

Introduction to Situational Leadership

Many studies of leadership have shown that there are two major dimensions on which managerial behavior varies: **task behavior** (the degree to which the manager directs subordinates' behavior and tasks) and **relationship behavior** (the degree to which the manager supports human factors such as morale, teamwork, and communication). The research of Paul Hersey and Ken Blanchard indicates that while good leaders need to have high concern for both tasks and relationships at all times, their behavior as leaders will vary depending on the situation and on the developmental level of the subordinate.

Hersey and Blanchard developed the term situational leadership using the theory that leadership varies along both "Directive" and "Supportive" dimensions. **Directive behavior**, which is related to task and productivity, is defined as the extent to which a leader engages in one-way communication, tells the follower what to do and when and how to do it, and then closely supervises performance. **Supportive behavior**, which is related to improving commitment and motivation, is defined as the extent to which a leader engages in two-way communication, listens and provides support, and involves followers in decision making.

The Four Leadership Styles

This model generates four basic leadership styles:

<p>Style 3 S3 - Supporting Low Direction High Support</p>	<p>Style 2 S2 - Coaching High Direction High Support</p>
<p>Style 4 S4 - Delegating Low Direction Low Support</p>	<p>Style 1 S1- Directing High Direction Low Support</p>

A Style 1 leader, then, is high in direction but low in support, a Style 2 leader is high in both direction and support, a Style 3 leader is high in support but low in direction, and the Style 4 leader is low in both direction and support.

At first, researchers attempted to prove that the Style 2 leader (high in both direction and support) was best in all circumstances, but did not find this hypothesis borne out by data. All styles were effective in some situations; no one style was effective in all situations. Hersey and Blanchard and other researchers who have further developed the concept have developed terms to describe the behavior used in each style. Style 1 is DIRECTING, Style 2 is GUIDING OR COACHING, Style 3 is SUPPORTING, and Style 4 is DELEGATING.

The Four Developmental Levels

Further thinking on the subject has led to the idea that leadership style should be varied to meet the Readiness level or Developmental level of the subordinate. Developmental level varies along two dimensions, Competence and Commitment. Competence refers to the skill level of the person, and is a combination of basic ability, past experience in the position, training, and understanding of their role. Commitment is a combination of two factors, confidence (self- assurance in the task), and motivation (interest and enthusiasm in the task).

Developmental Levels, then, would be as follows:

Developmental Level 3 High Competence Variable Commitment	Developmental Level 2 Moderate Competence Low Commitment
Developmental Level 4 High Competence High Commitment	Developmental Level 1 Low Competence High Commitment

Using Situational Leadership to Coach and Develop

For example, a new employee would often be in Developmental Level 1. He or she would be unfamiliar with the job, therefore low in competence, but would usually be highly motivated and enthusiastic - ready to soak up information. The manager would probably use a highly directive S1 style (Directing) as the employee is trained and instructed in job requirements.

After the newness of a job wears off, however, motivation often declines as the tasks become repetitive or as the realization that many required tasks will not be appealing sets in. The employee may be finding the job unexpectedly difficult. The manager must now move to an S2 style (Coaching), providing more emotional support and doing more listening. Continued training will be necessary.

After an employee becomes quite competent in a task (or perhaps in most aspects of the job), he or she needs much less moment to moment training and oversight. However, the employee may not yet feel confident in his or her ability to perform without supervision. At this level (D3), the manager uses an S3 style (Supporting) to provide the support necessary to build confidence, but needs to provide little supervision and training.

At the D4 level the employee is both highly skilled and highly committed to a task, and the manager can use an S4 style (Delegating), allowing the subordinate to work with minimum direction or support.

It should be noted that developmental levels are considered task specific, meaning that an employee could be at one developmental level in one task area, and at another level in other areas. For example, a software engineer could be at a D4 level in technical areas, but be at a D1 level in company procedure and at a D2 level in budget preparation for a project.

It should also be remembered that the leadership styles refer to leader behavior, not to leader attitude. The attitude of the leader is always one of concern for both people and production, and employees should always be aware of this concern. It is his or her behavior that is varied according to the situation.