**LESSON 20: SITUATIONAL LEADERSHIP**

**Introduction**

This lesson consists of:

1. Situational Leadership Theory

2. Case Study

3. Student Journal Entry

4. *Twelve O’clock High* Background Information

**Assignment**

1. **Read Course Guide**, pages 2 - 6.

2. When you solve a case study or act as a leader in your organization:

I. ***Identify*** the **Areas of Interest**.

II. ***Analyze*** the situation using Situational Leadership Theory.

A. ***Identify*** the follower level of development.

B. ***Classify*** the leader’s current leadership style.

III. ***Explain*** an Area of Interest in terms of the mismatch between the leader’s current leadership style in this situation and follower’s level of development.

IV. ***Select*** an appropriate theoretical leader strategy(ies) to address Areas of Interest.

V. ***Apply*** the theoretical leader strategy(ies) to the situation in the form of a specific leader plan that addresses all Areas of Interest.

VI. ***Assess***, evaluate, and revise your leader plan.

3. **Complete a Student Journal entry** for Situational Leadership.

Using a police group or organization of which you have been a member or the leader, briefly describe a situation where the group/organization was not functioning as efficiently as possible. At which level of development were the group/organization members? What leadership style did you/the leader use? Was there a match? Assuming a mismatch, what was the impact of the mismatch on individual, group, and organizational outcomes? What could the leader have done differently to create a better match between follower level of development and leader style?

**SITUATIONAL LEADERSHIP THEORY**

In Lesson 18, we explored leadership as a social exchange in which both leaders and followers have something to offer, something to gain, and potentially something to lose in their interactions. We also introduced the concept of the Locus of Leadership (refer to Figure 25 in Lesson 18), which illustrates the interaction among the leader, the follower, and the environment. Additionally, we examined Vertical Dyad Linkage Theory, which explains how leaders adjust their leadership styles between formal and informal by categorizing followers as either part of the Out-Group or the In-Group.

In this lesson, we will build on these ideas by focusing on how successful leaders adapt their leadership styles to meet the demands of various situations. Using Hersey and Blanchard’s Situational Leadership Theory, we will see how effective leaders combine directive and supportive behaviors according to the competence and commitment levels of their followers—referred to as follower development—to optimize group performance.

Since the core of this theory lies in aligning leader behaviors with follower characteristics, the leader must first accurately assess each employee’s current level of development. For instance, new officers often possess limited skills but have high enthusiasm for their new roles, while more experienced officers may demonstrate the same enthusiasm but possess significantly greater skills. Based on this assessment of followers' abilities and motivation, Situational Leadership suggests that leaders should treat these two groups differently by adjusting their behaviors to align with the followers’ attributes.

It’s important to remember that both followers and the situations they face are dynamic. As new employees become more familiar with their roles, they typically require less supervision. However, life circumstances can affect even the most skilled employees; they may lose competence when facing personal challenges, when assigned new tasks, or when new goals are set. Situational Leadership advocates that leaders must also adapt their behaviors accordingly to maintain effectiveness and ensure the group operates at an optimal level.

When there is a misalignment between leader actions and a follower’s development level, it can lead to poor individual performance, as well as suboptimal group and organizational performance. Let’s take a closer look at these two critical sets of variables and briefly examine their application in the workplace.

**The Followers’ Level of Development**

In Situational Leadership, follower development refers to a follower's combined competence and commitment to perform a specific task without supervision. Competence is defined as a follower's knowledge and skills necessary to accomplish that task, and it can be acquired through education, training, and experience. Commitment encompasses a follower's confidence and motivation to complete the same task. A confident follower believes they can perform a task well with minimal supervision, while a motivated follower shows genuine interest and enthusiasm for the task at hand.

Considering these two developmental variables, there are four possible combinations of follower development. Situational Leadership categorizes these combinations into four distinct development levels, each reflecting an individual employee's or group's competence and commitment. These four levels are illustrated below.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **FOLLOWERS’ DEVELOPMENT LEVEL** | **COMPETENCE** | **COMMITMENT** |
| **D1 (Enthusiastic Beginner)** | Low | High |
| **D2 (Disillusioned Learner)** | Some | Low |
| **D3 (Reluctant Contributor)** | High | Variable |
| **D4 (Peak Performer)** | High | High |

Individual development is not a straightforward or linear progression. As individuals advance from level D1 to level D4, their competence and commitment fluctuate.

