaging in physical activity also reduces risk of heart related health issues. The
studied boot camp provides a culture which supports these aspirations by creating and inclusive environment for its campers and advocates healthy eating.

Body weight training took the lead for *ACSM’s Health & Fitness Journal*®, which was previously high intensity interval training (Thompson, 2014). Prior to high intensity interval training, personal trainers held the number one spot for most popular fitness trends over the span of six years. Fitness boot camps have become popular over the years due to these types of workouts. Boot camps incorporate high intensity interval training, body weight training, and personal training. The trainer serves as a personal coach for each camper as needed. However, an essential component to group workouts is the accountability between, not only the trainer and participant, but each participant to each other. Studies suggest scheduled group fitness is more advantageous than individual workouts (Yorks, 2017).

[There is] a significant decrease in perceived stress and an increase in physical, mental, and emotional QOL (Quality of Life) for students who regularly participated in a 12-week group fitness program compared with students who participated in exercise regimens on their own or who did not engage in formal physical activity. (Yorks, 2017, p. 21)

Group fitness proved to be an advantageous workout plan over other types of working out. Therefore, it is an effective means of effective physical activity.

**Camp Gladiator**

There is a fitness company who provides an outdoor boot camp for many people with differing opinions on exercise, ages, fitness levels, and sizes. The diverse people
consist of individuals whom may or may not have previous knowledge or interest in exercise. Camp Gladiator is a Christian based company that strives to create fun, community-oriented workouts to inspire people’s physical fitness and overall health. Camp Gladiator does not promote their Christian background as a marketing ploy but uses their values in an unobtrusive way. Camp Gladiator has five main values:

1. Honor God and serve others,
2. Abundance mentality and power through numbers,
3. Anything is possible with a responsible, solution-oriented mindset,
4. Have a long-term mindset with short-term sacrifices to create lasting success,
5. Hard work, commitment and action help achieve goals (CampGladiator, 2018).

With these concepts serving as the basis of the company, Camp Gladiator is always looking to improve their employees and the company as a whole.

Camp Gladiator was founded and created by Ally Davidson (CampGladiator, 2018). The camp currently has 3,500 locations in 350 cities. Campers are allowed to go to any location at any time available. A smart phone app is provided to keep participants updated and aware of the different options. Campers are encouraged to bring a yoga mat, weights, water bottle and towel. The other equipment is provided by the trainer. There are five different weeks per camp. Table 1 details the weekly rotation of workouts.
### Table 1

**Camp Gladiator Weekly Workout Themes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Label</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
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<tr>
<td>Week 1</td>
<td>Endurance</td>
<td>“Build the Foundation”</td>
<td>Build up strength and stamina by continuing exercise for 60 minutes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 2</td>
<td>Strength &amp; Agility</td>
<td>“Train Like an Athlete”</td>
<td>Build muscle and power by increasing lifting weight.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 3</td>
<td>Interval</td>
<td>“Up the Intensity”</td>
<td>High intensity drills with short rest times to increase oxygen levels.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 4</td>
<td>Peak</td>
<td>“Test Your Limits”</td>
<td>Enhance stamina, speed, and strengths.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 5</td>
<td>BOLD</td>
<td>“Exclusive Workouts”</td>
<td>Focus on recovery and specialty items.</td>
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Week one, endurance week, is geared toward building up strength and stamina for campers. The goal of the workouts is to continue moving for the entire 60 minutes and keep the campers’ heart rates constant. Week two is strength and agility week. The goal is to build muscle and power, while working on form. Week three is interval week, which entails high intensity drills with short rest times to increase oxygen levels. Week four is peak week. Peak week enhances the campers’ stamina, speed, and strengths. The goal of this week is to push limits and increase goals. Week five is BOLD week. BOLD
is a term which describes campers who have committed to six or more months of Camp Gladiator, and pay a monthly membership (CampGladiator, 2018). BOLD week is dedicated to focusing on recovery and specialty items, such as foam rolling or proper form. Once week five is over, a new camp starts back at week one, endurance week. Camp Gladiator always offers free promotional weeks at camp or challenges, such as “CG Fit”. CG Fit is a fitness test that happens throughout the course of one camp, or five weeks. A body scanner is provided, as well as healthy meals and unlimited workouts to help each camper improve. The trainers’ goals are to keep the workouts diverse and intriguing, all the while providing encouragement and alternatives if a workout is not feasible to a camper. Camp Gladiator’s ability to combine community and fitness has created a new way of achieving physical goals, which, in turn, has positively affected many lives.

As the CEO of Camp Gladiator, Ally Davidson stays busy. Not only is she the face of her business, but serves as a trainer, herself. Langer (2019) discussed many aspects of Camp Gladiator, and not once did Davidson refer to herself as a leader. This is leadership in fitness. Davidson considers herself one of the trainers or employees. She sets the stage for how she wants her other trainers to be. Davidson explained, “But I think the harder decision is so often what is better for the company and its people in the long run” (Langer, 2019, para. 4). It is clear that Davidson is passionate about fitness, but people seem to be her main priority, which transitions into the meaning of Situational Leadership Theory. Camp Gladiator’s culture is a key component to their success.
Analyzing cultural typologies is a way to identify the internal functions of an organization and how they operate (Stolyarova & Stolyarova, 2012). If organizations are successful, it is important to study the way they get things done, therefore, the process can be replicated to make other organizations successful. Studying the skeleton of a company will reveal an underlying cultural typology. Adhocracy is a primary cultural typology within Camp Gladiator’s organization. Adhocratic organizations entail people who are flexible, driven, and risk-takers (Strong, 2018). New camps are being added and trainers are in the hiring process every day, which entails ongoing growth and change, moreover requiring major flexibility. Davidson’s entrepreneurial spirit is instilled in each partner trainer, enabling drive and stimulation within the organization. The trainers are big risk takers, by either quitting their day job to pursue Camp Gladiator or working a day job and encompassing all aspects of a trainer as well. The adhocratic core of the organization enables it to be successful and recruit like-minded people to enhance the company’s value and growth. Camp Gladiator’s employees must be like-minded in that they have a passion for people, fitness, and accountability. These three passions that the trainer possesses attract many diverse people to join Camp Gladiator as campers.

Camp Gladiator also has a normative cultural climate. The majority of the employees, especially trainers, have a general interest in the fitness industry. Schein (2004) describes normative organizations as a culture in which, “the goals of the organization are basically the same as the individual’s goals” (p. 191). If the employees do not have some sort of passion for fitness, their passion and drive for the company and betterment of others is most likely not where it needs to be. Davidson’s goals are clear
cut; therefore, all of the Camp Gladiator employees should be aware of the intent of the company. Along with fitness, faith is a part of the normative culture as well. The employees have a general interest and understanding of all core values, which creates a supportive and energetic environment.

**Problem Statement**

Leadership needs vary by situation. Each organization has its own wants and needs from leadership to enable effectiveness and efficiency. Research on situational leadership and fitness has not been done before. As a trainer, one must be able to know what the trainee needs as far as direction and support. Camp Gladiator’s campers consist of many different ranges of competence and commitment to the organization and fitness, itself. Therefore, it is important to take a look at how to improve those relationships between trainers and campers.

**Purpose of the Study**

This action research study will look at the impact of Situational Leadership Theory (SLT) on follower development in fitness by a Camp Gladiator trainer. SLT allows the interaction between the leader and follower to develop the leadership skills of the follower by tending to the followers’ needs based on the commitment and competence the followers possess. High commitment and low competence would be exemplified by a person eager to workout with no previous experience or knowledge of how to do so. A highly committed and highly competent follower at Camp Gladiator would require less attention from the leader due to his or her innate ability to perform the task.
Research Questions

The following serve as the research questions conducted for this treatment:

RQ1: What impact does Situational Leadership Theory treatment have on followers’ D-level?

RQ2: What impact does learning and applying Situational Leadership Theory have on the trainer’s ability to lead?

Limitations

The study of human participants is subject to limitations. The limitations of this study included the sample size, which is a case study action research experiment which consists of campers who attend Camp Gladiator at Pebble Creek Elementary (PCE) in College Station, Texas, on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday mornings. The treatment may not be generalizable to all campers and is limited to this location, which does not take into account other locations Camp Gladiator offers. The treatment consists of current PCE Camp Gladiator campers who attend Camp Gladiator and have completed the Camp Gladiator survey to diagnose developer levels. Moreover, another limitation is the campers may choose not to attend every camp.

Basic Assumptions

This study is important to me because I can personally see the results I gain from a steady workout routine. As a participant in this action research study, I find it imperative to choose time to get some type of physical activity and enjoy it. Camp Gladiator provides an alternative cross-training to my usual gym weight-lifting workout. Although I have no problem working out on my own, there is something about the
people I work out with that makes me want to keep coming back. Accountability is a huge part of that. If I do not attend one of my usual workouts, the trainer, as well as other campers ask where I was and if I am ok, as well as give me some grief to ensure I attend regularly again. Camp Gladiator also has a check in system that helps campers advance in their membership status from BOLD, to Bronze, to Silver, to Gold, then to Elite. The check in system is a great way to keep me motivated to attend as many camps as possible to move to the next level.

Another component of my personal experience with Camp Gladiator is fitness is required to maintain sanity, flexibility, and positivity. Not only do campers get a good workout in, but we have a support system and encouragement from the trainer, as well as other campers to start our days and weeks off in a positive manner. Starting my day off with a workout enables me to have a clear mind throughout the day, and truly focus on one task at a time. I also have energy throughout the day and do not have to worry about planning my own workout.

As a leadership researcher and fitness connoisseur, there is a need for leadership theory implementation into the fitness industry. Personal trainers know the science behind what workouts improve different muscle groups but are not experts on the leadership styles that could enhance the relationship with their trainees. By implementing Situational Leadership Theory to Camp Gladiator, I hope to incorporate both of my passions into one positive outcome.
Society is driven by success. Leaders define the success of an organization. Without good leaders, success is difficult, if possible, to achieve. Good leaders will work with their followers to achieve a common goal, while bad leaders will use their followers to get ahead. Good leadership is essential to team effectiveness. This is why it is imperative to look at previous research and findings regarding what theories are effective and what theories are not as useful. When integrating leadership into fitness, the at-risk items are physical and mental health, which are day to day functionalities of life. Leaders in fitness have to work with their followers to ensure the utmost success and safety to improve the followers’ goals. While leadership is a common term, there is no definitive meaning that has been universally adopted.

