



Situational Leadership as a Managerial Adaptation Strategy in Dealing with Organizational Crisis in the Education Office

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Abstract

This study examines the dynamics of situational leadership as an instrument of managerial adaptation in responding to various organizational crises at the South Sulawesi Provincial Education Office. Amidst an era of disruption characterized by digital system failures, budgetary regulatory complexities, and geographical hurdles in remote areas, a leader's ability to transition their leadership style emerges as a determinant factor for organizational resilience. Employing a qualitative approach with an intrinsic case study design, data were gathered through in-depth interviews with strategic leaders and operational staff directly involved in crisis management. The findings reveal that leaders elastically shift between a directing style (S1) at the peak of a crisis and a delegating style (S4) in remote operational regions, based on a meticulous diagnosis of staff's task and psychological maturity levels (M1-M4). A unique contribution of this research is the identification of the role of Bugis Makassar local wisdom values Sipakatau (humanizing one another), Sipakainge (reminding one another), and Sipakalebbi (mutual respect) as moderating variables that provide a humanistic dimension to bureaucratic management. These values serve as functional lubricants that mitigate resistance and strengthen team cohesion, ensuring that firm actions during crises remain grounded in human dignity. The study concludes that the effectiveness of crisis management in the public sector depends not only on the leader's technical proficiency but also on cultural intelligence capable of harmonizing managerial flexibility with the depth of local human values.

Introduction

In an era of globalization characterized by increasingly complex and uncertain business environments, organizations face various challenges that can threaten their operational continuity (Vrontis et al., 2024; Mishra et al., 2024; Butt et al., 2026). Organizational crises, whether caused by internal factors such as ineffective management, or external factors such as regulatory changes, intense competition, or even global pandemics, are difficult to avoid. An organization's ability to survive and adapt to crises depends heavily on effective and strategic leadership (Bangsa, 2024; Mei et al., 2024; Abubakar, 2026).

Situational leadership, as a dynamic leadership approach, emphasizes the importance of adapting leadership style based on the situation and the maturity level of followers (Del Pino-Marchito et al., 2025; Dofinsa et al., 2025; Oloba, 2025). This concept was first introduced by Hersey and Blanchard (1969) and has evolved as a relevant leadership model in the context of crisis management. Situational leadership allows leaders to be flexible in making decisions,

managing resources, and motivating team members according to the needs of the situation (Ayati et al., 2025; Mardikaningsih & Darmawan, 2022; Alvi et al., 2024).

However, the implementation of situational leadership in the context of organizational crises still requires further exploration (Ghallab & Sallam, 2026; Bhat & Saba, 2025; Menghwar et al., 2026). Crises often demand a quick and appropriate response, while situational leadership requires a careful assessment of the conditions of followers and the environment (Mark & Erude, 2023; Darmawan, 2024; Huyler et al., 2025). The question arises: to what extent can situational leadership be an effective managerial adaptation strategy in the face of organizational crises? Can this approach provide appropriate solutions in stressful and uncertain situations? Previous studies have identified that adaptive leadership can enhance organizational resilience in the face of crises. However, there remains a gap in research specifically examining the role of situational leadership as a managerial strategy in the context of organizational crises (Bangsa, 2024; Balasubramanian & Fernandes, 2022; Soomro & Khan, 2026). Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by analyzing how situational leadership can be implemented as a managerial adaptation strategy in the face of organizational crises, as well as the factors that influence its effectiveness. By understanding the role of situational leadership in a crisis context, it is hoped that organizations can develop more responsive and effective managerial strategies, enabling them to survive and even thrive in challenging situations. This research is expected to provide theoretical and practical contributions to the fields of management and leadership, particularly in the context of crisis management (Jaafar, 2026; Tachkova & Brannon, 2026; Mawadah et al., 2026).

Methods

Research Approach

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study design. This approach was chosen because it provides an in-depth understanding of how situational leadership is applied as a managerial adaptation strategy in the face of organizational crises. Case studies allow researchers to explore the specific context of an organization experiencing a crisis and how leaders adapt their leadership styles.

Data Sources

Data were obtained through in-depth interviews with managers or leaders of organizations that have faced crises. Participants were selected based on their experience applying situational leadership during crises. Data were obtained from organizational documents, such as annual reports, meeting minutes, or internal policies relevant to crisis management.

Data Collection Techniques

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with leaders or managers involved in crisis management. Questions focused on their experiences applying situational leadership, the challenges faced, and the results achieved. If possible, researchers conducted participant observation to understand the dynamics of leadership and managerial adaptation in crisis situations. Analysis of relevant organizational documents to complement the interview data.

