Section 4

SITUATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Key Points

1 Situational Leadership

2 The Four Styles of Leader Behavior

3 Follower Readiness

4 Follower Development

All my life, both as a Soldier and as an educator, I have been engaged in a search for a mysterious intangible. All nations seek it constantly because it is the key to greatness, sometimes to survival. That intangible is the electric and elusive quality known as leadership.

GEN Mark Clark

Introduction

In previous sections, you've studied several different leadership theories. Trait theory, for example, holds that leaders are born with specific traits that make them good leaders. Behavior theory suggests that leaders characteristically behave in certain ways, so you can learn to be an effective leader by learning to behave a specific way. Transformational leadership theory holds that effective leaders appeal to morals and values to inspire others to follow.

In this section, you will learn about the *situational leadership* theory. This theory proposes that the environment and the **readiness** of followers determine, to a large extent, how leaders will tend to function. By understanding the interplay between environment and the readiness and motivation of followers, you can strengthen your repertoire of leadership skills, gaining experience and confidence in your own leadership style.

readiness

the extent to which a follower demonstrates the ability and willingness to accomplish a specific task

The Commander's Notebook

A brigade commander met with his subordinate leaders and outlined his goals for an upcoming training exercise. In the days following, while the brigade staff worked on the formal orders and requirements, the commander spent time visiting subordinate units as they trained. As a part of each visit, he asked his subordinate leaders for specific feedback on his intent. Was it clear? Could they repeat the three main points he had tried to make? What would they add to the unit's goals for the training? He listened, asked his own questions, and allowed them to question him. It turned out that most of the people he spoke to had missed a particular one of his three main points, which led the commander to believe that he hadn't made himself clear the first time. Eventually, he started the conversation by saying, "There are a couple of points I tried to make in my talk; apparently, I dropped the ball on at least one of them. Let me take another shot at it." Then he explained the point again.

Whenever subordinate leaders offered suggestions about the upcoming exercise, the brigade commander took out a pocket notebook and wrote some notes. Even when suggestions sounded lame, he wrote them down. That way, he signaled to the speaker, "Yes, your opinion counts, too." Secondly, by writing down the ideas, the commander guaranteed himself a chance to look at the comments later. He knew from experience that sometimes the ones that don't seem to make sense at first turn out to be quite useful later. Many of the direct leaders remarked that they had never seen a brigade commander do anything like that before. They were even more astonished when they got feedback on the suggestion. The brigade adjutant even explained to one company commander why his suggestion wasn't implemented. On a Saturday morning the brigade

commander was standing in line at the PX when a platoon sergeant engaged him in conversation. "I wasn't around the day you visited my company last week, sir," the NCO said, "but I heard the other folks had a few suggestions for you. I wonder if I could add something. . . . "

Situational Leadership

task behavior

leadership behavior that focuses on giving instructions, directions, training, and guidance involving one-way communication from the leader to the follower

relationship behavior

leadership behavior such as active listening, use of praise, collaboration, consultation, and other social and emotional support involving two-way communication between the leader and the follower that can significantly increase Soldiers' satisfaction and productivity

Situational leadership theory is based on the ways people respond to working and being led in groups. Central to understanding situational leadership are the key concepts of **task behavior**, the amount of guidance and direction you provide; **relationship behavior**, the amount of social and emotional support you provide; *follower readiness*, exhibited in followers performing a specific task or function or accomplishing a specific objective; and *follower development*, followers' maturity and ability to manage themselves in an organizational environment. These variables don't operate independently of each other or in isolation; they are interactive (see Figure 4.1).

According to modern theories of situational leadership developed by P. Hersey, K. H. Blanchard, and D. E. Johnson in their seminal work, *Management of Organizational Behavior: Leading Human Resources*, there is no one best way to influence people. In Army terms, their theory holds that the leadership style you select and use will depend on the environment and the readiness or ability of your unit or your individual Soldiers.

A key point is that the *follower determines the leadership style*; that is, your Soldiers' behavior should determine the leadership behavior most appropriate for you to employ. Specifically, if a Soldier were an engaged self-starter able to accomplish a task, you would choose to get out of the way and allow the Soldier to work independently. On the other hand, if a Soldier seems timid and uncertain about how to proceed or accomplish the task, you would step in and use *task behavior*—instructions, training, and guidance.

