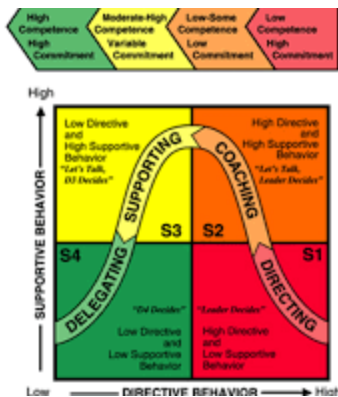


Talent Development 38 Situational Leadership

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPTD



Section 1.3 in the CPTD Certification program for ATD is Collaboration and Leadership. Section C reads “Knowledge of theories of leadership, for example, transformational, inclusive, and situational.”

In this article, I will focus the discussion on Situational Leadership. The concept of Situational Leadership was coined back in the 1970s by Ken Blanchard and Paul Hersey.

The concept is quite simple, but the model gets complicated because of all the permutations of possible conditions. Basically, Blanchard and Hersey were trying to answer the question of what leadership style will be most effective in any given situation. Their simple answer is, “it depends.”

The basis of situational leadership is that there is no one best style of leadership. The best way to lead depends on the situation currently being faced by people in the organization. Let’s start with the different types of style.

Blanchard and Hersey characterized leadership style in terms of the amount of task behavior and relationship behavior that leaders provide to their followers.

There have been many modifications to the original Situational Learning Model. The current version is called SLII as developed by Ken Blanchard after he split off from Paul Hersey.

Styles

Telling (S1)

This is a “command and control” type of style that can be demoralizing if practiced too much. This style was later called the “Directing” style by Ken Blanchard in SLII.

Selling (S2)

This style is using one's influence and personal appeal to woo people to perform in a certain way. This style is also called the "Coaching" style in SLII.

Participating (S3)

In this style the leader works in a collaborative role with others to get things done. Great teamwork is required for this style to be most effective. This style is also called the "Supporting" style in SLII. Most of the decisions will be made by the team members rather than the leader.

Delegating (S4)

Here the leader simply states the goal and allows people to figure out the best way to accomplish the task. It is a "hands off" style of leadership in SLII. The leader is more concerned with the vision than the day-to-day execution decisions.

The best leadership style will depend on the person or group being led as well as the task itself. The Hersey–Blanchard Situational Leadership Theory identified four levels of maturity.

Maturity Levels

Maturity or readiness level 1 (M1)

At level 1, the worker may be new to the task and not familiar enough to know what to do. Workers at this level may require encouragement in order to fulfill their role.

Maturity or readiness level 2 (M2)

At this level, workers are eager and willing to perform their role, but they may require some supervision to do it correctly.

Maturity or readiness level 3 (M3)

Workers in this category have high competence to do the job, but the decision-making remains with the leader.

Maturity or readiness level 4 (M4)

In this level workers are capable of performing the tasks and do not require any help from the leader.

As an example, let's examine the progression of a person who was just hired to be a punch press operator. On day one, the leader needs to use a **telling style** so the

operator knows how to do the job safely. As the operator gains understanding, the leader can back off and use the **selling style**. Once proficiency is achieved, the leader can use the **participative style** where there is only casual oversight. Finally, when the operator is a full expert at the job, the leader can use the **delegating style** and know that the operator will be successful at the task.

In Blanchard's later work, he refined the concept of maturity into four levels he called Development levels. For more information on the developmental states [call up this link](#).

Note development levels will change over time and with particular tasks and so it is necessary to modify your leadership style to match the current developmental needs of the individual as well as the type of task to do. With a new team unfamiliar with the work, it may be best to use a directing style, but later after the work is no longer new, it may be better to switch to a supporting style.

While the various categories of style, maturity, and development may cause the model to seem a bit confusing, the basic concept is quite simple. To be an effective leader, one must match the style used to the current situation in order to obtain optimal results.

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