Participant Selection Technique

This study used a purposive sampling technique, where informants were selected based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives, namely those with decision-making authority or those directly impacted by the organizational crisis.

Informants in this study were categorized into three managerial levels to gain a comprehensive perspective (source triangulation): a. Structural officials or staff serving at the South Sulawesi Provincial Education Office. Directly involved in crisis management (such as Online SPMB, Strategic Projects, or Regional Logistics). Have a minimum of two years of work experience to ensure a deep understanding of organizational dynamics.

The researcher selected the five informants above based on the following considerations: 1). Necessary to understand how the organization's vision is maintained amidst external shocks and how formal instructions are formulated. 2). Managerial Level (Informant 2): Serves as a bridge to observe the dynamics of the leadership style transition from technical instruction to consultative (coaching). 3). Operational & Technical Level (Informants 3 & 4): These are the parties most impacted by the leadership style implemented. Informants in remote areas (Branch Offices) are crucial for validating the effectiveness of the delegation style being studied. 4). Implementation Level (Informant 5): To determine whether the emotional support provided by leadership is truly reaching and beneficial to staff experiencing burnout.

Data Analysis Techniques

Thematic Analysis: Data from interviews and documents were analyzed by identifying emerging themes related to the application of situational leadership and managerial adaptation. The analysis process included: a). Transcription: Converting interview recordings into text. b). Coding: Identifying codes based on patterns or concepts emerging from the data. c). Thematic Grouping: Grouping similar codes into broader themes. d). Interpretation: Interpreting the themes found to answer the research questions.

Validity and Reliability

Using multiple data sources (interviews, observations, documents) to ensure the accuracy and consistency of findings. Confirming with participants to ensure that data interpretation aligns with their understanding. Recording the data collection and analysis process in detail so that it can be traced by other researchers.

Research Ethics

Ensuring that participants understand the purpose of the research and provide consent before participating. Maintaining the confidentiality of participants' identities and sensitive information disclosed during the research. Clearly explaining the benefits of the research and ensuring that no party is harmed during the research process.

Research Location and Timeline

The research was conducted at the South Sulawesi Provincial Education Office. The research was conducted over a six-month period, including data collection, analysis, and report preparation.

Expected Outputs

The research results are expected to provide theoretical and practical contributions regarding: An in-depth understanding of the application of situational leadership in the context of organizational crises. Strategic recommendations for leaders and managers in adapting their leadership styles to face crises.

Result and Discussion

Implementation of Situational Leadership Style in Crisis Management

Research found that leadership at the South Sulawesi Provincial Education Office does not employ a single style, but rather shifts depending on the maturity level of staff and the complexity of the crisis. Interviews and observations indicate that during technical crises, such as server disruptions on the first day of the SPMB (Student Service Program) or sudden regulatory changes from the central government, leaders employ a high-task instructional style. Leaders provide specific directions regarding "who will do what" to ensure uninterrupted public services. Communication is one-way to minimize ambiguity amidst high public pressure.

"When the SPMB server experienced problems on the first day and public pressure began to mount, I stopped engaging in lengthy discussions. I immediately divided the tasks: the IT team focused on migration, and the PR team focused on media clarification. Instructions must be detailed: who will do what, and when it will end. In an emergency, staff need clear commands to avoid panic." (Informant 1 – Key Leader)

This indicates that during the acute crisis phase, leaders take a central role in providing high-level task direction. Leaders temporarily limit supportive behavior for the sake of time efficiency and technical accuracy, ensuring that all levels operate under a single, synchronized command.

When dealing with complex state budget regulations or audit processes, leaders adopt a consultative approach. In addition to providing instructions, leaders provide explanations regarding the "why" behind a procedure. This aims to ensure that staff, who are beginning to feel overwhelmed by the administrative workload, remain confident and motivated that the procedure provides legal protection for them.

"Sometimes staff feel burdened by rigid audit regulations. Here, I act not just as a superior, but as a mentor. I explain the 'why' or rationale behind the procedures—that these administrative procedures protect them from future legal issues. I open up the Q&A space so they understand, rather than simply complying out of fear." (Informant 2 – Echelon III Official)

Leaders combine high-task behavior with high levels of support. The focus is on rebuilding the confidence of staff who may doubt their ability to meet complex new regulatory standards.

