An Overview of Situational Leadership II

Situational Leadership II is a process for developing people by providing effective leadership over time so that they can reach their highest level of performance. It is based upon a relationship between and individual’s development level on a specific goal or task, and the leadership style that the leader provides.

* Ken Blanchard and Paul Hersey originally developed Situational Leadership in 1968. The idea was further developed in Blanchard’s 1985 book, Leadership and the One Minute Manager, (coauthored with Patricia and Drea Zigarmi) and now widely used in corporations, private industry, and government.

As illustrated the model below, there are four leadership styles and four development levels.

The top of the model illustrates the four leadership styles S1 to S4:

- **S1: Directing/Telling** Leaders define the roles and tasks of the ‘follower’ and supervise them closely. Decisions are made by the leader and announced, so communication is largely one-way.

- **S2: Coaching/Selling** Leaders still define roles and tasks, but seek ideas and suggestions from the follower. Decisions remain the leader’s prerogative, but communication is much more two-way.
- **S3**: Supporting/Participating Leaders pass day-to-day decisions, such as task allocation and processes, to the follower. The leader facilitates and takes part in decisions, but control is with the follower.

- **S4**: Delegating Leaders are still involved in decisions and problem-solving, but control is with the follower. The follower decides when and how the leader will be involved.

Of these, no one style is considered optimal or desired for all leaders to possess. Effective leaders need to be flexible, and must adapt themselves according to the situation. However, each leader tends to have a natural style, and in applying Situational Leadership he must know his intrinsic style.

**Development levels**

The right leadership style will depend on the person being led – the follower. Blanchard and Hersey extended their model to include the Development Level of the follower. They stated that the leader's chosen style should be based on the competence and commitment of her followers. They categorized the possible development of followers into four levels, which they named D1 to D4:

- **D1: Low Competence, High Commitment** – They generally lack the specific skills required for the job in hand. However, they are eager to learn and willing to take direction.

- **D2: Some Competence, Low Commitment** – They may have some relevant skills, but won't be able to do the job without help. The task or the situation may be new to them.

- **D3: High Competence, Variable Commitment** – They are experienced and capable, but may lack the confidence to go it alone, or the motivation to do it well or quickly.

- **D4: High Competence, High Commitment** – They are experienced at the job, and comfortable with their own ability to do it well. They may even be more skilled than the leader.

Development Levels are also situational. I might be generally skilled, confident and motivated in my job, but would still drop into Level D1 when faced, say, with a task requiring skills I don't possess. For example, many managers are D4 when dealing with the day-to-day running of their department, but move to D1 or D2 when dealing with a sensitive employee "issue"

The development level is now called the performance readiness level (Hersey, Blanchard, & Johnson, 2008). It is based on the Development levels and adapted from Hersey's *Situational Selling* and Ron Campbell of the Center for Leadership Studies has expanded the continuum of follower performance to include behavioral indicators of each readiness level.

- **R1: Unable and Insecure or Unwilling** – Follower is unable and insecure and lacks confidence or the follower lacks commitment and motivation to complete tasks.

- **R2: Unable but Confident or Willing** – Follower is unable to complete tasks but has the confidence as long as the leader provides guidance or the follower lacks the ability but is motivated and making an effort.
- **R3: Able but Insecure or Unwilling** – Follower has the ability to complete tasks but is apprehensive about doing it alone or the follower is not willing to use that ability.

- **R4: Able and Confident and Willing** – Follower has the ability to perform and is confident about doing so and is committed.

**Leadership Style**

Leadership style is the pattern of behaviors people use to influence others, as perceived by those being influenced. Studies have shown that these behaviors fall into two basic categories, which are defined in Situational Leadership II as Directive Behavior and Supportive Behavior. Leaders use some combination of these two behaviors.

**Style 1**, which is referred to as Directive, consists of high Directive Behavior and Low Supportive Behavior. In the Directive style, the leader provides specific instructions about roles and goals and closely supervises the individual’s performance. Most decisions in Style 1 are made by the leader.

**Style 2**, or Coaching, is characterized by high Directive Behavior and high Supportive Behavior. The leader explains decisions, solicits suggestions from the individual, praises behaviors that are approximately right and continues to direct task accomplishment. Input from the individual is considered, although final decisions are made by the leader.

The high Supportive Behavior and the low Directive Behaviour of **Style 3** is called Supporting. A leaders using this style facilitates, listens, elicits ideas, encourages and supports self-reliant decision making and problem solving.

**Style 4**, low Supportive Behaviour and low Directive Behaviour, is the Delegating style. The leader empowers the employee to act independently and provides the appropriate resources to get the job done. Most decisions are made by the individual.

In all four styles, the leader (1) identifies desired outcomes and ensures that goals are clear, (2) observes and monitors performance and (3) gives feedback to the individual.

**Partnering for Performance**

One of the new roles of the leader is that of creating partnerships with people as they strive to achieve their personal and organizational goals.

Once the goals and objectives have been agreed on and both the leader and the individual know **Situational Leadership II**, they can mutually diagnose the individual’s development level and agree on an appropriate leadership style.

Communication should continue as the leader manages the individual’s performance using the agreed-upon leadership style. New goals, priorities and changes in development level should trigger more dialogue and changes in leadership styles.
Ramon Velasco is a Project Manager who effectively translates project management theory into actual practice. Visit his page http://www.projectmanagement.comxa.com to learn project management techniques. He can be reached at ramonvelascopena@gmail.com