

Situational Leaders

Use the model in your work.



by Paul Hersey

A MODEL IS MEANT TO be applied in various situations. In fact, for a model to have value, it has to be used. And to be used, it must be simple.

The *Situational Leadership Model* is about being more effective as a leader. This involves matching your leader behaviors (behaviors you use when trying to influence someone else) with the performance needs of the individual or group that you work with. It is about adapting the directive and supportive behaviors you use to match the readiness of others to perform specific tasks or functions. The model is simple, it works, and achieves results.

Take Three Steps

In using the *Situational Leadership Model*, take three steps:

Step 1: Identify the specific job, task, or activity. There needs to be a shared picture of what good performance looks like in the minds of the leader and follower. More specifically, what job task or activity is the focus or purpose of the intervention? The key determinant is the person's understanding of what the leader wants done. How specific does the leader need to be? For one individual, a high specificity may be needed. For another individual, high specificity might be perceived as micromanaging.

Step 2: Assess current performance readiness. Once the task or activity is identified, diagnose the Performance Readiness of the person you are trying to influence. How ready, willing, and able is the person? Readiness is the interplay between ability and willingness that a person demonstrates for a specific task. The two variables, *ability* and *willingness*, are interactive, meaning that one impacts the other.

Ability is the amount of knowledge, experience, and skill that a person is currently demonstrating for a task.

Willingness is the amount of confidence, commitment, and motivation demonstrated. For instance, a strong motivation can make a person appear very willing. The interplay between

ability and willingness determines the four levels of Performance Readiness.

Level R1: Unable and Insecure or Unable and Unwilling. *Unable and Insecure* is low skill demonstration and the issue is driven by insecurity. The individual could be intimidated by the task, overwhelmed, unclear, or uncertain about what is expected and how to perform. *Unable and Unwilling* means levels of demonstrated skill are low, and the motivation and willingness to perform is also low.

Level R2: Unable but Confident or Willing. R2 suggests "not ready yet" or "ignorance on fire." In fact, on a new task, most people start at this readiness level. The confidence and willingness can come from within, from others, or by working in a healthy, safe

environment. A person may be "unable" simply because they haven't performed the task or had a chance to demonstrate ability.

Level R3: Able but Insecure or Able but Unwilling. Ability is now being demonstrated, fairly consistently, at moderate-to-high levels. The person may be "insecure" when starting to perform with less involvement from the leader. The person may be "unwilling" when the task may be less rewarding than expected, problems won't go away, or performing is punishing.

Level R4: Able and Confident and Willing. Once a person reaches R4, consistent high levels of ability blend with confidence, commitment, or a sense of ownership. Motivation and desire for accomplishment are high.

Step 3: Match leader response. Leadership style is composed of relationship behavior and task behavior.

Relationship behavior is the extent to which a leader engages in two-way

communication with a person, providing socio-emotional support or psychological strokes. The leader explains why something should be done and provides facilitating, participating, or involving behaviors.

Task behavior is the amount of guidance or direction provided. It is the extent the leader engages in defining the who, what, when, where, and how the task is to be performed.

Four Leadership Styles

These patterns of influence behavior can be plotted on two distinct axes:

Style S1: High Task/Low Relationship. S1 is called "telling" since it is characterized by one-way communication. The leader defines the role, shows how to begin, and tells who, what, when, where, and how in relation to the task. Informing or guiding are also examples of how a style S1 may come across to a person low in readiness. This feels like a helping relationship, except when the person is unwilling to perform (not just insecure about their ability). The exception calls for consequences for nonperformance and becomes part of the unfreezing process.

Style S2: High Task/High Relationship. S2 is referred to as "selling" since the person receives two-way communication and socio-emotional support in an attempt to gain "buy in" to the decisions made. As leaders "sell," they focus on explaining and mentoring to increase understanding of the task.

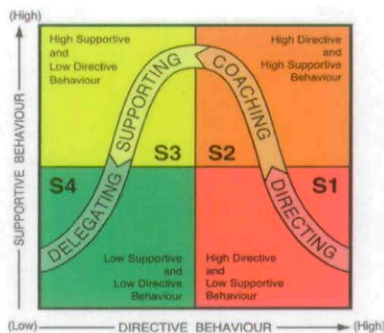
Style S3: High Relationship/Low Task. S3 is called "participating" since the leader and individual share in decision-making. Two-way communication and facilitating behavior boost the person's willingness/security, since they already demonstrate the ability to complete the task. Support and encouragement characterize an effective use of style S3. This style instills ownership in the decision-making process.

Style S4: Low Relationship/Low Task. S4 is referred to as "delegating" since this style involves letting an individual "run their own show." The leader delegates tasks, as people show they are able and willing to accomplish the task at hand. A leader using a style S4 spends more time monitoring progress as the person gets the job done.

There is no *one best way* to influence others. Any influence behavior may be more or less effective depending on the *Performance Readiness* of the person. LE

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