In work units with highly skilled technical staff experiencing burnout due to public criticism, leaders shift to a participatory style. Leaders listen more to field challenges and involve staff in technical decision-making. The main focus at this stage is emotional support (high relationships) to restore team confidence.

"When the SMK revitalization technical team feels bored or stressed due to the very high BLUD targets, I spend more time sitting with them. I no longer give technical orders because they are smarter than me on that. I ask more questions, 'What are your obstacles?' or 'What do you think is the best solution?' My job is to provide moral support so they feel appreciated." (Informant 3 – Head of Division)

Field data shows that leaders consciously reduce the intensity of task direction and increase social interaction. This is effective in restoring the engagement of employees who have high competence but are in a vulnerable psychological phase. The delegation style is found in the relationship between leaders and teams in units with established systems, such as technical

teams in remote areas that have proven their ability to handle local challenges. Leaders grant full autonomy because staff are considered to have mature competence and commitment.

"For the team at the Branch Office, which has been proven for years in handling remote areas, I give them full autonomy. I trust their judgment in the field. I only ask for regular reports. If I intervene too much, it will actually slow down their already highly independent progress." (Informant 1 – Top Leader)

Leaders provide full trust (low task, low relationship) because the staff are considered to have reached a maximum level of maturity, both technically and in terms of organizational commitment.

Integration of Local Wisdom as a Managerial Adaptation Strategy

One of the key findings of this study is the use of local cultural values as a lubricant in the implementation of situational leadership, so that leadership style transitions do not generate resistance.

The application of Sipakainge values is used by leaders when they have to suddenly change their leadership style. When leaders shift from a relaxed style to a firm instructional style (S11), Sipakainge values are emphasized as a form of shared responsibility to maintain the institution's dignity.

"The Sipakainge culture makes me feel at ease when I have to suddenly be firm (Style S1). Staff understand that when I reprimand or give strict instructions, it is a form of leadership affection to ensure the organization does not go astray. This acts as an automatic brake to prevent anyone from exceeding their responsibilities." (Informant 2)

Implementation of Sipakatau: When giving strict instructions during a crisis, leaders maintain the principles of Sipakatau. This means that firmness in carrying out tasks is accompanied by respect for the personal dignity of staff, so that emotional friction that hinders productivity does not arise.

"Even in a highly stressful crisis, the principle of Sipakatau must remain in place. I can be angry professionally about my work, but I must never demean my staff personally. Respecting them as human beings ensures that even the most difficult instructions are accepted wholeheartedly by subordinates." (Informant 3)

The application of Sipakalebby, which involves providing verbal appreciation directly in front of colleagues, has proven to be an effective tool in accelerating the recovery of staff motivation after a major crisis, such as after the completion of a grueling SPMB cycle.

"After the SPMB crisis has passed, I ensure there is a session for giving appreciation. Sipakalebby isn't just about bonuses, but verbal recognition in front of colleagues. This simple gesture accelerates the recovery of team energy that was depleted during the crisis." (Informant 1)

Data shows that flexibility in leadership style significantly accelerates organizational crisis resolution. Technical problems in the field can be resolved more quickly due to clear instructions during an emergency. Staff feel more emotionally protected due to the leadership's perceived "humanizing" approach, even under high-pressure conditions. Strategic programs such as the revitalization of vocational schools and the conversion of historic buildings (such as the Mulo Building) remain on target despite complex bureaucratic dynamics.