Leadership has been around for decades. The definition of leadership varies from theorist to theorist and depending on organizational goals. Some base leaders off of their position, while others view leaders as people who rise to the occasion when needed. Many different theorists have come up with alternative ways to define leadership, the traits a leader possesses, and how to be an effective leader. Bass (2008) describes the field of leadership beginning as a natural instinct from the period of hunters and gatherers as well as general parental leadership. However, as time progressed, theorists began to make more distinct, specific criteria for leaders. “The patterns of behavior that are regarded as acceptable in leaders differ from time to time and from one culture to the
Leadership is broad and used in every organization to achieve a common goal. This manuscript focuses on Situational Leadership and its impact on a modern organization.

**Leadership Movements**

Theorists can only explain leadership so many ways, however, there is not one solid definition of the concept. Leadership needs vary based on organizational goals and objectives. Eddy and VanDerLinden (2006) suggest that there is continued interest in leadership and the definition is ever changing. Theorists began their leadership definition search by focusing on trending emerging leaders’ personality characteristics, traits, and whether they were born or made (Rost, 1991). As leadership research progressed, deeper intangible diagnoses of leadership styles were formulated and confirmed. Rost (1991) explained the transition into the theoretical interest of leadership components and how leaders can positively impact organizations. Moreover, theorists were transitioning from how leaders should look and act, to a more intricate view of what it takes to be a leader. Rost (1991) found no surprise that the leadership definition search was never ending because researchers had not been looking at the nature of leadership as a relationship, but as empirical data and content. Currently, the meaning of leadership is still to be determined and constantly discussed amongst researchers.

**Trait Theory**

Leadership theory began with the question of whether leaders are born or made. Trait theory dives into this phenomenon to “...attempt to explain distinctive characteristics accounting for leadership effectiveness” (Lussier & Achua, 2016, p. 16).
Researchers studied psychological and physical traits to correlate the relation of traits to successful leaders. Bass (2008) noted two factors that trait theory was based off of: how traits decipher leaders versus non-leaders and studying the detailed differences in leaders versus other people. Through these studies, popular characteristics of leaders were defined and used to choose people for leadership roles. Five specific traits defining effective leaders within trait theory are openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism, also known as the Big Five Traits of Effective Leaders, also known as the Big Five (Lussier & Achua, 2016). The Big Five were further explored and defined with nine traits of effective leaders. However, more research was to be done on leadership and whether it was the traits leaders possessed or if there was more to the phenomena; thus, the behavioral approach was discovered.

**Behavioral Approach**

Seeing Trait Theory did not explain effective leadership, leadership researchers turned their focus to the behaviors of constructive leaders versus destructive leaders. Therefore, the behavioral approach was an “...attempt to explain distinctive styles used by effective leaders, or to define the nature of their work” (Lussier & Achua, 2016, p. 16). The behavioral approach has several popular theories that researchers have derived from their studies. This approach delves deeper into what specific ways leader behavior can be classified to better understand what classifies someone as a leader. Franke, Felfe, & Pundt (2014) found research which supported transformational leadership as an effective style needed for follower growth. Trainees look to their trainers for health and fitness guidance, as well as quality of life. Moreover, the behavioral approach was
questioned on the reliability of the theories working in all situations. The following
theory focuses on leading from within.

*Contingency Leadership Theory*

The behavioral approach was centered on specific leadership traits to determine
what an ideal leader acts like. However, researchers found that the best leadership traits
were not universal; the best leadership types were more dependent on the situation. Bass
(2008) explained contingency as task or relational based on a leader’s experience with
their least preferred coworker. “Contingency leadership theories attempt to explain the
appropriate leadership style based on the leader, followers, and situation” (Lussier &
Achua, 2016, p.17). Contingency is defined as leadership behavior and style needs
which are dependent on the followers and situation (Lussier & Achua, 2016). Followers’
needs depict the type of leadership traits desired. As researchers invented theories and
models to best study situational leadership approaches, Hersey and Blanchard built off of
those ideas and came up with their own theory, Situational Leadership Theory.

*Neocharasmatic*

Throughout leadership history, there have been many descriptions and labels
attempting to grasp the perfect leader. Theorists began to combine ideas.
Neocharasmatic leadership a mixture of transformational and charismatic leadership,
two styles that were deemed important (Bass, 2008). It encompasses authentic
leadership, as well as the importance of followership. Transformational leadership
focuses on the followers and development of the team as a whole. “Transforming
leadership elevates the follower’s level of maturity, ideals, and concerns for the well-
being of others, the organization, and society” (Bass, 2008, p. 619). This concept is the backbone of many newer leadership theories, which have been tested and successful within many research findings. One theory that was a spinoff of transformational leadership is authentic leadership. Authentic leadership requires the leader of the organization to maintain honesty and integrity throughout the whole process. This ensures the followers are able to trust in and identify with the leader of the group. This can also be related to authentic leadership.

Authentic leadership stems from the importance and relevance of authenticity. These leaders remain true to others as well as themselves. Authentic leadership leads to staff authenticity, which, in turn creates organizational health and climate (Bass, 2008). Climate can make or break an organization, therefore making it crucial that authentic leaders set the stage for the environment. Integrity and self-awareness are key factors in remaining an authentic leader. These leaders gain and retain good followers, which, in turn, become authentic followers and able to better perform (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). When the focus is on the followers, it is often referred to as followership.

Followership is an advancing study. Researchers have been looking deep into what leadership is and not finding a definite answer, that there is now a shift into looking at what it means to be a good follower. First, followership must be identified by studying the natural state and effect of the followers throughout the leadership process. This method addresses followers as subordinates or co-constructs (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). Baker (2007) mentions followership as a study of the situation between leader and follower, which correlates to Situational Leadership Theory.
Theoretical Framework

Given the importance of leader/follower relations, Situational Leadership Theory (SLT) was chosen as the theoretical framework of this study. This concept focuses on situations in which the leader has to alter his or her leadership style to match the follower type in their organization (Hersey and Blanchard, 1988). The four different leadership styles are directing, coaching, supporting, and delegating. “Situational leadership suggests that leaders should change the degree to which they are directive or supportive to meet the changing needs of followers” (Northouse, 2018, p. 95). The four leadership types are labeled as S1, S2, S3, and S4. The leader type varies based on supportive and directive behaviors. S1, or directing, is the leadership style in which the leader provides high direction and low support. The leader gives clear direction on how to achieve goals and supervises closely (Hersey and Blanchard, 1988). S2, or coaching, is a high-directive and high-supportive approach. Leaders focus on achievement of goals, as well as the followers’ emotional needs (Hersey and Blanchard, 1988). The S3 level, or supporting style, is high-supportive and low-directive in leadership. The leader’s purpose is to focus primarily on being a supportive advocate for the follower’s personalized skill sets (Hersey and Blanchard, 1988). Lastly, S4, or delegating, is the leadership style that is low-supportive and low-directive. Leaders lessen involvement and micromanaging of followers (Hersey and Blanchard, 1988). The different leadership types have follower types that correlate.

The followers, on the other hand, are labeled as D1, D2, D3, and D4, which translates the followers’ levels from developing to developed (Hersey and Blanchard,
1688). The leadership style, or S level number, necessary for the specific follower type correlates with the D level number. The followers are labeled as having differing competence and commitment based on their levels. For example, D1 followers are high in commitment, but low in competence. This level is considered the lowest level and categorized as a ‘developing’ follower. D2 followers are low in both competence and commitment. D3 followers have high competence, and low commitment. Lastly, D4 followers have high commitment and competence. The D4 followers are considered ‘developed’ due to their familiarity with the subject. When the leader is aware of the competence and commitment of his or her followers, he or she can use the appropriate leadership style. “To bring out the best in others, leadership must match the development level of the person being led” (Blanchard, 2007, p 88). Figure 1 is a pictorial representation of Situational Leadership Theory. The ideal leader is dependent on the situation and followers the organization possesses (Bass, 2008). Thus, SLT defines a way in which organizations can specifically identify what type of followers they have and how to lead them accordingly. Hersey and Blanchard (1988) believed, “situational leadership is based on an interplay among (1) the amount of guidance and direction (task behavior) a leader gives, (2) the amount of socioemotional support (relationship behavior) a leader provides, and (3) the readiness level that followers exhibit in performing a specific task, function or objective” (p. 170).
Figure 1 Situational Leadership Theory (Northouse, 2018, p. 97)

*Figure 1 is reprinted with permission from Leadership: Theory and Practice, by Peter G. Northouse, 2018, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA. Copyright 2019 by Sage Publications.*
**SLT Research**

Recent studies have used Situational Leadership Theory as a backbone for conducting research. Thompson and Vecchio (2009) studied three versions of Hersey and Blanchard's Situational Leadership Theory:

(1) the original, 1972, statement of the theory; (2) the revised, 2007, theory; and (3) an alternative statement of the theory's essential principle of differential follower response to “autonomy afforded by the leader” in conjunction with “follower developmental level” (as indexed by employee job experience). (p. 837)

The researchers noted that Situational Leadership Theory has been used successfully in many managerial leadership trainings. Thompson and Vecchio’s (2009) research came to the conclusion that, overall, Situational Leadership Theory is “...easily understood, intuitively appealing, and seemingly applicable to a wide range of leadership settings” (p. 838). The description and meaning, itself, is a viable way to train managers and leaders the fundamentals of successfully leading followers with different skill sets and competencies. The pictorial representation of SLT can help visual learners benefit with a better understanding the fundamentals of implementing SLT effectively in an organization.

Salehzadeh et al. (2015) conducted a study looking at SLT on the collegiate level. The researchers conducted a case study at the University of Isfahan. The case study consisted of a questionnaire distributed to students asking their preferences on
professors’ teaching styles in general. Undergraduate, postgraduate, and PhD students were categorized based on their educational level. The common trends were associated with each collegiate level to reveal the findings. SLT was successfully used in determining student satisfaction with utilizing different SLT leadership styles.

Reza et al. (2018) used SLT to determine employee performance and work motivation of millennials at an inspection office. Primary and secondary data were collected via direct interviews and questionnaires with millennial employees, and online questionnaires. The findings concluded supporting SLT as an effective means of successful performance. Moreover, the more the leader or supervisor knows about the followers or subordinates, the better the performance (Reza et al., 2018).