For instance, when starting a new task, most individuals are enthusiastic and eager to learn, despite having little prior knowledge or experience. This stage is represented by D1, the Enthusiastic Beginner.

As they begin to engage with the task, individuals may gain some job knowledge. However, they often find the task more challenging or less interesting than they initially expected. This disillusionment can reduce their commitment, even as their competence grows. This situation is defined as level D2, the Disillusioned Learner.

Once employees navigate these initial stages and learn to perform the task, they may enter a phase of self-doubt or even resistance. They might question their ability to perform well independently or reconsider their desire to continue the task. As the initial excitement wears off and the training support diminishes, employees may find themselves at level D3, the Reluctant Contributor. This back-and-forth between feelings of competence and self-doubt results in variable commitment at this stage.

Eventually, when self-doubt is overcome and the group is functioning independently, employees reach level D4, the Peak Performer.

**The Leader Behaviors**

Situational Leadership generally categorizes leader behaviors into two types: directive and supportive.

Directive leader behavior refers to the extent to which a leader communicates in a one-way manner, clearly defines the followers’ roles, and instructs them on what to do, where to do it, and how to proceed. This type of leader closely supervises the followers’ performance.

On the other hand, supportive behavior is characterized by two-way communication. A supportive leader listens to their followers, encourages, facilitates interactions, and involves them in decision-making processes.

Given these two dimensions of leader behavior, there are four possible combinations, or styles, of leadership. Situational Leadership identifies and defines these four styles.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **STYLE** | **LEADER BEHAVIORS** | |
| **DIRECTIVE** | **SUPPORTIVE** |
| **S1 (Directing)** | High | Low |
| **S2 (Coaching)** | High | High |
| **S3 (Supporting)** | Low | High |
| **S4 (Delegating)** | Low | Low |

High directive and low supportive behavior is known as the Directing leader style, labeled as leader behavior S1. In this style, the leader defines the roles of the followers and instructs them on what, how, when, and where to perform various tasks. Problem-solving and decision-making are solely initiated by the leader, who announces solutions and decisions. Communication is primarily one-way, and the leader closely supervises the implementation. While this style may seem highly authoritarian, it is appropriate for an Enthusiastic Beginner, or a group at development level D1.

As discussed, a D1 group or individual is eager to start learning a new task but lacks competence. Thus, a Directing/S1 style, which provides clear and specific direction along with close supervision, will best meet their needs in accomplishing the task. Since their commitment is high, extensive support from the leader is not necessary.

High directive and high supportive behavior is referred to as Coaching or leader behavior S2. In this style, the leader offers substantial direction and shares their ideas while also attempting to understand the employees’ feelings, ideas, and suggestions. Although two-way communication and support are emphasized, the leader retains control over decision-making. This behavior fits best with Disillusioned Learner or D2 followers.

As noted, D2 followers possess some competence but lack the commitment to take responsibility. They need both direction and support. The Coaching/S2 leader behavior provides the necessary directive support for those who lack competence, while also offering supportive behavior to build their confidence and enthusiasm. This style encourages two-way communication and helps foster the confidence and motivation (commitment) of followers who are struggling to acquire new skills. Coaching leaders maintain control and responsibility for decision-making until the group develops the necessary competence in the task.

High supportive and low directive behavior is known as Supporting or S3 leader behavior. In this style, control over day-to-day decision-making and problem-solving shifts from the leader to the followers. The leader’s role is to provide recognition, actively listen, and facilitate problem-solving and decision-making conducted by the followers. This style is appropriate for employees or groups at the Reluctant Contributor/D3 level of development.

Employees at this development level are competent but display variable commitment toward the assigned task, which often stems from a lack of confidence. If they are confident but uncommitted—since commitment encompasses both motivation and confidence—their reluctance to perform is primarily a motivation issue. In either case, the leader needs to maintain open communication and provide support to encourage followers to build on their existing skills while incorporating newly acquired ones.

Low supportive and low directive behavior is termed Delegating, or S4 leader behavior. In this style, the leader discusses problems and goals with the follower(s) and then allows the follower(s) to make their own decisions. Employees possess significant autonomy and control over how tasks are accomplished. Individuals in this category are empowered to manage their responsibilities independently. With a D4 group, a delegating style is most suitable.