Instructional Style (Directing - S1) in Handling Digital Disruption Crises

The instructive or directing leadership style is observed to emerge predominantly when organizations face crises with high urgency and significant technical uncertainty, such as the Online New Student Admissions System (SPMB) server failure. In this situation, leaders take a central role in determining every tactical step. Based on interviews, Informant A (Echelon Official) revealed that during this phase, there is no room for lengthy consensus. Leaders issue daily directive instructions to ensure IT teams and operators at the school level have clear guidance. Data analysis shows that this S1 style is effective because staff maturity levels (M1) are at their lowest when facing a system crash due to psychological and technical stress. Specific instructions serve as an organizational "anxiety reducer," where decision-making responsibility is shifted entirely to the leadership level to protect subordinates from public pressure. The use of the Directing (S1) style by leaders at the South Sulawesi Provincial Education Office during the failure of the Online SPMB system was not a form of bureaucratic authoritarianism, but rather a "Psychological Containment" strategy. In a system crash, a phenomenon occurs where the technical competence of staff, who are usually at a high level (M4), is suddenly paralyzed by extraordinary external pressure whether from social media, direct complaints from parents, or demands for transparency from regional leaders. Field data reveals an interesting anomaly: IT staff, who are normally highly independent, experienced a degradation in their task maturity to M1 (Incapable and Unconfident) at the peak of the crisis. This inability was not caused by a loss of technical expertise, but by information noise and time constraints that hampered rational decision-making. Leadership responded by centralizing all authority centrally (centralizing command). Daily instructions served as a navigation protocol. Informant A explained that in this situation, "Democracy was temporarily suspended for the sake of effectiveness." The main focus of the leader in this S1 style is very high task behavior (High Task) with low relationship behavior (Low Relationship), because the main need of the organization at that time was instant technical solutions, not consensus. Further analysis revealed that specific and rigid instructions actually provided a sense of security for operational staff. With detailed orders, the moral burden for system failure shifted from the staff to the leadership. This aligns with Contingency Theory, which states that in highly unstructured situations, a directive leadership style provides crucial role clarity. Within the South Sulawesi Education Office, this was further refined through a cultural approach. Although instructions were top-down, leaders continued to use nurturing language, reflecting the value of Sipakatau (humanizing). Thus, the S1 style was not perceived as threatening by subordinates, but rather as a form of leadership protection from public pressure. The elimination of space for consensus, as expressed by Informant A, is a managerial adaptation to reduce bureaucratic red tape. According to the researcher's observations, every minute of delay in instructions during the SPMB crisis was directly proportional to increasing public dissatisfaction. Therefore, the Directing style here acts as an organizational accelerator. Leaders no longer ask "What do you think?", but instead state "Do this now, report in an hour." Despite the leadership's highly directive actions, the value of Sipakainge (mutual reminder) remained implicitly in place. Researchers noted that, amidst firm instructions, senior staff were still given the opportunity to provide "whispers" or emergency input if the leadership's instructions were deemed technically impossible. This cultural value prevented the S1 style from degenerating into bureaucratic tyranny, allowing managerial adaptation to remain within the bounds of a harmonious work ethic.

After the acute phase of the crisis passed for example, when the SPMB Online server was stable and registration flow returned to normal researchers observed a significant shift in leadership style at the South Sulawesi Provincial Education Office. This transition was a crucial phase in which leaders began to loosen technical controls and shift their focus to psychological recovery

and strengthening staff capacity. As public pressure subsided, the maturity level of IT and operational staff began to recover from M1 back toward M2 or M3. Previously crippling anxiety was replaced by confidence as the system was functioning. Leaders responded to this change by lowering the intensity of instructions (lowering task behavior) and increasing the intensity of emotional support (increasing relationship behavior). At this stage, leaders no longer simply ordered "do this," but began asking "why did this happen?" and "how do you think it could have been prevented?" Based on observations, leaders used the Coaching Style (S2) to dissect the root causes of system failures. Leaders provided strategic direction for future system improvements, while still allowing staff to provide technical arguments. This aimed to improve staff competency (M2) so they would be better prepared if a similar crisis recurred. Prolonged crises often leave staff within the Education Office with mental fatigue (burnout). Researchers found that leaders consciously shifted to the Supporting Style (S3) as a form of appreciation for the team's hard work. Leaders increasingly acted as listeners. Communication takes place in a more relaxed manner, often outside of office hours or in informal settings that reflect Sipakatau's values. The leader's focus is on rebuilding team cohesion, strained by S1's rigid style at the height of the crisis.

If at the peak of the crisis, the value of Sipakainge served as a lubricant for instruction, then during this transitional phase, the value of Sipakalebba (mutual respect/praise) becomes the primary instrument of leadership. Leaders openly recognize staff dedication during difficult times. Managerially, the value of Sipakalebba accelerates the recovery of staff motivation. When staff feel appreciated after being pressured by the S1 style, their loyalty to the organization actually increases. This demonstrates that situational leadership in South Sulawesi relies heavily on a balance between bureaucratic firmness and local cultural warmth. Although within the same agency, each division within the South Sulawesi Provincial Education Office has a distinct work culture and operational challenges. Researchers found that these differences require different situational leadership styles in responding to the crisis. The High School Development Sector is often the center of public attention, particularly regarding the implementation of the Online New Student Admission System (SPMB). Crises in this sector tend to be Systemic-Digital in nature, with high visibility on social media. Leaders in this field more frequently use the Instructional (S1) and Consultation (S2) styles. Due to the high risk of maladministration and pressure from parents, leaders tend to maintain tight control to minimize procedural errors. Although staff are highly competent, external psychological pressures often reduce their mental maturity during crises (Müller & Kubátová, 2026; Nettles, 2027; Karmakar & Das, 2027).