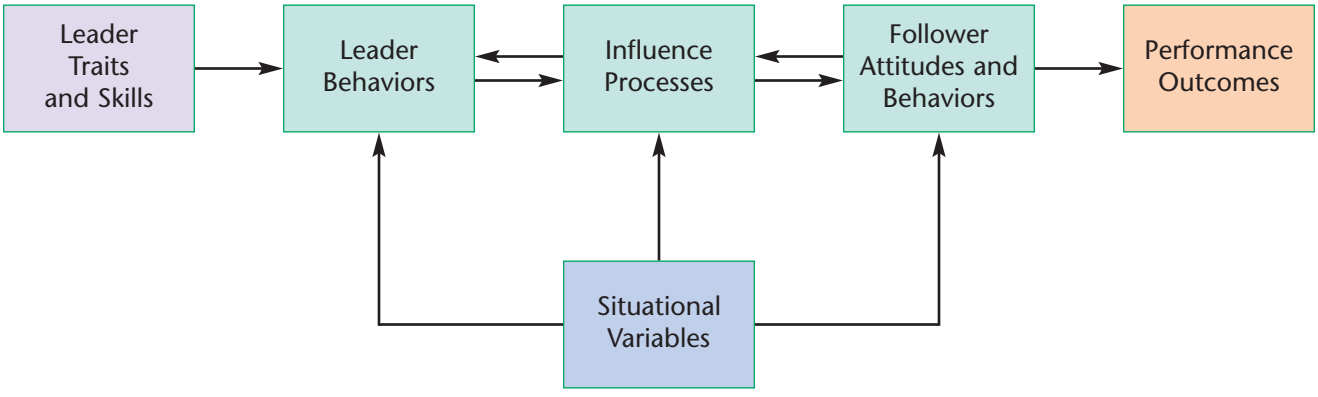

Figure 4.1 Relationship Among Leadership Variables
Taken from Yukl, 2006

Task Behavior

Task behavior is the extent to which you specifically define the duties and responsibilities of an individual or group. Examples of task behavior include directing Soldiers on what to do, how to do it, and when to do it. In his book *Leadership in Organizations,* leadership and organization expert Gary Yukl suggests that task behavior has limitations when used alone, because it tends to have inconclusive effects on follower satisfaction and productivity.

Relationship Behavior

Relationship behavior is the extent to which you engage in two-way or multidirectional communication with your subordinates. Such behavior includes listening, facilitating, praising, collaborating, counseling, consulting, and other socially and emotionally supportive behaviors. Studies have shown that leaders' relationship behavior significantly improves follower performance. In particular, if you reach an impasse in the conduct or progress of a mission, using relationship behaviors can help solve the problem.

And that makes sense, doesn't it? People will respond better if they feel you are supportive and sympathetic to the challenges they face in doing their jobs. If you simply issue orders and then micromanage tasks, you'll have a harder time gaining cooperation from Soldiers who might begin to feel you don't trust them. The old expression "You catch more flies with honey than you do with vinegar" does in fact apply to the way you lead people.

Task behavior and relationship behavior are distinct leadership behaviors, but considered together, they help define four main leadership styles.

The Four Styles of Leader Behavior

In situational leadership theory, organizational and leadership experts identify four basic leadership styles based on task behavior as one axis of a graph and relationship behavior as the other axis (see Figure 4.2).

Style 1 (S1 or Directing): High task/low relationship

This leader uses above-average amounts of task behavior and below-average amounts of relationship behavior.

Style 2 (S2 or Coaching): High task/high relationship

This leader uses greater-than-average amounts of both task and relationship behaviors.

Style 3 (S3 or Supporting): High relationship/low task

This leader exhibits greater-than-average amounts of relationship behavior and below-average amounts of task behavior.

Style 4 (S4 or Delegating): Low relationship/low task

This leader uses below-average amounts of both relationship and task behaviors.