A common misconception is that Delegating/S4 leader behavior means the leader is entirely uninvolved. This is not true. An organizational leader is always ultimately responsible for their group’s actions and accomplishments. Rather, an S4 leader has the opportunity to spend more time on goal setting and problem identification, while spending less (but not negligible) time monitoring job performance, as employees at this development level are trained, motivated, and aligned with the leader’s objectives.

**Key Points about Using Situational Leadership**

Situational Leadership can and should be proactive. Enlightened leaders anticipate upcoming situational variables and adjust their leadership behaviors accordingly. If the demands of the job change, employees' motivation fluctuates, or daily operations undergo adjustments, the Situational Leader should foresee potential problems. Future challenges, as well as opportunities, may require leaders to adopt behaviors better suited to enhance organizational performance in a new context.

As you consider Situational Leadership, keep in mind one implicit but essential assumption: Leaders must be willing and able to adapt their behavior to meet the needs of their followers. But is this truly achievable? Reflect on the following questions:

- Do you intentionally adjust your leadership style based on the situation?

- Do you modify it according to employee needs?

- Can you recall instances where you have done this before?

- If not, do you believe you possess the ability to do so?

- If you find it difficult to change your leadership behavior, how can you still optimize group performance?

**Conclusion**

Hersey and Kenneth Blanchard’s Situational Leadership is one of the earliest and most fundamental leadership theories. It offers a straightforward yet effective way to understand leadership concepts. As we delve deeper into this topic, we will also explore other situational variables and alternative theories.

**Reference**

The material cited in this lesson is from Hersey, Paul and Ken Blanchard, *Management of Organizational Behavior: Utilizing Human Resources,* 4th ed., (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc.), 1982. Since then, Hersey and Blanchard have revised their model and republished their book, which is now in its eighth edition (2001). You may have attended training that presented this theory based on their refined model, but the basic concepts remain the same.

Case Study

You are the Commanding Officer of Detective Services Group. Several diverse investigative units are under your command, including Robbery Homicide Division (RHD). You are always busy and frequently in the public’s eye because your divisions are responsible for the high profile, complex cases that exhaust the resources or expertise of area detective divisions.

Lately, you have become worried about the Robbery-Homicide Division (RHD). Captain Jim Horne is the new commanding officer; he had recently come to Robbery Homicide following the retirement of the legendary Bill Jones. Captain Bill Jones had led the division for ten years. Jones developed RHD’s excellent reputation throughout the law enforcement community. Recently, however, under Captain Horne’s leadership, RHD has shown a noticeable decline in performance. Last week the Major Crimes Section of RHD executed a search warrant at the wrong address and dragged an elderly woman from her bed at gunpoint. This proved to be a public relations nightmare. What concerned you most was that this blunder was caused by sloppy police work, the type not normally attributed to this elite division. It also showed a lack of supervision by Captain Horne.

Jim Horne desperately wants to do well; he recently located and attended two FBI seminars and a Crime Scene Management Course. His use of these skills has proven adequate for managing basic investigations, but he soon learned that the classroom and the real world are two very different places.

You remembered how Captain Horne had come to you for guidance after the bad search warrant execution. Unfortunately, he walked in at a time when you were busy. You told him, “Look, Jim, you were put in this position to lead RHD. If I do your job for you, you’ll always be coming to me for the right answers. Then I might as well take over your division myself. I’m in charge of several major investigative functions in the department; I can’t run all of the divisions myself. You were brought here to take care of RHD. You know what is expected of you; now go out there and do it!”

Despite his initial enthusiasm for his new position, Captain Horne has become very frustrated with the obvious decline of RHD. Since his arrival, the division has shown a lack of initiative and the robbery and homicide crime statistics are increasing. Captain Horne is anxious to turn things around.

Recently, the Robbery Special Section of RHD received information from a confidential reliable informant. Ben Raffi, the ringleader in a series of armed robberies of jewelry stores, intended to rob Jeffrey McNally’s Gems at closing time on Friday night. Robbery Homicide Division met with patrol units and prepared the tactical plans to intercept and arrest Ben Raffi and his ring of hoods. No surveillance or Metropolitan units were used.