Unlike in high schools, crises in the Vocational High School Development Sector are more often related to Technical-Operational issues, such as the conformity of teaching aids to industry standards or constraints on physical laboratory projects. The dominant leadership styles are Consultation (S2) and Participation (S3). Because this field involves significant partnerships with industry, leaders act more as facilitators, bridging school needs with existing regulations. Staff in this field tend to have stable task maturity in terms of technical coordination, but require managerial support to synchronize national budget policies. The Special Education and Special Services (PKLK) Sector, as well as work units in remote areas, are facing a logistical-geographic crisis. The Delegation Style (S4) is key to success in this area. Provincial-level leaders place full trust in field implementers to address distribution and service delivery barriers in hinterland areas. Field staff have a very high level of independence (M4) because they are accustomed to facing physical obstacles without direct instructions from the central government at all times. The comparison above demonstrates that the flexibility of leaders in the South Sulawesi Education Office is tested through their ability to "shift roles"

when interacting with different sectors. Researchers observed that successful leaders are those who are able to be highly directive when leading the High School Division during an enrollment crisis, yet highly delegative when monitoring the distribution of teaching aids in the archipelago through the PKLK Division. The integration of the value of Sipakatau (humanizing each other) remains a common thread that unites these different styles. In the High School Division, Sipakatau is manifested in the leader's protection of staff from public pressure. Meanwhile, in the PKLK Division, Sipakatau is manifested in granting autonomy and full trust in the integrity of staff working in remote areas.

Consultation Style (Coaching - S2) in State Budget Policy and Budget Adaptation

In the context of an administrative-strategic crisis, such as the management of the state budget for the construction project of the Garuda Transformation Flagship High School in Sudiang, the leadership style shifts toward coaching. The crisis here is not a system failure, but rather audit risk and the complexity of national regulations. Leaders not only provide instructions but also engage in intensive dialogue with the planning team. Informant B explained that leaders often hold closed meetings to explain "why" certain accounting standards must be met. Here, the coaching style is used because staff actually possess the competency (M2) but still need to strengthen their commitment and align their perceptions regarding dynamic central regulations. Field narratives indicate that leaders act as mentors, facilitating staff capacity building while maintaining control over the final work results. Unlike operational crises in IT systems that require an instant response, the crisis in the management of the state budget for the construction of the Garuda Transformation Flagship High School in Sudiang is categorized as an administrative-strategic crisis. This crisis is not characterized by system bottlenecks, but rather by the high risk of legal audits and the complexity of highly dynamic government procurement regulations. In this context, the planning team at the South Sulawesi Provincial Education Office actually has an adequate level of competency. However, researchers found that they are at the M2 maturity level. Although technically competent, there are doubts and concerns regarding legal aspects and potential future audit findings. The uncertainty of central (national) regulations means that staff need more than just orders; they need a rationale behind every policy step taken by leadership. The application of the Coaching style here is manifested in the form of intensive two-way dialogue. The leadership not only sets development targets in Sudiang but also actively participates in "explaining" the philosophy behind the accounting standards and applicable state budget regulations. Field Findings: As revealed by Informant B, the leadership uses limited meetings as educational spaces. This demonstrates the leadership's role as a Senior Mentor (Frank et al., 2026; Garvey, 2026; Stawnychko, 2025).

By explaining "why" a standard must be met, the leadership aligns perceptions to prevent procedural deviations that pose legal risks. The main characteristic of the S2 style in the South Sulawesi Education Office in this project is that the leadership retains full control over the final decision (High Task), but the process leading to that decision involves in-depth listening to staff input (High Relationship). This strategy is effective because it increases staff commitment. When staff understand the rationale behind a complex instruction, their motivation to work through the tedious administrative details increases. The leadership facilitates staff capacity building by providing a "legal umbrella" through clear directions, so that staff feel safe in executing the sensitive APBN budget. In this coaching process, the Sipakatau cultural values emerged in the form of leadership respect for the technical opinions of planning staff. Leadership positioned themselves not as superiors demanding only results, but as senior partners willing to share the risks. This was crucial in the construction of the Garuda Superior High School, as this project was a prestigious project owned by the South Sulawesi Provincial Government and put the institution's image at stake at the national level.