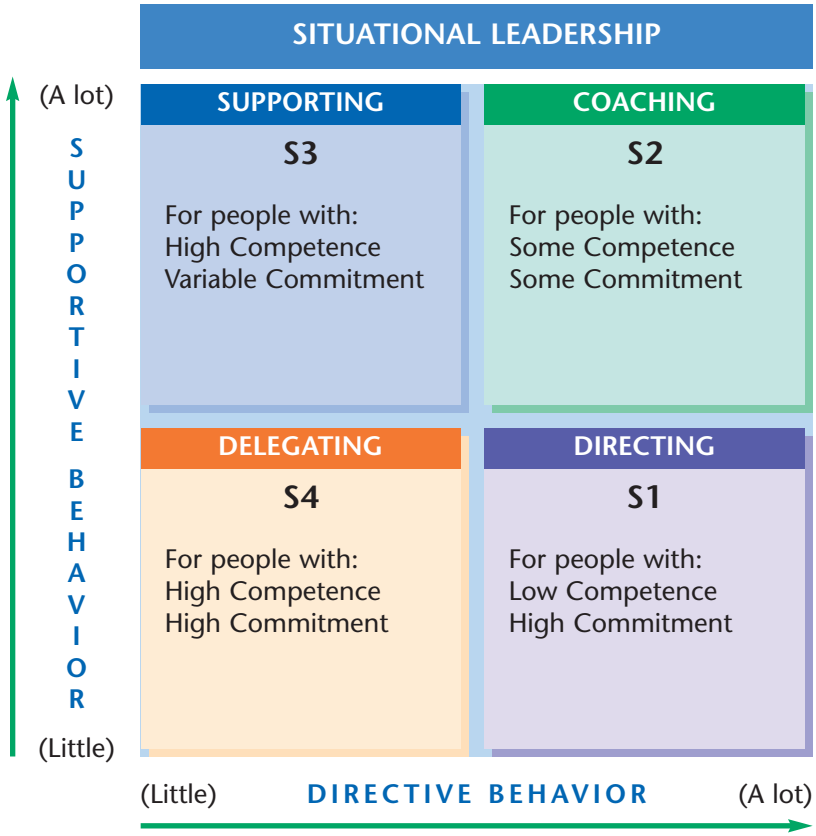

Figure 4.2 Leadership Behavior Grid
Taken from Hersey, Blanchard, and Johnson, 2001

GEN Douglas MacArthur, who commanded US forces in the Far East during World War II, had an instinctive feel for relationship behavior, as comments from his subordinates reveal.

MacArthur's Leadership Style

[GEN Douglas] MacArthur, who was often mistakenly criticized for his remoteness, had the personal touch. "Well I think he had a little bit of what Franklin D. Roosevelt had: this ability to make you feel that you were doing something for him especially," says Frank Rizzo, who worked in the Government Section at SCAP (Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers in Japan) headquarters. Rizzo explained:

> **Let's say it was the top man's ability to engage you with the feeling that it was a privilege to do this for him, that he knew that personally, and that he had asked you personally to do this, whatever it was.**

For example, when I would meet him someplace, he would say, "Thank you very much for taking care of so-and-so." Somebody would come in from Manila, and I would take him around and see that he got his briefings and the rest of it. MacArthur would know about it, and he would thank me personally. He would say "Frank," he wouldn't say "Mr. Rizzo."

Well, after all, this thing that he's talking about is something that I would do anyway. It's part of the business of the section. But he takes it as a personal favor to him and lets me understand that he appreciates it that way. I would say that is a characteristic of a leader.

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MacArthur was an expert at delegation, and the officers that worked for him appreciated the confidence and trust that that implied. President Dwight Eisenhower said, "[MacArthur] was a rewarding man to work for. When he gave an assignment, he never asked any questions; he never cared what kind of hours were kept; his only requirement was that the work be done."

Senior aide Laurence Bunker, who served under MacArthur during the Japanese occupation, also noted "the General's unusual capacity of being willing to delegate authority along with responsibility. In other words, if he gave a man a job, he also gave him adequate authority to carry it out, and then held him responsible for the way he did it and the end result. He didn't nag him while he was on the job. He gave him the job and looked to him to finish it."

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Praise, a no-cost form of recognition that too many leaders neglect, was another of MacArthur's motivational tactics. In December 1944, for example, two privates with the 11th Airborne requested an audience with the five-star general to find out why their division's accomplishments had not received more press attention. MacArthur met with them, explained that he did not want to publicize their unit's position, and provided a message of praise for the division and its commander to deliver on their return to combat.

Theodore Kinni and Donna Kinni, *No Substitute for Victory*

Critical Thinking

Based on the vignette above, where would you place GEN MacArthur on the list of leadership behavior styles?

Follower Readiness

Readiness

In Act 5, Scene Two of Shakespeare's *Hamlet,* the prince remarks that "the readiness is all." Hamlet was right: Understanding readiness is a key element of situational leadership. Soldiers will tend to be at different levels of readiness as they face each task, assignment, or mission. But readiness doesn't refer to a Soldier's personality traits, values, experience, or temperament. Rather, it focuses narrowly on how prepared a Soldier is to carry out a particular assignment or job. Two main factors determine readiness: ability and willingness.

