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## The Situational Leadership® Model

Situational Leadership® is one of the most effective ways of leading an organization, yet it is often absent from the list of dominant [leadership styles](#). Learning how to be a situational leader helps business owners and executives effectively guide team members who are at various levels of development. “What Situational Leadership teaches is that you need to do your diagnosis first and then act on it to provide those things that can make a difference,” [says](#) Paul Hershey, co-founder of the Hersey-Blanchard Situational Leadership Model.

Below, find out how to grow a cohesive, strong team that achieves your organizational vision by learning more about Situational Leadership.

## What is Situational Leadership?

Situational Leadership is a flexible, adaptable style of leadership that determines whether a leader is more directive or supportive based on their followers’ individualized needs. For instance, business owners, executives, and managers who practice this type of leadership shift their management style based on a person’s development.

## Situational Leadership Defined in 5 Qualities

Because Situational Leadership is a leadership model, it is best defined by how it is put into action. For example, business leaders make it applicable in their organizations by:

1. **Analyzing:** Situational managers focus on identifying and analyzing team members’ performance readiness factors, which helps them adjust their style of leadership.
2. **Adapting:** This type of leader can quickly shift out of the four influencing behaviors. Even if they’re dealing with more than one person at a time, they can still seamlessly transition based on the needs of those in the room.
3. **Influencing:** Rather than using authority, those practicing situational management build influence, which comes from building trust and a safe work environment.
4. **Serving:** The purpose of Situational Leadership is serving others by being flexible with what employees need from the person guiding them.
5. **Developing:** Followers’ growth is the primary goal of a situational leader. Because of this, they often serve as a coach who guides their team members through learning experiences and opportunities.

# Why Learning About Situational Leadership Matters

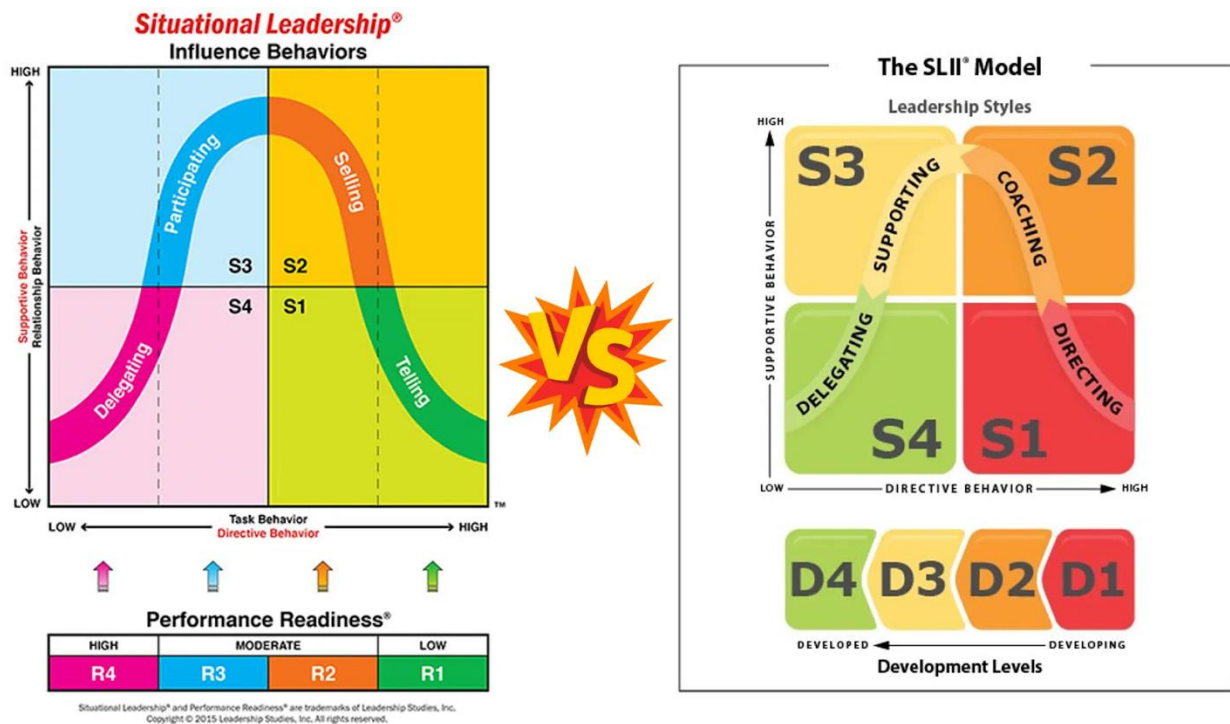
Instead of leading from a one-dimensional angle, situational leaders effectively guide their organizations by strategically deploying their [leadership qualities](#). Therefore, they create better outcomes by modifying themselves to positively influence team members.

Situational Leadership results in increased productivity and heightened levels of job satisfaction. According to [research](#) published by Scientific & Academic Publishing, “Situational Leadership was proven to be a very effective leadership style to motivate employees in different kinds of sectors. According to the results obtained . . . task behavior theory . . . is directly related to the improvement of employee’s task productivity.”