Thompson and Vecchio (2009) proclaimed the absence of critiques of situational leadership in its entirety. “Although it is among the most widely-known theories in the domain of managerial leadership, Situational Leadership Theory (SLT) remains among the less well-substantiated models” (Thompson & Vecchio, 2009, p. 837). Multiple companies use SLT as a building block for their leadership development trainings, but do not verify the outcomes of the theory, which puts constraints on the reliability and validity of the implementation. Edwards (1996) wrote about situational approaches as “flawed because they overlook individual differences in how situations are cognitively appraised” (p. 293). Humans possess different perspectives of every situation they are involved in. Therefore, it is imperative that researchers note the diverse possibilities of leadership behavior and outcomes when assessing how to best lead a certain follower type.
In later research, Lynch (2015) studied the partnering for performance aspect of situational leadership to residential care methods. “Individual followers at various levels on the developmental continuum require the situational leader to use a leadership style that matches their level so that they are enabled and supported in the delivery of more effective person-centered care” (Lynch, 2015, p. 9). When a follower’s needs are met by a leader who can gauge them based on the situation, the follower is more satisfied and effective. When a follower is satisfied with the leadership received, he or she is more apt to remain in the organization.

**Leadership in Fitness**

Fitness requires personal commitment and action. In some cases, fitness leaders, or trainers, are the accountability and knowledge source. Estabrooks et al. (2004) mentions the leader in fitness must be a “motivational physical activity leader” (p. 233). The text goes on to explain health professionals’ interest in the role trainers play in participants motivation to and comprehension of fitness programs (Estabrooks et al., 2004). It begins with the participants’ preference to work out alone or in groups with a fitness trainer. Carron et al. (1996) found that leadership was not necessarily the main component to participants’ involvement, but the social influences. However, the leaders were deemed important when it came to participant confidence. Consequently, the definition of leadership can be relatively skewed due to the different situations a leader has to succumb to. Chemers’ (2000) proclaimed general leadership research can be described as "a fractured and confusing set of contradictory findings and assertions without coherence or interpretability" (p. 27). The term leadership is used for a variety of
reasonings and research, but there is never a definite answer as to what leadership really is.

Chelladurai and Carron (1983) conducted a study to look at high school and collegiate athletes’ coaching preferences using SLT. They found the more experienced athletes at the collegiate level appreciated more training and instruction, whereas the younger athletes at the high school level preferred more personal interaction. “These findings may be a reflection of the adolescent's emerging need for independence” (Chelladurai & Carron, 1983, p. 376). Therefore, SLT needs and adoption may depend on the age of the participants involved. The SLT integration to coaching was further studied in later research.

Chelladurai’s (1990) multidimensional model of leadership, which examines leadership in sports teams, defines the need for a comprehensive leadership model in fitness groups. This model takes into account situational characteristics, leader characteristics, and member characteristics, then aligns with required, actual, and preferred behaviors. Member satisfaction and group performance levels are dependent on characteristics and behaviors. Athlete satisfaction and performance are strongly supported by the relationships between athlete perceptions of the dimensions of leadership behavior (Chelladurai, 1990). Therefore, the team dynamic is situational.

Cummins (2017) correlated coaching effectiveness to the coach’s ability to lead. Coach leadership is described as a developmental process that is used to enhance athlete performance and satisfaction (Cummins, 2017). The athletes would be considered the followers in this situation, depending on their coach, or leader, to help them improve on
certain athletic skills. Depending on the athlete’s competence of the sport, the coach would have to adhere to those needs individually to help each athlete progress and stay motivated.

**SLT and Fitness**

The fitness industry is a complex structure, equipped with many different trends and details. Camp Gladiator is only one of many fitness options, but also contains multiple differences that make the organization protrude from the rest. Van Pelt (2017) mentioned several fitness trends in which Camp Gladiator possesses such as body weight training, HIIT (high-intensity interval training), and group exercise classes to name a few. Camp Gladiator provides a community for the campers involved, using varied workout plans and personal accountability as a diverse platform. “The overlapping concerns of service work, emotional labor, and flexibility frame the structure and organization of personal training, shaping the varying degrees of autonomy and constraint, modes of establishing authority, and broader implications of the one-on-one service interaction in the fitness club and larger fitness industry” (Maguire, 2001, p. 380-381). There is a need for personal trainers to better understand their customers. Situational Leadership focuses on leading the follower or consumer based on the follower type diagnosis. If a follower is not familiar with fitness, it is important for the leader to be more supporting and detail oriented, so the follower understands why he or she is performing in such a way. When the points of the movements are understood, the follower is able to advance and improve. Therefore, Situational Leadership can be used
to help trainers better understand their campers and hopefully shape the organization into a better fitness camp.

Williams (2007) suggested that personal trainers who possess good people skills are more likely to have better relationships with clients. “[Personal trainers] excel by treating clients like close friends and developing successful training relationships into strong, loyal bonds that produce many valuable referrals” (Williams, 2007, p. 40). Knowledge of Situational Leadership Theory should enable trainers to teach based on their followers’ commitment and competence levels. If the trainers are well versed in situational leadership and can implement the model in their daily camps, the campers will have an effective and positive experience. Leiderman (2007) describes situational leaders as people who “…encourage individuals to become more fully conscious of their own values and personal and cultural identities to see themselves as the locus for decision making, and to act in ways consistent with that internal sense of self and those personal values” (p. 199). Leadership studies often mention the need for leaders to have awareness of self in order to best lead their followers. Leiderman (2007) continues by stating “…leading from within, authentic communication, conscious awareness, healing, and “doing your own work” as ways to increase the skills needed to work effectively across similarities and difference” (p. 199).

Conclusion

It is important to revisit the statement that leadership is not yet defined. It can vary from organization to organization, and leadership styles can depend on the needs of the followers. However, the importance of leadership is vital to organizational growth.
Situational Leadership Theory plays a key role in many organizations, whether it be subconscious or consciously studied. There are many different perceptions from researchers in regard to the importance of leadership in fitness groups. It depends on what the definition of leadership is and all it entails to be able to truly identify the need. There has been little research composed on behalf of Situational Leadership Theory and coaching and the fitness industry. Therefore, this study is aiming to bridge the gap between SLT and fitness.
CHAPTER III

METHODS

Action Research

The best way to learn is to do. You as the learner can also be a critical aspect of changing the world through action. McNiff (2013) describes the epitome of action research: explaining your learning process and how you best implement those practices to better your organization.

My interactive study is based on action research. Action research (AR) can also be described as “an approach in which the action researcher and members of a social setting collaborate in the diagnosis of a problem and in the development of a solution based on the diagnosis” (Bryman, 2016, p. 387). Moreover, I would like to address my bias that is included in this study. McNiff (2013) explains the AR process as using “the way you are thinking to critique the way you are thinking” (p. 154). My perspective of the study plays an essential role in AR’s mission: to tell a story from an insider’s perspective. I chose this method for my study because I am entrenched in Camp Gladiator’s organizational culture. AR allows the researcher, me, to be involved and a participant of the study.

This methodology focuses on issues or improvements that could potentially impact the group or organization (Patton, 2002). Reflection, collection, and analyzing information are all components of AR that enable an organization to implement needed changes (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2008). “In other situations, the researcher seeks to empower, transform, and emancipate individuals from situations that constrain their self-
development and self-determination” (Creswell, 2002, p. 550). I was an intimate part of data collection and analysis, as well as research and observation.

Bryman (2016) describes AR as a differentiated study due to its emphasis on practical outcomes. There are two different types of AR; practical AR and participatory AR (Patton, 2002). Participatory AR focusses on studying social issues and equal collaboration, emancipating the researcher when the study is complete (Creswell, 2002). Practical AR consists of the following:

- Studying local practices
- Involving individual or team-based inquiry
- Focusing on teacher [trainer] development and student [camper] learning
- Implementing a plan of action
- Leading to the teacher [trainer] as researcher (Creswell, 2002, p. 552)

Practical AR is best suited for this study. Therefore, throughout the study, AR prescribes the researcher to blend in with the participants. I, as the researcher, participated in Camp Gladiator workouts, as well as took time to observe and analyze trends and commonalities throughout the study. I was a camper, as well as Situational Leadership Theory facilitator for the trainer.

Action Research Application in Leadership

“Life does not come to us like a math problem, but more like a story. There is a setting or context, there are characters or respondents, and there is conflict or a problem to address” (Dooley, 2002, p. 33-34). Dooley (2002) gives a background to what AR in leadership looks like. AR cannot be complete without the researcher’s experience and
reflection on those experiences. The outcome reveals a story that readers can engage in without realizing they are experiencing academic writing. Researchers have noticed the importance of integrating themselves into their research criteria to not only collect data but understand it from a personal lens. Gorley (2017) used participatory action research (PAR) to find the impact of leadership on end goals of patient safety and quality care. His results revealed the biased lens of the health care professionals, and he made sure to reiterate the importance of the participants’ experience because they were “the grass-roots and front-line personnel” (Gorley, 2017, p. 8). AR in leadership serves to not only address leaders’ biased lenses, but highlight the followers’ needs, which is why SLT and AR work together hand in hand.