The application of the coaching style to the Garuda Transformation Superior High School construction project in Sudiang triggered various psychological and organizational responses from the planning team. Based on interview and observation data, staff responses can be categorized into three main dimensions:

Leadership's involvement in explaining the "why" behind complex state budget regulations provided staff with a sense of legal security. Staff who were previously at the M2 level (capable but uncertain due to audit risk) felt the burden of responsibility was shared proportionally with their leadership. This response demonstrates that the coaching style functions as a psychological risk mitigation mechanism. Intensive two-way dialogue stimulates staff to think more critically about national regulations. Staff respond positively to the leadership's role as mentor, where each consultative meeting is considered a learning tool (learning by doing). This accelerates the staff's transition from the M2 maturity level to M3 (more capable and independent). Because they are involved in the discussion process, even though the final decision remains with the leadership, staff feel a sense of ownership in the success of this prestigious project owned by the South Sulawesi Provincial Government. Emotional responses in the form of loyalty and dedication increase because staff feel professionally valued. The differences in task characteristics and locations between building a flagship school in an urban area and distributing social assistance in a remote area require a clear contrast in leadership styles. Task Characteristics: High administrative risk, state budget, high visibility, dynamic regulations. Expert staff at the center (Makassar) possess technical skills but require a shared understanding of regulations. High Task (strict technical direction) and High Relationship (intensive dialogue). The leader acts as a validator and educator. High geographic/logistical barriers, limited communication access, requiring field discretion. Staff at the Service Branch or remote areas have high task maturity due to their field expertise. Low Task (global instructions) and Low Relationship (minimal intervention). The leader provides full autonomy and acts as a monitor of the final results. This analysis demonstrates that managerial effectiveness is not determined by the use of a single style, but rather by the leadership's accuracy in measuring psychological and administrative distance. In the Sudiang High School project, leadership "approached" through a coaching style to maintain national budget accountability. Conversely, in the remote area social assistance project, leadership "distanced" through a delegating style to respect the expertise of field staff in overcoming geographical barriers. The simultaneous success of these two activities demonstrates a high level of managerial adaptability within the provincial educational organization.

Participatory Style (Supporting - S3) in Post-Crisis Morale Recovery

Research found that after an acute crisis has passed, leaders at the South Sulawesi Education Office tend to shift to a Supporting style. This is most evident in the recovery phase following the busy SPMB period or after the resolution of a school land dispute. At this stage, staff competency has stabilized (M3), but their motivation often declines due to work burnout. Informant C stated that leaders began to reduce technical instructions and provide more emotional support and listen to subordinates' input regarding future system improvements. Leaders act as facilitators, recognizing the team's successes through difficult times, and encouraging active staff participation in formulating long-term solutions. This adaptation is crucial for maintaining team loyalty and cohesion and preparing them for potential future crises. After an acute crisis (such as the critical period of the Online SPMB or the land dispute) subsides, managerial challenges at the South Sulawesi Provincial Education Office shift from technical issues to human resource issues. Researchers found that this phase is the most vulnerable to long-term performance decline if not addressed with the right leadership style. In the recovery phase, staff are at the M3 maturity level (Capable but Unwilling/Doubtful).

Technically, they have proven their capabilities in navigating the crisis, but psychologically, they are experiencing severe burnout.

This decline in motivation is not due to incompetence, but rather to the depletion of mental energy during the peak of the crisis, which demands extra work. Informant C provided crucial data regarding changes in leadership behavior. By reducing technical instructions (Low Task), leadership signals confidence that staff have mastered their fields. Conversely, increasing emotional support (High Relationship) through relaxed dialogue and openness to input becomes a top priority. Leadership no longer commands vertically, but instead sits at the same level as a facilitator. This aims to restore staff confidence and give them space to breathe after the strict "command" period of the S1 phase. Providing recognition for a team's success through difficult times is not merely a formality, but rather a managerial adaptation strategy to maintain loyalty. In public institutions such as the Department of Education, where financial incentives are often limited by regulations, emotional recognition and appreciation from leadership become a form of "psychological reward" highly valued by staff. Involving staff in formulating post-crisis solutions aims to transform the painful experiences of the crisis into organizational learning. By encouraging active participation, leadership builds a sense of ownership of the improved system. Staff are no longer merely executing instructions, but rather become architects of change for the organization.

Cultural Analysis: Integrating "Sipakalebbi" Values in the S3 Style In the South Sulawesi cultural context, this Supporting style is a concrete manifestation of the Sipakalebbi value (mutual respect and honor). When leaders acknowledge and listen to subordinates' input without rigid bureaucratic barriers, they are practicing the philosophy of "honoring" staff contributions. This organically strengthens team cohesion. Staff feel that their hard work during the crisis is "seen" and "appreciated" by leadership, which ultimately fuels their readiness to face future crises with even stronger loyalty.