Ability

Ability refers to the knowledge, experience, and skill a Soldier (or unit) brings to a particular assignment or activity. More specifically, it includes knowledge, or the demonstrated understanding of a specific task; skill, or the demonstrated proficiency at a task; and experience, or the demonstrated ability the Soldier has gained from performing a task. When assessing the ability levels of those in your command, you should first carefully consider the job you will be assigning. For example, if a sergeant trained as a welder in civilian life, he or she might not be as much help in writing a draft of a speech for the company awards ceremony as another Soldier who majored in English in college. You must first clearly visualize the outcome of the project you're assigning, then consider who in the unit is best suited by knowledge, skill, and experience to accomplish the task.

Willingness

The degree to which a Soldier or the unit shows confidence, commitment, and motivation to accomplish an assigned activity defines their *willingness.* In other words, willingness consists of the demonstrated *assurance* in the ability to perform the work, the demonstrated *sense of duty* in performing it, and the demonstrated *desire* to perform it.

A lack of willingness might present itself in the Soldier who is uncomfortable with the situation or assignment and, therefore, is not confident that his or her performance will measure up to the standard. The welder-sergeant assigned to write that speech, for example, may have serious doubts about his or her ability to complete the assignment and so balk and stall in doing the job.

Remember that even though both ability and willingness are different, they work in tandem in what Hersey, Blanchard, and Johnson call an *interacting influence system,* where a change in one factor will affect the way both factors operate together. For example, you assure the sergeant that you are interested more in his or her sense of humor and knowledge of unit history than in his or her writing ability in drafting the speech. The sergeant is flattered and returns enthusiastically to compose a draft. In this case, the sergeant's willingness then compensates for a self-perceived lack of ability.

Readiness Levels

The combinations of ability and willingness that Soldiers bring to the assigned activity are called *readiness levels.* Follower readiness breaks down into four discrete levels, with each level representing a different combination of follower willingness, confidence, or ability.

Low Readiness

Readiness level 1 (R1): Unwilling and unable
The Soldier lacks ability, commitment, and motivation. This level may also apply to a subordinate who is both unable and insecure, lacking the confidence to perform a task to standard.

Moderate Readiness

Readiness level 2 (R2): Unable but willing
The Soldier lacks ability, but is motivated and makes an effort to accomplish the mission. The subordinate may also be unable but confident, as long as you are there to provide guidance.

Readiness level 3 (R3): Able but unwilling
The Soldier is able to perform the task, but is unwilling to use that ability. Or the Soldier is able but insecure—showing ability but acting apprehensive and insecure about taking the initiative.

High Readiness

Readiness level 4 (R4): Able and willing
Would that all platoons were full of R4s. This Soldier has the ability and commitment to perform the job. The Soldier is confident about completing the assignment.

Follower Development

Another way to look at your subordinates' "follower styles" is to assess subordinates according to the different levels of development they demonstrate. While not an original component of the Hersey, Blanchard, and Johnson situational leadership model, this system describes four levels of follower development based on follower attributes. The four types of development include *enthusiastic beginner, disillusioned learner, reluctant contributor,* and *peak performer.* They can be described as follows:

Development Level 1 (D1)
Enthusiastic beginner—low competence, high commitment

Development Level 2 (D2)
Disillusioned learner—some competence, low commitment

Development Level 3 (D3)
Reluctant contributor—moderate to high competence, variable commitment

Development Level 4 (D4)
Peak performer—high competence, high commitment.

The leader evaluates the follower on the readiness or development scale and matches his or her behavior style to the follower's development level. So the leader uses Style 1 with a D1 follower, Style 2 with a D2 follower, Style 3 with a D3 follower, and Style 4 with a D4 follower (Figure 4.3). Note that development levels in this model are specific only to the task at hand, not to the follower in general. A Soldier or subordinate leader could be a D1 on one task and a D4 on another.