Meet the Trainer

The pseudonym, Kelly, will be used for the studied Camp Gladiator trainer. Kelly is a 28-year-old born and raised in Spring, Texas. She fell in love with gymnastics at the young age of three. As she aged she became very involved in school and began to compete in gymnastics at age six. She continued competing in gymnastics for ten years. In high school, Kelly started coaching gymnastics due to her injuries that disabled her from competing. She found a passion for working with others to help them achieve their goals. After graduating high school in the top ten percent, Kelly was automatically accepted into Texas A&M University. She joined the Texas A&M gymnastics team first semester of freshman year. Unfortunately, her injuries started to resurface. She took a step off the floor and began coaching again. With a degree in Kinesiology, love for gymnastics, athleticism, and coaching, and a goal-oriented mindset, Kelly’s plan was to
graduate and move on to Physical Therapy (PT) School. As a senior in college, Kelly quit coaching gymnastics, and began coaching for a local boot camp in College Station, Texas. After graduation, Kelly married her, now, husband. She started applying for PT school interviews but was rejected by all. With determination, Kelly continued in her academic career, pursuing her master’s degree. After finishing her graduate degree, Kelly moved to Austin, Texas, with her husband. She and her friend created fitness company together in January of 2016, while Kelly’s husband worked at Apple full time. Consequently, Kelly found out she was pregnant in May of 2016. Moreover, their fitness business was not picking up because they did not realize they had another big fitness boot camp they were competing with. This boot camp turned out to be Camp Gladiator. Kelly and her friend ended up closing down their business, and Kelly’s son was born that fall. Many doors began to close for Kelly and her husband in Austin, Texas, and they began to feel a tug to retract to their old stomping grounds; College Station, Texas. In October of 2017, Kelly and her family packed their things, with no plan, and moved to College Station. Shortly after the move, Kelly received a Facebook message from a mutual friend letting her know that Camp Gladiator would be launching in College Station, and they needed some energetic trainers to start the movement. Kelly stated, “We had the background in fitness, and God was calling us to move back to College Station for this reason.” Kelly and her husband started the Camp Gladiator training process in late October of 2017 and launched their first camp in January of 2018. “Ever since then, it’s been a freight train, or maybe like a rocket ship!” Kelly exclaimed. Currently, Kelly, her husband, and one other trainer, with the help of Camp Gladiator
directors, throughout the year have grown Camp Gladiator in College Station from three trainers to 13, seven locations to 46 locations, 20 workouts per week to 110 workouts per week, and zero BOLD campers to 660 BOLD campers. Kelly and her husband are now being prompted to move into leadership of the College Station area and continue with the ongoing growth and success Camp Gladiator has to offer.

Camper Selection

The camp chosen to study was picked due to the trainer leading it, Kelly. The specific location and time of the camp was chosen due to the large number of campers that show up on a regular basis. Kelly and I hand selected each camper. Therefore, it is to be noted that I, as the researcher, know and interact with the campers. While choosing campers, Kelly and I made sure to have at least two campers from each D-level.

To protect the identities of participants, pseudonyms were randomly assigned to each camper, and will be used throughout the rest of this thesis. Participants self-selected their demographic responses to sex, age, ethnicity, and number of children. See Table 2 for the participant demographics.
Table 2

Camper Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Marital</th>
<th>Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Camper A</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>White/Caucasian</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camper C</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camper D</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>White/Caucasian</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camper F</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camper G</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Korean/Caucasian</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camper H</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>White/Caucasian</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camper K</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>White/Caucasian</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camper Q</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>White/Caucasian</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camper R</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>White/Caucasian</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Methods

I began my research by observing one of Kelly’s Camp Gladiator camps. I watched her interactions with her campers; mannerisms, conversations, corrections, explanations, and modifications. I brought the same journal to camp each day I observed and noted my observations as I participated in the workout and simply sitting to the side and observing each camper interaction. Once my observation came to an end, I began training Kelly on Situational Leadership Theory (SLT).

The first SLT training was at Kelly’s house. I chose to meet at a place that was comfortable for Kelly, especially since she has a one-year-old son. Kelly was very motivated and energetic to learn the material from the beginning. The first training focused on introducing the SLT visual to help describe the theory pictorially. I explained each quadrant of the visual, both leader and follower verbiage. The training was held one-on-one, using the textbook as a means to visually identify each factor of
the visual representation. Kelly picked up on the SLT and language and began to identify campers that fell into each follower type quadrant. She understood the theory very well and was able to connect the concepts to her campers during the first training. Kelly was very drawn to colors and referred to the D1 level as ‘red’, which is the color Northouse (2016) represents in the visual. I also received the following text a couple days after our training, “Hey I was totally evaluating campers this morning and running through my list to see who I need to be focusing on in that orange (or the low competency and low commitment) section.” Due to Kelly’s color coordination, when reviewing SLT material and filling in the visual model herself, she color coordinated the leadership styles versus the followership styles as seen in Appendix B.

The second training consisted of further dialogue about camper-follower diagnosis and the prevalence of SLT in each camp at Camp Gladiator. Kelly explained her ability to diagnose a follower type for a camper and alter her leadership style to adhere to the camper’s needs. We discussed what competence and commitment looked like for CG campers. Kelly mentioned her awareness of different D-levels in the other camps she was teaching. She mentioned her ability to diagnose campers based on their fitness and form skill level (competence), and their motivation to attend camp (commitment). Kelly considered D1 campers as campers who did not need texts or calls to remind and encourage them to come to camp (high commitment), but when they did come to camp, they needed a lot of help as far as form and safety goes (low competence). Kelly described D2 campers as campers that would not respond to texts (low commitment), nor come to camp to work on their form to improve (low
competence). Therefore, the development remains stagnant. D3’s are considered inconsistent; they need Kelly to text them, and when they come to camp they need motivation. However, their form is usually very good. The D4 campers do not need Kelly to text them (high commitment). Kelly gives them the workouts and the D4 campers perform the correct exercises with little to no corrections of their form (high competence).

Following the discussion, Kelly was asked to fill out the SLT visual. Kelly was able to refer back to her textbook, if needed. She was not able to label each quadrant without referring to the model in the textbook. Kelly continuously mentioned colors as a means of correlating follower versus leadership types. Consequently, I provided Kelly with pink and green highlighters to correlate which verbiage represented followers and which represented the leadership style. Once the colors were involved, Kelly was able to connect and apply the material to the visual. Following the visual review, Kelly began to make connections with specific campers, diagnosing them at her current perceived levels. She started to talk through each level, describing why a camper had high or low competence and commitment. Kelly mentioned her frustration with a D2 camper and stated, “At what point do you stop giving direction.” She went on to described how ineffective the D2 camper’s form was, which correlated to low competence, and the camper’s sporadic attendance at Camp Gladiator, which represents low commitment. Kelly had been correcting the camper’s form over a period of time and the camper did not catch on.
Kelly continued to diagnose campers and explain the current diagnosis. Later in the week following the second training, I received a text from Kelly stating the following, “It’s so funny how many people fit into the categories and how I’m able to notice and change the way I react based on their area of the graph.” Kelly was able to connect and identify components of SLT to her campers and training experience after only two rounds of training.

At the third training, I asked Kelly to try to fill out the SLT visual once more, but without referring back to the textbook. She was competent in S (leader) and D (follower) levels, as well as the ‘competence’ and ‘commitment’ verbiage. However, Kelly was having difficulty assigning high and low levels to each quadrant. I compared each quadrant and follower level to different stages of high school. I stated the following:

For example, a freshman would be considered a D1 follower because he or she is excited to be there but does not know anything about high school. A sophomore would be considered a D2 follower because of their lack of knowledge and lack of commitment to being there. Juniors in high school are considered fairly knowledgeable, but lack commitment to being there, such as a D3 follower would possess high competence and low commitment. A senior in high school is highly knowledgeable and excited to be there, consequently correlating to D4 followership.
After this explanation, Kelly was able to correlate the meaning behind each D-level and the S-level, accordingly. She had suggested, “There needs to be an in-between.” Reason being, that some campers come to camp and know some exercises but are D1 in other exercises. Kelly’s improving coherence of SLT can be seen in Appendix C. Following the training, I received a text from Kelly,

I did notice it with one camper at my mid-morning who I have to spend much more time with. She’s kind of a D1 committed but not competent but she requires a little more sweetness than directness if that makes sense.

Kelly was able to connect and use SLT communicatively. Her thought process included SLT terminology and processes to implement to her training strategy. A couple days later, Kelly sent me the following text:

Also have lots of D4 campers in my early crew that just need me to be energetic and bubbly. It’s so funny how many people fit into the categories and how I’m able to notice and change the way I react based on their area of the graph. But I don’t have to think super hard about it is that bad?

Kelly was learning and implementing SLT rather quickly and implement it to her practice.

The final training was dedicated to diagnosing campers in each corresponding D level. Kelly used the SLT visual to label each camper as D1, D2, D3, or D4, based on
their current competence and commitment levels to Camp Gladiator. She went through an in-depth description and reasoning behind her diagnosis of each camper. After diagnosing the campers at their current level, Kelly diagnosed each camper’s D-level based on her best knowledge of the campers from the beginning of their first camps. Lastly, I diagnosed each camper at the D-level I deemed most appropriate.

In between trainings, I continued to observe Kelly’s mannerisms and behaviors with her campers to spot any changes or alterations. I noticed her awareness and attention to D1 and D2 campers’ form corrections. Kelly addressed camper Camper S in regard to her form doing a push-up. Kelly not only verbalized the correct form but went down to her hands and knees to show Camper S how to implement the correct form. Kelly is a visual learner herself, so she understands how to connect different teaching strategies to the learners’ needs.

**Instrumentation**

Action Research data collection requires a source of instrumentation. Due to this study having a basis in action research, I am a dynamic component to the study. I also serve as the instrumentation. Due to this explanation, I will provide pertinent information about myself:

I am a white, 25-year-old, Caucasian woman. I was born in Carrollton, Texas, and have lived in Texas my whole life. From the young age of five years old, I was involved in dance, soccer, basketball, gymnastics, and track. I grew up with sports being a part of my daily life, not thinking twice about it. Beginning at age 17, I acquired a fascination for physical fitness; posing as the drill team colonel, participating in
INSANITY workouts by Shaun-T with BeachBody, running multiple half marathons, completing my first full marathon with my mom in 2013, competing in ToughMudder, and many other physical activities. I maintained my physical fitness and improved my muscle mass throughout my college experience, primarily working out at the gym, while competing in intramurals.

When Camp Gladiator landed in College Station, Texas, in 2018, I decided to try it out. I fell in love with the boot camp and the trainer. Accountability was the main aspect of Camp Gladiator that kept me coming back. Through this process, I invited many colleagues to join me, and it has been successful thus far. The camp being studied is the camp I most attend due to the encouraging trainer and campers. Each camper at this workout keeps me motivated and makes me want to attend every camp possible. I have a personal connection to the trainer and campers being studied.

The trainer kept me accountable and eventually prompted me to become a Camp Gladiator Trainer. I went through all of the proper steps and applied to be an affiliate to work alongside the trainers and aid, when needed. I have filled in for trainers over the past year due to illness, as well as maternity leave. I have formed my own workouts and trained up to sixty campers at one community workout. The average number of campers I would teach was about twelve campers, four times per week.