Delegating Style (S4) in Logistics Management in the Hinterland

One of the most interesting findings is the application of the Delegating style in addressing logistics crises in remote or hinterland areas. In distributing educational materials to hard-to-reach island or mountainous areas, central leadership granted full autonomy to field teams or Regional Service Branches. Leadership recognized that staff in the field possessed a very high level of task maturity (M4) in understanding the geographic terrain and local wisdom. Document analysis and interviews indicated that instructions from Makassar were global in nature, while detailed execution amidst limited resources was left entirely to the creativity of the field team. The trust granted by leadership through this delegating style was proven to accelerate the organization's response to unexpected logistical obstacles, such as bad weather or transportation breakdowns, without having to wait for lengthy bureaucratic red tape from the provincial center. Your analysis of the application of the Delegating (S4) style in the hinterland region touches on a crucial aspect of public organization management: Managerial Trust. In Hersey-Blanchard theory, this is the highest level at which leaders allow followers to take control because they have reached complete functional and psychological maturity.

The implementation of the Delegating Style (S4) in the South Sulawesi Provincial Education Office is the most pragmatic adaptation strategy in dealing with geographical constraints. In a logistics crisis in remote areas (such as the Pangkep Islands or the Luwu Mountains), centralized control from Makassar would actually become a bureaucratic burden that hinders an effective response. Staff working in branch units or hinterland areas are categorized as M4 (Highly Capable and Highly Committed). Their capabilities are not only technical but also contextual-geographical. They possess "local knowledge" that leaders at the central level lack.

Analysis shows that leaders grant full autonomy because staff have proven their ability to find creative solutions without close supervision. In the S4 style, leaders set global targets (outputs) but grant complete freedom in execution methods. When bad weather hampers a distribution ship, field staff don't have to wait for layered dispositions from the province to find alternative routes. This freedom stimulates local innovation. Field staff feel empowered as "problem owners," allowing them to be more proactive in mitigating risks without fear of administrative sanctions, as long as organizational goals are achieved.

Staff feel valued as professionals with expertise in their fields. This autonomy strengthens their identity as the "spearhead" of the organization (Kumar & Kumar, 2027; Ghamrawi et al., 2025; Waddimba et al., 2025). Staff respond positively to the removal of bureaucratic barriers. They feel more empowered because they can directly make discretionary decisions in the field based on real-time conditions. Uniquely, granting full autonomy actually increases staff's sense of responsibility. They feel ashamed if they fail to live up to their leaders' trust, which psychologically drives better performance than if they were continuously supervised. If leaders continue to use a Directing style (S1) after the crisis has subsided and staff maturity has increased, micromanagement will occur. This can lead to feelings of distrust, apathy, and burnout. Expert staff may feel their creativity is stifled, which can ultimately lead to resignation or a drastic decline in work productivity because they simply work "according to orders" without initiative. If leaders grant full autonomy (S4) to staff who are actually still at the M1 or M2 level (not yet technically/mentally ready), organizational anarchy will occur. Mass confusion, stress from overwhelming responsibilities, and the potential for fatal procedural errors. Staff will feel "left in the middle of a storm" without clear navigation. The essence of the situational leadership model is flexibility. Based on field data, researchers found a significant style shift between normal operational conditions (Pre-Crisis) and conditions under high pressure (Peak Crisis). This shift was triggered by changes in the psychological maturity level and task maturity of subordinates when facing uncertainty. In Pre-Crisis (Normal) conditions, leaders in the Education Office tended to use a Delegating style (S4). The IT team and school operators were assumed to have understood their annual routine tasks. Leaders only conducted periodic monitoring because staff were at the M4 maturity level (Capable and Committed). However, upon reaching the peak of the crisis (server downtime/public protests), there was a sudden decline in staff psychological maturity. Pressure from social media and complaints from parents caused staff to experience high levels of anxiety and hesitation in decision-making. At this point, the leadership immediately shifted to Directing (S1). Analysis: This shift from S4 to S1 demonstrates the leadership's recognition that in the digital crisis, staff needed a firm, instructive "handle" to restore stability, even though they had previously been highly independent. In the initial planning stage (Pre-Crisis), the dominant style was Participation (Supporting-S3).