The jewelry store robbery became a disaster. Patrol Sergeant Barry White and RHD Detective Lisa Stockton were guarding the back door of the business, but they were caught off-guard by an armed lay-off suspect in the rear alley. That suspect fired at both White and Stockton, causing gunshot wounds to the legs of both officers. RHD Detective III Larry MacDonald, who was not wearing body armor, rushed to the aid of White and Stockton and mortally wounded the suspect. In the exchange of gunfire, however, Detective MacDonald was shot once in the chest. MacDonald will survive, but he’ll probably be hospitalized for several weeks and medically retired.

In your heart, you blame Captain Horne but you also blame yourself. You consider getting Horne transferred out of your command, but you realize there is no one available with better qualifications. Besides, you worry about shaking up RHD with a new leader all over again. Immediately, you must meet with the wounded officers and their families, confer with the chief of police, and handle the media. You know that it is your responsibility to, somehow get Captain Horne back on his feet and performing at the level you know he can attain.

I. ***Identify*** the **Areas of Interest**.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

9.

10.

(If necessary, continue listing **Areas of Interest** on another page.)

II. ***Analyze*** the situation using Situational Leadership Theory.

What is the relationship among the Areas of Interest listed above? More specifically, is there a chronological order or **logical chain of events** that helps you make sense of the facts you have? If so, outline the time sequence of events.

What is this follower’s current development level?

How much (high or low) directive behavior has the leader provided?

How much (high or low) supportive behavior has the leader provided?

How would you classify the leader’s current style?

III. ***Explain*** an Area of Interest in terms of the mismatch between the leader’s current leadership style in this situation and the follower’s level of development.

How has the mismatch between Captain Horne’s development level and the leader’s style influenced the motivation, satisfaction, and/or performance of individuals in this scenario?

What is the impact of the leader-follower mismatch on the working group’s performance?

Has the mismatch affected the organization’s performance? How?

Do the facts of the case and your explanation form a pattern that allows you to identify a fundamental or **root cause** (i.e., is there something in the case information that suggests it is the underlying cause of all or most of the Areas of Interest)?

IV. ***Select*** an appropriate theoretical leader strategy(ies) that would be effective in this situation.

Which theoretical leader strategy(ies) should the leader use to address the Area(s) of Interest in this situation?

V. ***Apply*** the theoretical leader strategy(ies) to the situation in the form of a specific leader plan that addresses all Areas of Interest. The plan should be realistic and holistic, address all the Areas of Interest you have identified, and translate the theoretical leader strategies into real world action. What will you do and say to whom, when, where, and how?

VI. ***Assess*** the effectiveness of your leader plan and revise as needed. After your leader plan, list the measures you would use to evaluate your actions. In this step, leaders need to ask, “What information do I need to tell whether or not my leadership is having the desired effects? How will I obtain the information I need? How can it be generated? Who can help me get what I need? How often should I collect data and in what form?”

Name:

**Complete a Student Journal entry** for Situational Leadership.

Using a police group or organization of which you have been a member or the leader, briefly describe a situation where the group/organization was not functioning as efficiently as possible. At which level of development were the group/organization members? What leadership style did you/the leader use? Was there a match? Assuming a mismatch, what was the impact of the mismatch on individual, group, and organizational outcomes? What could the leader have done differently to create a better match between follower level of development and leader style?

**Twelve O’clock High: Synopsis and Background**

*Twelve O’clock High* is a 1949 Academy Award winning film that portrays the intense aerial combat of the Allied bombing campaign against Germany in WWII. The film takes place at Archbury Airfield, England, and focuses on the men of the American 918th Bomber Group. As the film opens, the 918th has just returned from another bombing mission against German targets in France. The 918th’s performance is bad. The unit has been unable to hit targets, and it is experiencing an unusually high number of aircraft and aircrew losses. Very poor weather, combined with daylight and low-altitude bombing missions have not made things any easier for the 918th. Morale and satisfaction are low, as is the motivation to perform to standard. Many members of the unit are making excuses to miss duty. Yet the other Bomber Groups in the 8th Air Force are having much higher levels of success, under the same general conditions.