When it came time to figure out my thesis topic, I merged my two passions; leadership and fitness. I knew it was something that had not been done before in our department, and I believed many may have an interest in it due to my seemingly
obsession with Camp Gladiator. I essentially want to merge leadership theory into organizations, and this seemed like the perfect place to start.

_Data Analysis and Coding Procedure_

Data analysis was coded and transcribed in a vignette format. A vignette works to tell each participants’ story, gather collective findings based on observation and interviews, and conclude the analysis (Finch, 1987). Deductive, open coding was used to analyze the given data. Deductive analysis is structured by applying a theory to a given study “with reference to hypotheses and ideas inferred” (Bryman, 2016, p. 690).

Moreover, SLT was the theory I chose to apply to the organization. Open coding can be described as linking certain words or phrases together in thematic relation to general meaning (Klenke, 2008). Specific terminology was understood as congruent to decipher the results of each participant. Thematic analysis is considered a way in which a researcher can identify commonalities throughout the coding processes (Bryman, 2016). Therefore, the deductive, open coding worked to provide thematic analysis to complete this study.

_Issues of Rigor and Trustworthiness_

Trustworthiness is analyzing the findings to ensure the participants’ voices are being heard (Dooley, 2007). This study achieved trustworthiness via triangulation, which consisted of interviews, reflective field notes, and SLT. Triangulation is the use of several methods or data references in qualitative research to advance to an overall understanding of a research topic (Patton, 1999). Through the listed methods, I was able to keep a detailed history of all the occurrences.
Interviews are a source of triangulation which captures the participants’ perceptions verbatim. This method brings about confirmation of stated findings, as well as different perspectives from the participants to extend the credibility of the research findings (Denzin, 1978). Interviews provide diverse personal experiences and perceived outcomes from participants. Therefore, I have multiple interviews to support the concluding findings in this study.

Reflective field notes serve as a reference to which I observed and reflected upon my experiences with Kelly at CG. Field notes are crucial to AR. “Predominantly, they aid in constructing thick, rich descriptions of the study context, encounter, interview, focus group, and document’s valuable contextual data” (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018, p. 381). Within my field notes, I noted Kelly’s specific interactions with each camper. When Kelly would approach a camper and alter their form to fit their needs, I would take note of the interactions and the outcomes. As an action researcher, it is my duty to interact with and understand the campers’ perspectives. It is also my responsibility, as an action researcher, to reflect on my thinking (McNiff, 2013). Therefore, the observatory field notes are reflected upon to note my, as a camper and researcher, experience and perceptions of Kelly’s leadership style.

SLT contributes to the final component of this study’s triangulation. Theory triangulation utilizes theory to analyze and interpret data (Carter et al., 2014). Carter et al. (2014) mentioned in some instances, the theory applied may refute or support the findings of the research. For this study, SLT served as the theory which supported my findings.
The following findings are discussed in a vignette format. This study’s purpose was to find what impact Situational Leadership Theory treatment has on followers’ D-levels and the impact learning and applying Situational Leadership Theory has on the trainer’s ability to lead. The campers’ development was a vital component to this study. Each camper’s demographics, observation results, and D-levels are discussed. The campers were asked to participate in a five-question interview to retrieve their demographics, as well as express their perceptions of Kelly and their experience at her camp. The participants were told they could answer or skip any of the five questions. The camper interview questions can be found in Appendix D.

**Situational Leadership Theory in CG Terms**

Each organization is composed of different levels of competency and commitment. In Camp Gladiator terms, Kelly composed her own D-level descriptions, intertwining Situational Leadership Theory and Camp Gladiator components. D1 campers are high in commitment, but low in competence, meaning they do not need to be texted to come to camp because they are excited to be there. However, they need help with form and safety throughout the workout. D2 campers are low in commitment and competence, making them unmotivated to be at camp. They are not showing up even though Kelly texts them. Kelly explained that D2 campers will not come to camp to “work on their competence at all if the commitment just is not there.” D3 campers are low in commitment, but high in competence. Kelly stated, “They need me to text them to
get to camp and then once they’re there, they need some support and form correction...but their form is better than others.” D4 campers are high in commitment and high in competence. “I don’t need to text them. They are going to be there for sure. Then, when they get to camp, I just basically tell them what to do and they do it,” Kelly explained. See Table 3 to visualize Kelly and my interpretation of what each D-level is composed of.

Table 3

*D-Level Descriptions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>D-Level</th>
<th>Competence</th>
<th>Commitment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>D1</strong></td>
<td>Need help with form</td>
<td>Come to every camp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Little to no fitness experience</td>
<td>Excited to be at camp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Responsive to Kelly’s texts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>D2</strong></td>
<td>Need help with form</td>
<td>Barely come to camp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Little to no fitness experience</td>
<td>Nonresponsive to Kelly’s texts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No interest in pushing themselves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>D3</strong></td>
<td>Little form corrections</td>
<td>Barely come to camp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Barely modify</td>
<td>Nonresponsive to Kelly’s texts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Executing all exercises correctly</td>
<td>No interest in pushing themselves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>D4</strong></td>
<td>Little form corrections</td>
<td>Come to every camp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Barely modify</td>
<td>Excited to be at camp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Executing all exercises correctly</td>
<td>Responsive to Kelly’s texts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Pushing their limits</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Camper Demographics and Findings

RQ1: What impact does Situational Leadership Theory treatment have on followers’ D-level?

The camper demographics were accumulated via the CG Camper Survey and optional question and answer via phone call or text message. The CG Camper Survey, as seen in Appendix F, questions and answer options give information on the camper’s current fitness goals and challenges. The survey was automatically sent to each camper after he or she went BOLD. Therefore, the surveys were completed at the beginning of each campers’ CG fitness journey.

Each CG BOLD camper’s survey was completed and sent back to Kelly so she could get some insight on the people she had in her camp. The questions were a mixture of multiple choice and short answer. I retrieved the campers’ self-diagnosis based on their survey responses and my prior knowledge of each camper. Kelly diagnosed the campers from her previous knowledge of when they began camp to the most recent diagnosis. I diagnosed the campers at their current level as well.

Camper A is a married Caucasian 38-year-old female, and mother of two children. She has been a BOLD CG camper for about one year. From her CG BOLD Camper Survey, I concluded she believed she started out as a D1, with high commitment, low competence. Kelly diagnosed Camper A’s beginning D-level as a D2, due to her lack of knowledge and lack of commitment to come to camp. As Camper A progressed through camp, Kelly was very attentive to Camper A’s needs. She corrected her form and provided modifications when needed. In Camper A’s post treatment
interview, she noted that Kelly had sent her videos of different exercises when she first started camp to practice at home. Kelly adhered to SLT’s D2 needs by supporting Camper A’s competence level and directing her with the correct form and workouts. Throughout the process, Kelly diagnosed Camper A’s current D-level as a D4, due to her growth in commitment and competence of form at camp. I diagnosed Camper A as a D3, due to her competency in the workouts, but lack of enthusiasm at camp.

Camper C is a married Hispanic 47-year-old female, and mother of two children. She has been a BOLD CG camper for 7 months. Based on her CG BOLD Camper Survey, it seems she had more confidence in her fitness ability that Kelly and I did. Her survey made it seem as if she believed she was D3, when Kelly and I both diagnosed her as a D1. Camper C remained fairly stagnant at D1 throughout the treatment. She mentioned in her post treatment interview that she did not gain any new fitness knowledge from Kelly, but Kelly “reinforced what I knew” from her other trainer. However, observing Kelly’s interactions with Camper C, I noticed Kelly’s attentiveness to Camper C’s form, correcting when needed, and adding modifications if the workout was too difficult. She is very committed to coming to camp, but her form and effort were lacking. Therefore, at the end of the treatment, Kelly and I believed she was still a D1.

Camper D is a single Caucasian 22-year-old female with no children. She has been a BOLD CG camper for one year. She rated her current fitness level as returner, but she was looking for more consistency. Therefore, her own perception of her diagnosis was a D2. Kelly and I both diagnosed Camper D’s beginning D-level at a D2 as well, because she was not very confident at camp, so she did not show up continuously. Over
time, Kelly encouraged all of her campers to meet new people and work out with a
different group each time. Therefore, Camper D began to meet new people and have
some accountability. Camper D said Kelly would text her, “hey girl! I miss you!” Kelly
was providing Camper D with the support she needed to develop further according to
SLT. In her post treatment interview, Camper D mentioned she was “excited to be back
at camp”. Camper D mentioned her appreciation for accountability from Kelly and other
campers, which made her commitment level increase. Due to her continuous attendance
at camp and Kelly’s direction on improving form, Camper D developed into a D4
follower, according to Kelly and myself.

Camper F is a married Hispanic 36-year-old female with one child. She has been
a BOLD CG camper for seven months. From her CG BOLD Survey, it seemed as though
she thought she would be a D4 follower. However, based on Kelly and my knowledge of
SLT, her starting diagnosis was D2 followership based on her inconsistent attendance to
camp gladiator and lack of form knowledge. However, Camper F mentioned Kelly’s
positive and energizing attitude every camp helped her to be more positive and
motivated. Camper F explained

She’s actually taught me how strong I am or how much I
can actually push myself. For example, I always said I could
only lift like five-pound weights like forever, and I’ve
learned that actually, I can actually do more. Like even now,
ten pounds is a bit too light.
Kelly provided the high support and direction Camper F needed to help her develop her competence and commitment. Post treatment, Camper D was diagnosed a D3 by Kelly and me. She is more competent on the form, but has a hard time waking up for camp sometimes.

Camper G is a married Korean/Caucasian 41-year-old female with three children. She has been a BOLD CG camper for seven months. Her CG BOLD Camper Survey seemed to diagnose her as a D3 at the beginning of her journey. Kelly diagnosed Camper G as a D2 in the beginning of her Camp Gladiator journey. Camper G was fully aware of her low commitment at the beginning. She noted her only reasoning for attending camp was because her coworkers were there. Throughout the treatment, I observed Kelly encouraging and correcting Camper G’s form. She rated her current fitness level as a returner. Her goal was to improve her overall health to feel fantastic and energized. Camper G explained her mother's history of diabetes and how she wanted to “stave off the odds” of getting diabetes as well by “establishing healthy habits and taking care” of herself. Her biggest obstacle was beginning a consistent workout routine, and she hated working out by herself. She was looking for accountability from her trainer. Her goal was to attend camp at least three to four times a week. She rated it herself a four out of five for commitment level. Kelly diagnosed Camper G as a D2 at the beginning of camp, but she progressed to a D3. Her CG Camper Survey was also diagnosed as a D3. I diagnosed Camper G as a D2, because she is not very committed to camp, and not as competent as some D3s in the study. However, I can identify major stages of growth between Camper G and Kelly. Camper G started camp only attending because her work
friends were there. Once she became more confident in her abilities, she mentioned her motivation to come to camp altered from impressing others, to improving herself.