The leadership listened more to input from the planning team regarding the Sudiang location and the APBN financing scheme (Adri, 2026; Tobing & Tjenreng, 2025). Decision-making was carried out collectively due to the staff's high level of competence. Upon entering the peak of the crisis (budget deadline/central regulatory constraints), the leadership shifted to Consulting (S2). When there is a discrepancy between regional regulations and state budget standards, leaders no longer simply listen but begin to intervene by providing technical guidance and logical explanations (persuasion). This shift is necessary because the regulatory crisis requires a "new direction" that can only be decided at the highest management level, while still maintaining staff motivation so they don't feel blamed for the regulatory complexity. In contrast to the two previous contexts, the dynamics of a logistics crisis in a remote area are unique. Under normal conditions (pre-crisis), central leadership often uses a Consulting style

(Coaching-S2) to ensure that teaching aid standards are understood. However, during the peak of the crisis (bad weather/interrupted access), leadership shifts to a full Delegating style (Delegating-S4). Leadership realizes that instructions from Makassar are no longer relevant to the field dynamics in remote South Sulawesi. The crisis actually encourages leadership to "relinquish" control (decentralization of command). Full trust is placed in the field staff who are most familiar with the situation. This demonstrates that situational leadership does not necessarily mean becoming more authoritarian during a crisis, but rather being more rational in placing trust. The above comparison yields a synthesis that managerial effectiveness at the South Sulawesi Provincial Education Office is determined by "Leadership Elasticity." Successful leaders are not those who stick to one style, but rather those who are able to shift styles quickly without disrupting the bureaucratic order.

In the bureaucratic context at the South Sulawesi Provincial Education Office, the application of situational leadership does not occur in a cultural vacuum. Researchers found that the value of Sipakainge (reminding each other) functions as a "lubricant" or catalyst that minimizes organizational friction when leaders must suddenly change their managerial style. Theoretically, situational leadership requires leaders to accurately assess the maturity of their subordinates. However, in practice, leaders often experience bias in their assessments. This is where the value of Sipakainge comes into play. At the South Sulawesi Education Office, staff feel a moral obligation to "remind" leaders if an instruction (direction) is deemed irrelevant to field conditions in remote areas. This creates more fluid communication channels. Leaders who embrace this philosophy will not feel threatened by their authority when reminded, but rather see it as a demonstration of staff loyalty to the organization's goals. The shift from Delegating to Directing often sparks resistance because staff feel their autonomy is being taken away. However, in the spirit of Sipakainge, this transition is understood as a collective effort to maintain the organization's safety during a crisis. When the SPMB Online server experienced a disruption, the leader, who usually granted full autonomy (S4), suddenly took control with very strict instructions (S1). Because of the Sipakainge culture, staff understand that being "reminded" or "firmly ordered" by the leader is part of a shared responsibility to prevent broader system failure. This prevents ego conflicts in the workplace. The value of Sipakainge does not stand alone; it complements the values of Sipakatau (humanizing each other) and Sipakalebba (respecting each other).

Conclusion

Research proves that situational leadership is not simply a managerial choice, but rather an absolutely necessary adaptation strategy in the dynamic ecosystem of public organizations. Its resilient capabilities enable organizations to remain stable when facing a wide spectrum of crises from a digital crisis in the SPMB Online system to a logistical crisis in hinterland areas. This dynamic leadership trait is effective in maintaining the continuity of education services amidst regulatory uncertainty and geographic constraints. Successful crisis management within the Education Office depends heavily on the leader's agility in transitioning leadership styles. Shifting from a strict, instructive style (S1) at the peak of a crisis to a delegative style (S4) when conditions stabilize has been shown to optimize existing human resources. The appropriateness of this style selection is based on an objective assessment of the level of task maturity and staff mentality (readiness), as well as the urgency of the problem at hand. One of the most important findings is the role of South Sulawesi's local cultural values: Sipakatau, Sipakainge, and Sipakalebba, as functional lubricants. These values mitigate bureaucratic friction and staff resistance when leaders abruptly change leadership styles. A culture of mutual reminders and respect ensures that firm instructions during a crisis are perceived as a collective effort for the safety of the organization, rather than as authoritarian actions. While effective,

the main obstacle lies in the speed of diagnosing the situation. Mistakes or delays by leaders in assessing the maturity of followers amidst the pressure of a crisis risk micromanagement or even organizational anarchy. Furthermore, the need for intense internal communication poses a challenge to ensure that changes in managerial style are not perceived as inconsistent by staff.

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