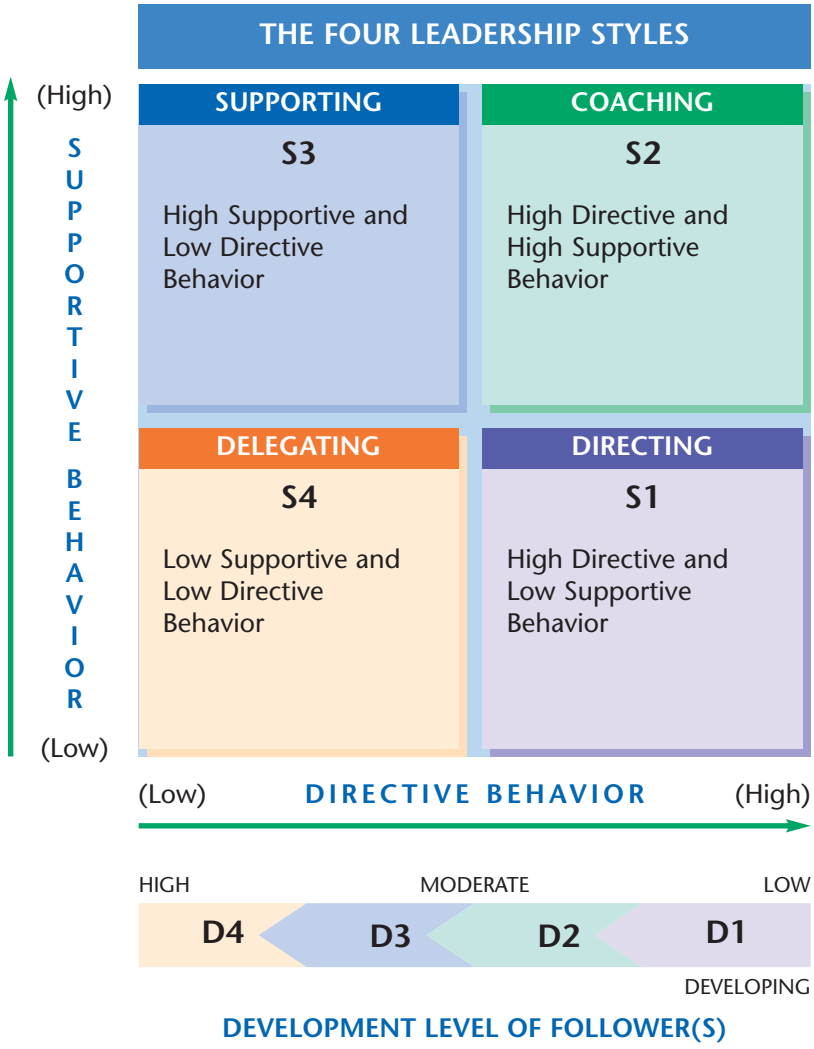

Figure 4.3 Leadership Styles and Development Levels
Taken from Zigarmi, Blanchard, O'Connor, and Edeburn, 2005

Keep in mind that as Soldiers' competence and abilities change, so will their attitudes, levels of enthusiasm, and commitment. That means that you should avoid pigeonholing or labeling your subordinates. Stay open to the prospect of their moving from one level of readiness and follower development to another—either positively or negatively.

These categories of follower behaviors and attitudes are provided merely to help guide your decision making about your own leadership style. Unit training and your good leadership lead to improvement. That improvement, in turn, affects how you choose to lead and will ultimately help you become a more effective leader.

Critical Thinking

Using the criteria set forth in this section, how would you characterize yourself as a leader?

As a future Army leader, you will also be a subordinate. What kind of follower do you think you are?

There must be, within our Army, a sense of purpose. There must be a willingness to march a little farther, to carry a heavier load, to step out into the dark and the unknown for the safety and well-being of others.

GEN Creighton Abrams

CONCLUSION

The situational leadership model supports the notion that there is no one "best practice" for influencing and leading people. Situational leadership evolves from a number of factors. Key among them are the amount of guidance and direction (task behavior) and the amount of social and emotional support (relationship behavior) that you provide your Soldiers.

Your subordinates typically exhibit different levels of readiness in performing specific tasks or functions, depending on their knowledge, skill, and experience. In addition, Soldiers conform to several different follower development levels, according to their maturity and ability to manage themselves in the unit environment.

An important part of success as an Army leader, then, may be your ability to gear your leadership style to the readiness and development levels of your Soldiers and the unit you intend to lead.

Critical Thinking

How do you think situational leadership theory fits with the Army's *Be, Know, Do* leadership framework?

Key Words

readiness
task behavior
relationship behavior

Learning Assessment

1. What factors characterize situational leadership?
2. What are the four styles of leader behavior?
3. What are the four follower readiness levels?
4. What are the four levels of follower development?

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