Camper G completed her survey and sent the following text to add to her experience:

One more thing I thought about [Kelly’s] leadership style is how much I appreciate that she’s engaged as she’s training. She not only gets on the ground and demonstrates form and the exercises, but she is constantly walking around to push/encourage us by name. I have been around some trainers who maintain more of a distance from the trainees. [Kelly] is right in the mix with us, walking around to correct form. I’ve also been with trainers who rely heavily on verbal explanations of exercises. Having a combo of both verbal explanations and visual demonstrations is more helpful. Just another quick thought about her leadership style. I feel like she’s IN it WITH us. It’s what keeps me going back to her workouts over other options where the time or location might be more convenient.

Kelly provides each camper with their specific D-level needs based on the respondents’ answers. Camper G improved in D-levels from a D2 to D3, according to Kelly.

Therefore, Kelly provided high support throughout this camper’s experience, which improved Camper G’s D-level.
Camper H is a married Caucasian 41-year-old male, with three children. Has been a BOLD CG camper for one year. From his BOLD CG Camper Survey, Camper H was considered a D3, which was fairly accurate according to Kelly and I. Kelly’s beginning diagnosis of Camper H was D2, because he was barely committed to being there and did not have proper form on majority of movements. Over the course of the treatment, Camper H’s form improved tremendously, but is commitment was still lacking. He came to camp but was not thrilled to be there. In fact, he was hard to get ahold of to interview, and was not very explanatory regarding his experience. He mentioned how his motivation for camp was that it was good for him and it was convenient. He did say camp with Kelly is always fun and he “enjoys it.” Kelly has been attentive to Camper H since the beginning of his camper experience, encouraging him and helping him advance in his form. I believe he is still developing into a D4, because in his interview he stated,

    Accountability allows me to be consistent… I guess because she is my trainer, I look at her as that peer that I don’t want to disappoint her by not going… she’ll text me if I haven’t shown for a couple of times… she is very good with communication.

Kelly was being a highly supportive leader by checking in with Camper H, making sure to try to improve his commitment level. He is not quite at the D4 level but improving over time.
I am a single Caucasian 25-year-old with no children. I have been a BOLD CG camper for one year and three months. I was diagnosed as a D4 by Kelly and myself from the beginning of camp and developed into a leadership role. Kelly noticed my experience in and passion for fitness, so she approached me about becoming a trainer a month into my experience at camp. I went through all of the training necessary to become a trainer but became stuck in a D3 follower level as a trainer. This was because of all of my other commitments, and lack of time. However, I am able to sub for other trainers when needed. I coached one of the trainer’s camps while she was on maternity leave for seven weeks. When asking myself the interview questions, I believe Kelly was always pushing me to do more reps, lift heavier, and run faster. However, she knows that I am always working hard. She has the ability to motivate and inspire people of all different fitness levels. Although she was taught SLT recently, I believe she has implemented the idea all along. Her passion for people and love for helping others achieve their goals enables her to implement SLT naturally. However, since she was aware of the theory, she was able to connect and be more aware of her campers’ needs. I absolutely love Kelly’s accountability and commitment to her campers. She is a great trainer and provides the support and direction to her campers as needed.

Camper Q is a married Caucasian 33-year-old male, with no children. He has been a CG BOLD member for six months. His BOLD CG Camper Survey seemed to reveal his idea that he is a D4 follower. However, Kelly diagnosed him as a D2 in the beginning of camp. He had low competence of the different workouts, and only came to camp because his wife did. Over the treatment period, Camper Q began improving his
form and knowledge of different exercises due to Kelly’s constant corrections and support. Kelly would help him, personally, during the workouts, showing him the correct form, and helping him implement it as he continued. Camper Q mentioned that Kelly had helped him a lot with form, and he was more confident because of this. He mentioned her positive energy and motivational personality; “It keeps everyone engaged, having fun, and working hard.” Camper Q’s diagnosis following the treatment was a D4.

Kelly and I could see that Camper Q is more confident and committed to coming to camp. He has minor, if any form implications, and stated, “I really enjoy it... I like that I’m not on my own… it’s motivating. It’s good to be able to motivate other people. It’s not real hard accountability, but you know still some level of accountability.”

Camper R is a single Caucasian 30-year-old female with no children. She has been a BOLD CG camper for one year. From her BOLD CG Camper Survey, she seemed to believe she was a D3, and Kelly agreed. Camper R was in shape and used to working out, so she had minimal issues with form. Her main improvements were needed as far as commitment goes. Her attendance was very sporadic, and motivation was lacking. However, Kelly’s texts and constant support and motivation towards Camper H helped increase her morale over the treatment period. Camper R’s note about Kelly’s leadership style was explained,

Her teaching style not only like encourages me to do better, but it’s like she’s like taught me a lot… Like she’s literally, I feel like been a personal trainer because I’ve learned so much from her that did not know like elsewhere in life. I
could go to the gym now and like be able to know what to
do with the weights because I didn’t know how to like
properly lift them, or like form and what-not.

Following the treatment, Kelly and I diagnosed Camper R as a D4. Her commitment and
motivation to attend camp increased tremendously, and her form continues to improve.

Camper S is a married Caucasian 27-year-old female with no children. She has
been a BOLD CG camper for nine months. She believed she started out as a D3 camper
according to her BOLD CG Camper Survey. She compared to her previous boot camp
experiences as being negative and not as upbeat, so that interfered with her perception of
Camp Gladiator. Camper S supported her low commitment by stating, “Throughout the
Fall I went through kind of a lull just from my personal things that were going on in my
life.” She explained that when the New Year started, “I did the CG Fit that first month to
make sure I was going to stay motivated.” Therefore, her commitment increased because
she was taking steps to ensure she would reach her goals. Kelly also noticed Camper S’s
commitment increase and had made a comment to me about how proud she was of her
increased performance and attendance. From her continued attendance, Kelly was able to
direct Camper S on her from improvements, which developed her to a D4 throughout the
treatment.

Overall, there was noted growth throughout the majority of participants. What I
found was that SLT enabled Kelly to better comprehend her campers’ needs. Moreover,
the campers were able to commit to coming to camp, and, therefore, grew in competence
from their interactions with Kelly. After the treatment, it was apparent that Kelly’s
campers noted her leadership improvements as well. Accountability and encouragement was noted by several campers in their explanation of what commitment entailed.

**Trainer Findings**

*RQ2: What impact does learning and applying Situational Leadership Theory have on the trainer’s ability to lead?*

As McNiff (2013) suggested, Kelly and I reflected on the actions that took place during camp through “a process of dialogue and encounter” (p. 30). Throughout her trainings, she had many quick learning experiences. As mentioned in the methods section, Kelly was already comprehending and utilizing SLT after the first training. Her awareness of SLT increased throughout the process. I had five interview questions following the treatment for Kelly that we discussed via recorded phone call. These interview questions can be seen in Appendix E. I wanted to make sure her answers were as authentic as possible; therefore, I did not conduct a face to face interview to ensure my body language or presence did not sway her answers.

**Tacit Knowledge**

We found Kelly had been practicing SLT concepts subconsciously based on her training experience. She had been recognizing campers who were new to fitness and providing them with the proper individualized modifications based on their needs. When campers had not come to camp in a couple of days, Kelly reached out to them via text to check on them. Kelly was able to capture a couple moments where she noticed change in interaction due to SLT where she altered her S-level to meet the needs of a camper.
I had a camper who literally has not been out to camp in 90 days and she came back this camp because of persistence… on my part… I just was more persistent with her and she came out to camp, and it happened a couple more times.

Kelly would often tell me about her thought process when she was training at camp, which would advance each time we met. McNiff (2013) explained Kelly’s experience perfectly when he stated, “…knowledge can be understood as emerging from the deep levels of tacit knowing to explicit consciousness” (p. 29-30). She had been perceptive to her campers before the treatment, but more aware of her interactions once she intentionally understood SLT, implementing the corresponding S-level treatment to the D-level diagnosis. Kelly thought SLT was not as beneficial to her as it could be to some based on her training background. However, based on the multiple texts and conversations we had, SLT kept her accountable to her campers and gave her a better understanding of their needs from a follower perspective. SLT enhanced Kelly’s awareness of S-level skills, even though the basics were already in place.

*Benefits to Other CG Trainers*

Kelly made it clear that not all trainers have her same mindset. She is very positive and eager to learn. It is apparent she is passionate about helping other people reach their goals. Other trainers may not come in with this same mentality. Therefore, SLT could have a big impact on the other trainers within CG.

I think that it [SLT] would be advantageous, for sure, for someone who is… maybe a new trainer, or maybe someone
who doesn't know how to do those connections. I have been doing this for a year… I had a lot of experiences in this kind of thing. People tell me relatively frequently that I’m kind of a motivational person, in general. So, I think that may have played a factor too. I think that someone who doesn’t have that natural ability... or someone who has had smaller camps and is looking to grow… I feel like those people would have a little bit more of a need for it.

Kelly further explained her experience in coaching, and you can see from her background in fitness, that her statements are valid. However, my observation led to a different conclusion; Kelly had advanced and changed her perspective on the campers’ D-levels and physical needs. After learning and regurgitating SLT, Kelly’s competence and commitment to her campers was escalated. Moreover, Kelly benefited from the SLT trainings and application more than she believed she did.

Transferability

As far as difficulty, Kelly did not think SLT was hard to learn. For this reason, SLT was easily transferable. The concept itself is fairly straightforward, but the implementation to action is the difficult part. Kelly believed she already had the skill set SLT implied, she simply did not know the theory.

I don’t think it was difficult at all. I think having been doing what I’ve been doing for so long… I think I have a little bit
of, almost, not braggadocios at all, but almost a natural ability to do that.