Simply put, effective [leadership](#) isn’t one size fits all—people within an organization differ from one another. While some might need more support and direction, others may need the exact opposite. As Paul Hersey, co-creator of the model wrote: “People differ not only in their ability to do but also in their ‘will to do.’” Regardless of these differences, situational leaders serve in a way that gets everyone working toward a collective vision.

## The Background of Situational Leadership Theory

As referenced above, Hersey co-authored *Management of Organizational Behavior* with Ken Blanchard in 1969. In this foundational work, the two developed Situational Leadership theory. The concept lays out a business owner’s or manager’s relationship between task behavior and relationship behavior when interacting with their followers through a simple visual:



## Explanation of Situational Leadership

There are four different leadership styles paired with four levels of team members' Performance Readiness® or maturity. In chronological order, the leadership styles rank from **least ready** (requiring the most amount of direction and support) to **most ready** (requiring the least amount of direction and support).

### Telling (S1)

Followers who have the lowest amount of Performance Readiness require the highest amount of attention. For example, this [leadership style](#) is typically used when someone is new to their role, not a self-starter, or failing to meet standards. When an employee cannot make decisions for themselves, a telling leader calls the shots. They set clearly defined goals and deadlines and also regularly check in on progress.

### Selling (S2)

Selling leaders serve as an influential, supportive figure for those who show interest in learning how to execute a job well done. This Situational Leadership style is used when providing motivation, growing buy-in, and building trust. In essence, a selling leader proves themselves as someone capable of leading their team members.

### Participating (S3)

A participating leader creates a collaborative, encouraging environment where input is welcome. While the employee at hand might be more experienced and capable than those requiring the telling or selling styles, they still need support. When practicing this style, hands-on leaders let the team member do the decision-making but help as needed.

### Delegating (S4)

This Situational Leadership style is practiced when dealing with experienced, competent, and motivated team members. These team members are granted the highest level of autonomy because they've proven they can successfully direct themselves. With this type of person, business owners and managers can be more hands-off, yet still offer support if the person needs it.

## SLII® Differences

Blanchard introduced a newly revised version of Situational Leadership in 1985 in *A Situational Approach to Managing People*. The model does feature a few differences but still operates by pairing leadership styles to an employee's needs.

## **A few of his most significant changes to the model are:**

- Changing all the leadership style names except “Delegating” to “Directing” (Telling), “Coaching” (Selling), and “Supporting” (Participating).
- Restructuring “Performance Readiness” to become “Development Level.”
- Reworking the various leadership styles and developmental stages to fit the evolution of a new hire growing into a seasoned key player.

## **Situational Leadership Examples**

The following people serve as great examples of what the situational model looks like in practice. While understanding the theory is important, it’s equally beneficial for situational leaders to see how the model works.

### **Dwight D. Eisenhower, 34th U.S. President and Five-Star General**

*“Plans are worthless, but planning is everything.”*

Eisenhower is famously known as a highly adaptable situational leader. Dwight D. Eisenhower’s Situational Leadership served him as the Supreme Commander of the Allied Expeditionary Force in Europe, president of Columbia University, and later the 34th U.S. president. While these positions of power differed, Dwight D. Eisenhower always led by studying people and thinking strategically. For example, during his presidency, he deeply analyzed other political leaders and tried to figure out what he called their “personal equation.” Eisenhower’s Situational Leadership gave him a greater understanding of those he worked with helped him realize how he could positively influence them.

### **Phil Jackson, NBA Coach**

*“The strength of the team is each individual member. The strength of each member is the team.”*

Jackson coached some of the greatest basketball players in history: Michael Jordan, Dennis Rodman, Kobe Bryant, and Shaquille O’Neal. He treated each player as an individual, analyzing their strengths and the places they could grow to better the team as a whole. For example, he quickly used the delegating leadership style with Jordan, but O’Neal required a more hands-on approach. Jackson knew Shaq was a phenomenal player but wasn’t at his optimal performance level when he joined the team. In a speech captured by Lakers Nation, Jackson says he challenged Shaq to play 48 minutes a game. This hands-on leadership approach led to Shaq winning MVP that year.

## Steve Jobs, Co-Founder of Apple

*“It doesn’t make sense to hire smart people and tell them what to do; we hire smart people so they can tell us what to do.”*

Apple co-founder [Steve Jobs](#) was a multi-faceted leader, which is why it’s difficult to categorize his leadership style. Based on the way he guided others, he was most likely to be a situational leader. His behavior and actions truly depended on the situation and individual he was dealing with at the time. While he was undoubtedly an incredibly inspiring CEO, he also lacked a high level of emotional control. When using the telling leadership style, Jobs could speak with a cutting directness. His example goes to show that even outstanding leaders still have room for improvement. Using these leadership styles is a process that requires dedication and the constant pursuit of growth and development.

## Additional Resources

The information about the Situational Leadership style in this article condenses a large body of research on the subject. For those still interested in learning more about it, read:

- [\*Management of Organizational Behavior\*](#)
- [\*The One Minute Manager\*](#)
- [\*Situational Leadership: Conversations with Paul Hersey\*](#)
- [\*5 Levels of Leadership\*](#)

Additionally, business owners and their teams can find training support for SLII® with The Ken Blanchard Companies, [here](#).

Want more ways to effectively lead your team? Check out “[Leadership Styles: Learn the 7 Different Management Types](#)” next.