The 918th has developed the reputation of being a hard luck unit. Yet, despite these issues, the men of the 918th are extremely loyal to their commander, Colonel (COL) Keith Davenport. To his men, Davenport is their friend and confidant, and in their eyes, he can do no wrong. COL Davenport attributes the failures of his unit to external influences (remember attribution theory from earlier in the course). He believes that the failures are due to impossible missions issued from higher headquarters that place inordinate demands upon his unit and personnel capabilities. Additionally, he blames the bad weather and inaccurate intelligence about the strength and location of enemy anti-aircraft defenses. He feels that higher headquarters has generally lost touch with the reality that combat crews experience and is consequently loosing good men by executing bad missions.

Concerned about this situation and the 918th’s poor performance, the 8th air force commander, Major General (MG) Pritchard, decides to personally visit the 918th with his operations officer, Brigadier General (BG) Frank Savage (Gregory Peck). COL Davenport relates his concerns to MG Pritchard in an intensely emotional and confrontational meeting. MG Pritchard, recognizing that COL Davenport is no longer an effective commander, relieves him of command and orders the 918th to stand down from operational missions. In a very poignant scene, MG Pritchard asks BG Savage to take command of the 918th in what Pritchard believes might very well be an impossible task. This sets the stage for the remainder of this classic tale of a leader, faced with a difficult task under the worst of circumstances, who demonstrates tremendous leadership knowledge, skills, and abilities.

Some of the key events that occur in the film are listed below:

1. BG Savage arrives at the 918th Bomb Group Headquarters and finds that discipline is poor. He reviews the personnel files of all the members of the group.

2. The air executive officer (the primary assistant and second in command to the Group Commander), Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) Ben Gately, a solid officer with a strong file, is not at his place of duty. Savage orders the Military Police to find and arrest him. When he is found, Savage chastises him, removes him from his air executive officer position, and puts him in charge of the Leper Colony, a single aircraft where all of the 918th’s misfits will be assigned.

3. Under a great deal of tension, Savage conducts his first Air Mission Brief. He does not believe in the bad luck label and orders the 918th to fly practice missions until operational missions resume. This is a back to basics approach. He also offers a transfer to anyone who cannot cut the mustard and perform to Savage’s standards.

4. BG Savage tells the flight surgeon, Captain Kaiser, that the unit does not have medical problems. Rather, Savage believes it lacks the pride necessary for sustained combat operations. Savage tells Kaiser that aircrewmen should be so motivated to fly with their crews that the last thing in their mind should be being left on the ground.

5. Every pilot in the 918th submits a request for transfer. However, Savage earns a confidant in the group adjutant (the group’s HR director and principle administrator), Major (MAJ) Stovall, who delays the processing of the requests for transfer.

6. During the second Air Mission Brief, Savage tells the men that their performance is improving. He then conducts an after action review, challenging each man to justify his actions during the mission. Savage focuses on one bomber commander who left his formation to help a damaged aircraft that was piloted by his best friend. Savage chews out the commander for his action. Savage criticizes the commander for putting himself and his feelings ahead of the needs of the group, emphasizing that every bomber is essential to maintain group integrity and effectiveness.

7. Savage leads the 918th on a successful mission after MG Pritchard (Savage’s boss) recalled all three bomber groups in mid-mission because of bad weather. We learn in a post mission meeting between Pritchard and Savage that Savage ignored the call citing a broken radio. Despite Savage’s intentional violation of orders, the 918th effectively completes the mission with no bomber losses, thereby earning a unit commendation (award) for their bravery.

8. Savage has a discussion with Lieutenant Jesse Bishop, a Medal of Honor nominee and peer leader among the 918th’s pilots, about why the unit still lacks pride. The discussion centers on why they are doing what they are doing. Savage explains the importance of their mission.

9. The inspector general (an independent and feared investigation office) comes to Archbury to investigate why requests for transfer have not been forwarded to higher headquarters for action (see #5 above). MAJ Joe Cobb, the new air executive officer, announces to Stovall and Savage that the pilots pulled their requests electing to stay in the 918th.

10. Savage learns that LTC Gately, the commander of the Leper Colony, has flown the last three missions with a broken back and is now in the hospital in traction. BG Savage visits the hospital and expresses his pride in Gately’s leadership.

11. Savage eventually collapses from exhaustion, and a fully recovered Gately leads the 918th Bomber Group on the day’s successful mission.

**Figure 31. “12 O’clock High” Organization and Characters**

