



Situational Leadership

1. Introduction

The basic premise of situational leadership is that there is no one single method of leadership, but that a supervisor needs to adapt his or her style of leadership to the situation. Keen assessment skills and flexibility are the key concepts for this type of supervision.

2. Styles

There are two variables that determine the style of leadership. These are directing and supporting.

- Direction is giving specific instructions and checking the execution of tasks precisely.
- Support is encouraging, asking for suggestions and explaining decisions.

Four styles are formulated with these two variables:

- Instructing: lots of direction and a limited amount of support;
- Convincing: less direction and lots of support;
- Coaching: very little direction, lots of support;
- Delegating: very little direction, very little support

Directive behavior is more one-way; top-down. Elements that determine the type of direction: structure, control and supervision.

Supportive behavior relies more on the relational side of communication, is more between two equals; bottom-up. Elements that determine the type of support: praise, listening and facilitation.

Directive behavior is suitable in situations that require quick decisions, when risks are great. When there is a fire, it is hardly appropriate to form small project groups to outline a plan of action; action needs to be taken quickly. This style is also suitable for directing people who have little experience but ample potential for learning: an enthusiastic beginner for example.

The supportive style is meant for situations that call for influence on the motivation of the PhD student. Reinforcement, encouragement and good listening skills are then required.



3. Taxation

The Situational Leadership model describes four stages in terms of task maturity. The style needed in approaching an PhD student regarding a certain task depends on two elements that determine the PhD student's performance: competence and motivation/commitment. Competence is the product of knowledge and skill and is acquired through education, training and experience. Commitment is the will existent in an PhD student to carry out the task. With these two variables four levels are distinguished regarding carrying out a certain task. These levels are:

- level 1: low competence, low motivation;
- level 2: low competence, high motivation;
- level 3: high competence, variable motivation;
- level 4: high competence, high motivation.

At level 1 PhD students are neither competent nor committed to carry out a certain task. When it slowly becomes clear how a PhD student needs to tackle a certain task, the level of commitment rises (level 2). But the PhD student is still not competent enough to carry out this task independently. Next the PhD student learns more about the exact nature of the task and realizes his competence is limited, and sometimes loses interest in the task. This makes motivation drop (level 3). Providing challenging and doable tasks, positive feedback and encouraging discussions helps the PhD student to regain their motivation.

As competence increases confidence grows. Finally the PhD student is competent and the execution of the tasks becomes 'intrinsically rewarding' (level 4). At this level someone can work entirely independently and satisfaction is mainly gained from the work itself. People reward themselves as it were.



Job maturity PhD student	Suitable leadership style	Influence technique
Level 1 low competence low motivation	Instruction Structure, control and supervision	Prescriptive
Level 2 low competence high motivation	Advising Direction and support Convince	Prescriptive Logical Motivational
Level 3 High competence variable motivation	Coaching Praise, listening and facilitation	Logical Motivational Relational
Level 4 High competence strong motivation	Delegating Transfer responsibility for the daily decision making.	Relational

4. Open process

The supervisor who wants to approach his students this way will need to take various ground rules into account. One important factor for example is that the assessment of the competence and motivation of a PhD student is an open process in which both parties participate. The leader needs to communicate clearly to what extent he or she judges the student to be competent at specific tasks.

In this regard the student needs to enter into some type of contract about his or her performance. If this is neglected, it remains vague to the student how the supervisor makes the assessment. Concretely this means that the relevant tasks need to be discussed, as well as which performance/efforts are to be expected. The task must contribute to the total package of activities.