

# Article

## Situational Leadership, an Entrepreneur's Perspective

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As a business executive, entrepreneur and team leader the thought of situational leadership was always aligned with that of common sense in my mind. In fact, the Hersey/Blanchard model was one of the first derivatives of the various situational leadership theories that leveraged the concepts against tangible behaviors.

It has been proven that professional growth is driven by skill set enhancement, and skill set enhancement is driven by knowledge. Issues arise in organizations when these two activities are looked upon as being mutually exclusive. As leaders of people and companies, we are expected to identify and develop our subordinates. This development process can take many shapes including: training, coaching, modeling and shadow work. Any of these methods can and will result in knowledge transfer, the question, however, is will this knowledge transfer lead to improved performance?

At the end of the day, we all want to realize improvement or optimization of our efforts leading to improvement. In today's business climate successful results are looked upon as being instantaneous and providing immediate gratification is the norm. So, how can an employee take the time to compare, contrast or even digest new information if they are expected to show immediate results as a derivative from the new skills they have been exposed to?

Herein lies the conflict in most organizations, and it really reflects back on the overall leadership culture of the organization. Today's leaders have difficulty taking accountability for their subordinates and thus they lack the true essence of the situational leadership model. This breakdown is one of the core issues that derail good intentions and produce contradictory results.

It is imperative that managers embrace the tangible elements of the situational leadership concepts to ensure they apply the principals in their own behaviors before expecting results from subordinates. There have been many organizational models, theories and concepts over the years and they all focus on the improved performance of an organization. The situational leadership model is no different except that it ties the theory back to behaviors of individuals and allows the manager to correlate real organizational change with each interaction.

I have found in both my consulting practice and real executive management experience that embracing the Leadership Styles, Development Levels and Leadership/Development Matching aspects of the Hersey/Blanchard model provides both a proactive tool to guide employee growth as well as an ongoing tool to assist with professional development.

In many cases training gap analysis and organizational effectiveness assessments focus only on the skill set of an individual, job function or cross section of the same. In order to take full advantage of the situational leadership model a company must integrate the process with learning events. They must realize that learning events take place in every interaction a leader has with a subordinate. This is a relevant point because the success of true situational leadership is greatly enhanced when the organization embraces a belief in "continuous learning."



Our consultants, facilitators and teams have always professed that an organization will not succeed in continuous learning until it embraces a structure to support creativity, open feedback and trust.

Consider the structure of your organization and look at it as the skeleton upon which you will build the behaviors associated with situational leadership. I believe it is a prerequisite to evaluate the organizational culture and make any adjustments necessary to support a true learning model prior to implementation.

In order to prepare your company's leaders and structure for the implementation of situational leadership it is suggested that you evaluate the following:

- Strategic alignment with a continuous learning environment.
- Baseline management and supervisory skill sets.
- Objectives for employee growth and advancement.
- Career path aligned training curriculum.
- Aligned performance review process.
- Communication protocols that support continuous feedback.
- On-going coaching and mentoring programs.
- Visible behavioral model that supports all of the above.

Once the above bullets are embraced as a prominent component to the daily behavioral pattern of both managers and staff you will have accomplished a good balance between goals, values and culture. This balance will permit the continued growth of employees and managers driven by each interaction.

The overall benefit will be seen in performance, reduced turn-over and generally improved morale. Furthermore, you can expect a heightened level of accountability not only in the management realms but throughout the entire organization.

Finally, I would conclude that the aspects of situational leadership can greatly benefit an organization and its leaders. With that said it must be understood that the concepts must be embraced by everyone in the company and, more importantly, the company must be structured to support the situational leadership theory.