Transferability is vital when conducting a study to potentially improve an organization. The theory implemented must be somewhat easy to communicate to other leaders within the organization. Kelly also mentioned, “We actually are in the process of onboarding a couple of new trainers and I will definitely be going over this…” explaining the need for SLT training in CG. Moreover, if new approaches are difficult to comprehend, organizations are less likely to carry on the development tool.

In conclusion, you can recognize each camper’s appreciation for Kelly’s leadership style. Some campers mentioned her positivity and motivation that keeps them committed to attending camp. Multiple campers mentioned their improvements in different exercise form due to Kelly’s attention to their competence. SLT not only benefited Kelly, but the campers as well. Although many supportive factors arose through my findings, there are many recommendations that came about as well. The following chapter discusses the conclusions and recommendations for future educators and researchers.
CHAPTER V
CONCLUSIONS

Leadership in fitness is a key component to Camp Gladiator’s organizational growth. Fitness instructors must be able to lead with a purpose to better their followers. Follower development is dependent on leader support and direction. In order to implement this concept, I chose a local fitness boot camp, Camp Gladiator (CG), and a leadership theory, Situational Leadership Theory (SLT), to intertwine. SLT outlines follower diagnosis and needs based on their competence and commitment levels, which can be high or low. Depending on the follower level, or D-level, the leader alters their support and direction, or S-level, to match the followers’ D-levels.

Leadership definitions change based on organizational goals (Eddy and VanDerLinden, 2006). It is up to future researchers to address said goals and determine what the best leadership style or treatment is to apply. However, it is important to look at leadership as a relationship, not a simple task (Rost, 1991). From Trait theory to SLT, leadership research is an ongoing commodity that researchers cannot pin down. However, Hersey and Blanchard’s (1988) SLT introduces simple concepts that make a world of difference; get to know your followers. In physical fitness, it is imperative, especially in group settings, to know your followers’ experience and fitness motives. Moreover, leaders must define the competence and commitment of their followers individually to help them reach their goals (Hersey and Blanchard, 1988).
As the action researcher, I observed, interviewed, and applied theory to come to my conclusions. This was based on Kelly, the CG trainer, and her impact on her followers via SLT treatment. This chapter supports and concludes the impact of an SLT treatment to Camp Gladiator. This study sought to answer the following research questions:

**RQ1:** What impact does a Situational Leadership Theory treatment have on the followers’ D-level?

**RQ2:** What impact does learning and applying Situational Leadership Theory have on the trainer’s ability to lead?

**Conclusions**

Situational Leadership Theory as an applied learning mechanism can be advantageous to any organization with a leader trying to fulfill to the followers’ needs. Through this study, I demonstrated this concept via Action Research. I was embedded in the study as a follower, who taught the leader, Kelly, SLT. Over the course of the treatment, Kelly became aware of SLT concepts throughout her camps. As a crucial component to the study, my findings drew two conclusions which answer the given research questions.

SLT treatment impacts followers’ D-levels by helping them be more competent and committed to Camp Gladiator. While she was learning the theory, Kelly implemented SLT to her camps over the treatment period. There was a positive correlation of the theory and its impact on Kelly’s teaching style. The campers emphasized Kelly’s ability to coach and mentor them throughout each workout. Between
her constant communication and individualized training mechanisms, Kelly identified each campers’ strengths and weaknesses, and applied the SLT concepts to her campers. Reza et al. (2018) emphasized the impact of relationships with followers. My findings resulted in the same conclusion; the more the leader knows about their followers, the higher success rate.

Learning and applying SLT to Kelly’s training positively impacted her leadership style. As Kelly participated in the different stages of trainings, she became competent in SLT components and verbiage. She would communicate with me throughout the treatment period, reiterating SLT concepts and applying them to her coaching experiences. Although Kelly felt she had not benefited as much as other trainers might, I believe SLT made a lasting impact on Kelly’s training mechanisms due to her continuous references to the theory and its applications. I find Thompson and Vecchio’s (2009) concept true when they mentioned the simplicity of teaching and applying SLT. However, true outcomes depend on the leader’s true motivation to implement the theory as it recommends.

Kelly’s campers, as well as herself, view her as a motivational person. The findings of Estabrooks et al. (2004) prove to be true in this study as well; leaders must be motivators for their followers. The concept of practice what you preach is imperative for fitness instructors. People will not follow you if you are not passionate about whatever it is you are leading. Moreover, Kelly’s motivation and passion for her camps is very evident through her own lens, as well as her campers. Chelladurai (1990) stated that follower and leader relationships are the component that drives the success of the
follower. Kelly’s relationships with her campers help both parties advance and reach goals. This is a result of Kelly’s relationship-oriented nature and interest in each individual campers’ lives and goals. Campers appreciate Kelly’s personality and awareness of individual characteristics.

**Recommendations**

*Leadership Educators*

**Self-Awareness**

Watson (2016) stresses the importance of being self-aware, active listening, and body language. By being self-aware, one must choose to accept diverse perspectives of others while understanding the reasoning behind his or her perspective (Watson, 2016). One must have awareness of self and the followers in order to successfully implement situational leadership. “Through facilitated self-reflection the situational leader helps the follower to deepen their understanding and self-awareness through reflexivity” (Lynch, 2015, p.8). Situational Leadership is assessing the follower type present and adjusting the leadership style to adhere to the followers. Once the follower type is diagnosed, the trainer should use self-awareness in order to implement the best fit leadership type. In order to be most effective, the leader must be willing to learn about all followers and diagnose them accordingly. “If you want to be the best you can be, you have to become a great learner” (Kouzes & Posner, 2003, p.1). The followers will develop most effectively if led by a leader willing to learn the followers’ individual strengths and weaknesses. Self-awareness can encompass making changes to self to identify with the follower. SLT focuses on the leader altering his or her style to compromise to the follower’s needs.
Bass (2008) bases the diagnosis of follower level on task-relevant job maturity and psychological maturity. “The maturity manifests itself in the subordinates’ performance of their jobs” (Bass, 2008, p. 517). The subordinates’ development enhances as their time and experience within the organization increases. Therefore, the followers go through all four of the D-levels based on their competence and commitment to the tasks and hand. This is based off of the idea that SLT will work in any situation. Moreover, it is important for leadership educators to emphasize the importance of self-awareness as leaders. One must be self-aware to alter his or her leadership style to support the follower’s needs.

The Importance of Relationships

Trainers and campers have a unique relationship. The trainer provides structure and accountability, while the camper provides reassurance to other campers and purpose of self.

The overlapping concerns of service work, emotional labor, and flexibility frame the structure and organization of personal training, shaping and varying degrees of autonomy and constraint, modes of establishing authority, and broader implications of the one-on-one service interaction in the fitness club and larger fitness industry. (Maguire, 2001, p. 380-381)

Many people do not view physical activity as a primary source of enjoyment, much less know where to start. Fitness trainers must be aware of their campers’ needs and
experience level to help them engage in physical activity. Moreover, trainers must be self-aware. Self-awareness is being aware of oneself and having the willingness to reflect on one’s beliefs (Stanley, Watson & Watson, 2016).

**Self-Managed Teams (SMT)**

Graham and Trendafilova (2016) used Situational Leadership Theory to support their case study regarding self-managed teams (SMTs). The researchers were aiming to challenge future sport managers to understand the significance of organizational structure and the influence structure has on work effectiveness and motivation (Graham & Trendafilova, 2016).

Situational Leadership Theory was chosen “as a training framework for leadership because of its flexible nature and because of the way scholars in the management literature discussed it in connection with SMTs” (Graham & Trendafilova, 2016, p. 69). SLT is a popular training mechanism amongst managerial business coaching. However, as previously discussed, SLT should be further studied to identify specific measures to which the followers are measured on competence and commitment, as well as what makes a leader ‘flexible’.

There is minimal research regarding Situational Leadership in fitness. Franke, Felfe, & Pundt (2014) mentioned that transformational leadership was a vague description of what health-oriented leadership entails. “At its best, leadership is a partnership that involves mutual trust between two people who work together to achieve common goals” (Blanchard, 2007, p. 117). Therefore, specific leadership skills and
styles should be examined and noted to purposefully assign effective leadership skills to the leaders in the fitness industry.

**Behavioral Flexibility**

The term ‘flexible’ or ‘flexibility’ is used multiple times throughout the researchers’ findings and recommendations. Some say it is essential to be an effective situational leader, while others question what flexibility is and looks like. Yukl and Mahsud (2010) stress the importance of behavioral flexibility through different leadership concepts. As previously discussed, Lynch (2015) suggested to incorporate means of what ‘flexibility’ is and the terms involved to be a flexible leader. In contrast, Yukl and Mahsud (2010) suggested certain guidelines to be an effective leader, and leadership flexibility was described: “Increase flexibility by learning how to use a wide range of relevant behaviors; methods found to be useful for improving behavior include multisource feedback, behavioral modeling, role playing, and executive coaching” (p.83). Situational leadership requires leaders to be self-aware to adhere to the followers’ needs, which also requires personal flexibility.

Blanchard’s (2007) term ‘flexibility’ is a core competency of situational leaders. However, Blanchard (2007) fails to describe the methods in which a leader develops flexibility, making it seem as though the skill is learned over time and experience (Lynch, 2015).

Behavioral flexibility and adaptability can be defined and measured in a variety of ways, and the indicators reflect the context in which it is studied. One indicator is the extent to which a leader uses a
variety of different behaviors. However, to be adaptive, the selected behaviors must be relevant for the situations in which they are used. Thus, a better indicator of flexibility is the extent to which a leader’s behavior varies in ways appropriate for different tasks and subordinates. (Yukl & Mahsud, 2010, p.82)

Leaders must be able to translate different follower levels via their leadership style to meet and support their competence and commitment in SLT. Yukl and Mahsud (2010) continue by explaining how followers differ based on their experience, skills, values, and needs” (Yukl & Mahsud, 2010, p.82). As previously discussed, SLT’s leadership style components have an underlying theme of behavioral flexibility. A common trend in research which aligns with SLT, is the idea that followers possess different competencies and motivation, or commitment, to the organization or task at hand. “Flexibility is also required when changes occur over time in a subordinate’s skills [competence] and motives [commitment]” (Yukl & Mahsud, 2010, p.82). As followers progress through the SLT phases, the leader’s flexibility is advantageous in transforming from directing to delegating. Yukl and Mahsud (2010) support SLT’s ideas when they explain, “as a subordinate gains more experience and confidence, more delegation will be appropriate” (p. 82). Moreover, SLT requires flexibility within the leadership styles.

