

Situational Leadership Model by Hersey and Blanchard

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Introduction

Edgar H. Shein once contended that “the successful manager must be a good diagnostician and must value a spirit of inquiry.” The abilities and motives of employees are extremely variable, and managers must have the ability to sense the differences. In addition, a good manager must also be able to adapt their leadership style to meet the needs of the employees.

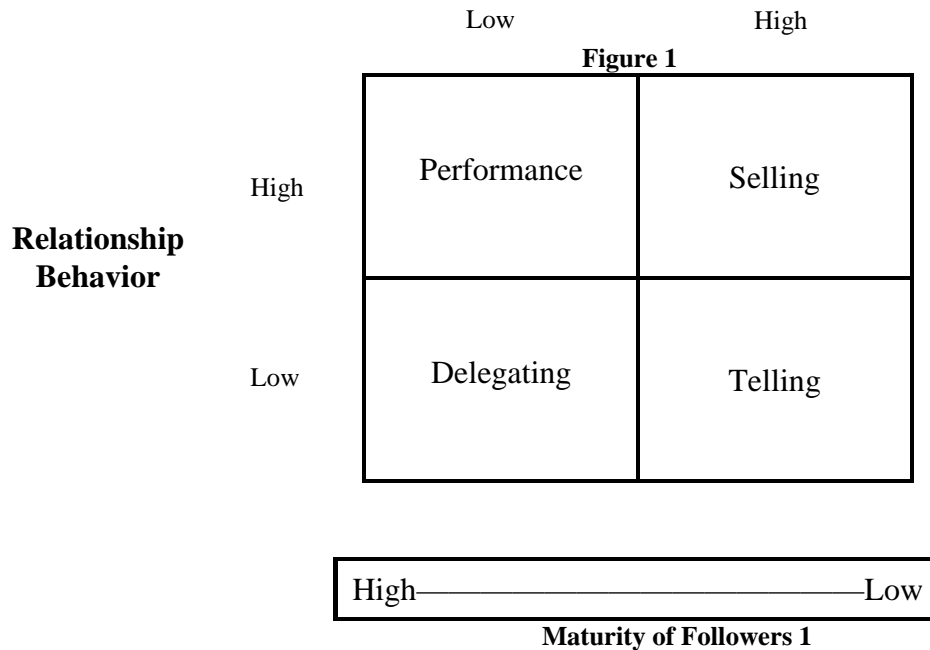
The Situational Leadership Model

The Situational Leadership model is based on the interaction between task behavior, relationship behavior, and maturity of followers. For the following, task behavior is the extent to which a leader provides direction for people – telling them what to do, when where and how to do it. Relationship behavior refers to the extent to which a leader engages in two-way communication with people – providing support, encouragement and facilitating behaviors. Maturity is defined as the ability and willingness of people to take responsibility for directing their own behavior.

According to this model, there is no best way to influence people; leadership style should depend on the maturity level of the people the leader is trying to influence. Figure 1 portrays the relationship between task-relevant maturity and the appropriate leadership styles to help move followers from immaturity to maturity. Each of the four leadership styles is a combination of task and relationship behavior.

- Telling – for low maturity: Followers are both unable and unwilling to take responsibility. In many cases, their unwillingness is a result of their insecurity for the task. Therefore, a directive style provides clear, specific directions and supervision will bring effectiveness.
- Selling – for low to moderate maturity: Followers are unable but willing to take responsibility. A selling style provides directive behavior to help their lack of ability, and supportive behavior to reinforce willingness and enthusiasm.
- Participating – for moderate to high maturity: Followers are able but unwilling to do what the leader wants. They may be insecure or unmotivated. In either case, the leader should use the participating style because the leader and follower share decision making, with the main role of the leader being facilitating and communicating
- Delegating – for high maturity: Followers are able and willing to take responsibility. Thus a low profile approach, with little direction or support, is the most effective.

Task Behavior



Application of Situational Leadership

To determine what leadership style should be used in a given situation, several things must be done.

First, you must decide what areas of an individual or group's activities you would like to influence. These areas will vary according to a person's responsibilities. Before managers can determine what style to use to influence someone, they must decide what aspect of that person's job they want to influence.

The second step is to determine the maturity level of the individual or group in each of the selected areas. Some argue that this is the key to effective leadership. Several things must be taken into account when examining the components of maturity.

- Achievement-motivated people have characteristics in common, including the capacity to set high but attainable goals. This capacity can be a measure of task-relevant maturity.
- There is no conceptual difference in terms of education and experience. Task-relevant maturity can be gained through both.
- Education and experience affect ability and achievement-motivation affects willingness. Maturity consists of two dimensions: job maturity (ability and

technical skills) and psychological maturity (willingness and confidence in one's abilities).

The final step is deciding which of the four leadership styles would be appropriate in each area. To help managers make better judgments about leadership style, Hersey, Blanchard, and Hambleton have developed leadership scales. Each of the four leadership behaviors are described by what the managers can do.

Telling – Provide specific instruction and closely supervise performance.

Selling – Explain decisions and provide opportunity for clarification.

Participating – Share ideas and facilitate in making decisions.

Delegating – Turn over responsibility for decisions and implementations.

An example of Situational Leadership at work

Educational settings provide many examples of where Situational Leadership is effective, particularly in the teacher-student relationship. Hersey and two colleagues in Brazil conducted a study applying Situational Leadership to teaching. Learning effectiveness was compared between a class taught the conventional way, and a class where the teacher applied Situational Leadership. In the experimental class, the maturity of the students was developed over time. The teaching method started with the teacher lecturing in the front of the class, and then moved to group discussions with the teacher directing the conversation. Next, the teacher participated as a supportive but nondirective group member, and finally the group continued to discuss with the teacher only involved when asked by the class. In two experiments of this design, the experimental classes showed not only higher performance on content exams, but were also observed to have a higher level of enthusiasm, morale, and motivation as well as less tardiness and absenteeism.

For Further Information and References

Management of Organizational Behavior: Utilizing Human Resources, 6th edition, by Paul Hersey and Kenneth H. Blanchard. 1993. Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey.

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