Bass (2008) and Yukl (2010) describe most leadership contingency theories as follower driven, making the situation dependent on what the followers
are needing, and the leader’s reaction is what effects the organization or individual. Therefore, leaders are required to be flexible in their leadership styles. Inflexibility leads to complacency, which can inhibit organizational growth.

As previously noted, researchers agree that SLT is advantageous in managerial training settings. However, they seem to question the validity of how the followers are diagnosed and how the leader’s flexibility is determined within studies. It is recommended that the process in which follower diagnosis is determined be outlined and communicated. Each organization and need for SLT is different, so the process in which followers are diagnosed and assigned a D-level will be unique to the organizational norms and processes. Moreover, each organization will have different stipulations to which their followers are identified as ‘competent’ and/or ‘committed’. In order for SLT to be effective, leaders must be relational, have self-awareness, have the ability to comprehend follower behaviors, maintain flexibility, and know the organization’s goals. SLT has been proven beneficial in many organizational trainings. However, some researchers have suggestions on how to improve the theory to specifically define how to successfully apply it.

Researchers

This study was based off of Camp Gladiator in College Station, Texas. Researchers should take this study to other CG camps to see how other trainers react to it, as well as the difference in demographics. Kelly’s attitude was a major part of the success of the data collection and procedure completion. Other trainers may not perform the same exact way she did. I already had rapport with Kelly, therefore, the treatment
was more of a get together than a training. Although AR was the best method for my particular study, it may be beneficial to use a different method in another situation. Also, other fitness organizations should be compared in the same study to see if it differs by organization. SLT can be implemented in any team setting and should be when discussing mentorship and organizational growth.

**Follower Diagnosis**

Each person has different characteristics physically and mentally. It is up to the leader to decipher what type of follower each person is and utilize to corresponding leadership style to best cater to the followers’ needs. Blanchard (2007) describes follower diagnosis as a mutual progression between the leader and follower. Moreover, Lynch (2015) claims the studies neglect to associate a specific strategy for the leader to diagnose the follower at a specific level. Thompson and Vecchio (2009) support this idea by stating, “A major criticism lies in the ambiguity surrounding the conceptual definition of follower development level” (p. 838). The leader’s diagnosis of the follower is solely based off of experience with the follower and competence in Situational Leadership Theory, but researchers argue that there should be specific terms to describe what competence and commitment really look like. Therefore, future researchers should look at what components address what it means to be fully competent or not, and fully committed or not. These terms will look different in each organization, but there may be a universal approach to figuring out what these look like altogether.
**Action Research as a Common Method**

Researchers should implement AR to their profession. The perspective of the researcher in a sample for a given study is a unique and useful way to go about researching to attain a common goal. I benefited from this experience, because I saw through the eyes of the trainer, as well as the campers. By observing and experiencing both perspectives, I can bridge the gap when issues arise, or there is minimal growth between the two. “Often those who conduct AR investigations build on their professional expertise to provide a valuable service to a client organization while at the same time furthering knowledge in their academic fields” (Knock et al., 2017, p. 754). Not only does AR help an organization, but the researcher is learning how to function within that organization as well. Also, if you are embedded within an organization, you most likely have the passion to put forth true effort toward the study. AR provides a way to study the depth of organizations from an insider’s point of view.

**Kelly’s Recommendations**

To compliment AR, it is most appropriate to add Kelly’s recommendations for SLT as well. As the trainer of her CG camp, she is the leader implementing and benefiting from SLT and the process in which it takes place. She had recommendations for the theory itself, as well as future trainers.

Kelly believed SLT was a great theory she was subconsciously already practicing throughout her camps. She had a difficult time diagnosing some campers due to their ability to execute some exercises, but inability to execute others. The campers were committed to being at camp but fluctuate in competence. Kelly said to “have a D-level
for grey area”. She believed that there should be another aspect to the campers’ diagnoses. Therefore, the question is, do we diagnose each camper based on each exercise to truly find their overall D-level? For the purposes and time constraints on this specific research agenda, the campers were only diagnosed by their overall performance and commitment to attending CG.

Another question Kelly brought up was do D-levels depend on what is going on outside of camp, such as personal responsibilities? As found in the demographics, some campers were married with kids, while others were not. Commitment and/or competence may depend on other individual life responsibilities. Future researchers can look into familial responsibilities and the impact it has on their commitment to personal fitness. As a fitness instructor, it is well understood you are a leader to your clients. However, some fitness leaders are not implementing the correct leadership styles to retain and improve their clients. Kelly gave the example of trainers who are in the green, yellow, or red. Green represents the trainer knows what they are doing and have great relationships with their campers. If a trainer is in the yellow, they are average and could use some improvement in their camper relationships and training abilities. Trainers in the red are not comfortable with camper relationships and have a hard time getting their camps started. Kelly mentioned teaching SLT to the yellow and red trainers for sure. This way, they could have something to refer to in helping them realize who their followers are and what their needs are.
Summary

This study has demonstrated many important points but poses many questions and recommendations for leadership educators and researchers. I have come to the conclusion that SLT is a great way to implement experiential learning and the importance of leader-follower relationships. As far as this study is concerned, Action Research also proved to be an experiential method that help me learn more about my trainer and fellow campers. Hopefully, after witnessing SLT applied to Camp Gladiator from my perspective via AR, leadership in fitness will have a positive connotation that will create a movement to better organizations in the future.
REFERENCES


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**APPENDIX A**

**IRB OUTCOME LETTER**

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**DIVISION OF RESEARCH**

**APPROVAL OF RESEARCH**

**Using Expedited Procedures**

(Common Rule – Effective January 2018)

February 05, 2019

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Type of Review:</th>
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<tr>
<td>Title:</td>
<td>The Impact of Situational Leadership on Follower Development in Fitness: An Action Research Study with Camp Gladiator</td>
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<tr>
<td>Investigator:</td>
<td>Jennifer Strong</td>
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<tr>
<td>IRB ID:</td>
<td>IRB2018-1645D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reference Number:</td>
<td>085650</td>
</tr>
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<td>Funding:</td>
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**Documents Approved:**
- IRB Application Version 1.2
- Social-Behavioral Consent Form Version 1.0
- Recruitment Script Version 1.0
- Survey Questions and Response Options Version 1.0
- Interview Questions Version 1.0

**Special Determinations:**
- Written consent in accordance with 45 CF 46.116/21 CFR 50.27

**Risk Level of Study:**
- Not Greater than Minimal Risk under 45 CFR 46 / 21 CFR 56

**Review Category:**
- Category 7: Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies

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Dear Jennifer Strong:

The IRB approved this research on 02/05/2019.

Before 01/04/2020, you are to submit an Administrative Check-In Form to the HRPP/IRB. If the HRPP/IRB does not receive the form, there will be no approval of new research after 02/04/2020.
## APPENDIX B

### SLT TRAINING 1: TRAINER’S RESPONSE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Directive Behavior</th>
<th>Supportive Behavior</th>
<th>Commitment</th>
<th>Competence</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SB</td>
<td>High support</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Coaches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directing</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delegating</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>High support</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Low direct</td>
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<td>Low support</td>
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<td>Low competence</td>
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### APPENDIX C

#### SLT TRAINING 1: TRAINER’S RESPONSE

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>Direct</th>
<th>Situational Leadership</th>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S3</td>
<td></td>
<td>High support, low comp.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D4</td>
<td></td>
<td>High commit, high comp.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S4</td>
<td></td>
<td>Low support, low direct.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D1</td>
<td></td>
<td>Low commit, low comp.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S1</td>
<td></td>
<td>Support, low direct.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:**
- D3 and D4 are Delegating leaders.
- D1 is Directive leader.
- S3 and S4 are Supportive leaders.

**Diagram:**
- A process diagram illustrating the leadership styles and their corresponding outcomes.

**Text:**
- Need text:
  - Work up
call
  - Great form
- Don’t need:
  - Text
  - Need lots of help,
camp
APPENDIX D

CAMPER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Q1. How do you feel the trainer’s teaching style helped or hindered your personal fitness goals?

Q2. What fitness knowledge do you feel you gained from your trainer, if any?

Q3. Did your Camp Gladiator attendance change or stay the same from the beginning of Camp to now? If so, why or why not?

Q4. What are your thoughts about going to Camp Gladiator?

Q5. What makes/made you want to go to Camp Gladiator?
APPENDIX E

TRAINER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Q1. How do you feel Situational Leadership affected your training ability, if at all?
Q2. How do you feel Situational Leadership affected your campers, if at all?
Q3. Were there any changes in interactions based on your knowledge of Situational Leadership? If so, explain.
Q4. Was it difficult to implement Situational Leadership? If so, elaborate how come?
Q5. Do you feel Situational Leadership was advantageous to your training ability? Why?
APPENDIX F

CG BOLD SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. What fitness goal would you like to achieve?
   a. Improve Fitness Level - train faster, longer and stronger
   b. Improve Athletic Level - train for a specific goal or event
   c. Improve Overall Health - feel fantastic and energized
   d. Lose Weight - sweat it out and lose a few
   e. Gain Strength - be stronger and leaner … hello, biceps
   f. Self Care/Self Esteem - be proud of the way I look

2. How would this goal impact your life?
   a. Type your answer here... (Short answer)

3. What are your biggest obstacles to achieving your goal?
   a. Type your answer here... (Short answer)

4. What are you looking for from your trainer?
   a. Motivation - give encouragement and pass out high fives
   b. Education - teach me correct form and best practices
   c. Accountability - be my second alarm clock and get me off the couch
   d. Other

5. How many times do you want to attend Camp each week?
   a. 1-2
   b. 3-4
   c. 5+

6. How would you rate your commitment to achieving your goal?
   a. 1
   b. 2
   c. 3
   d. 4
   e. 5
7. How would you rate your current fitness level?
   a. Beginner - fitness is foreign
   b. Returner - worked out before but looking for consistency
   c. Moderate - work out 2-3 times a week, but ready to turn it up
   d. Advanced - wake up to work out, fitness is life
8. What else should we know about you?
   a. Type your answer here... (Short answer)