

Situational leadership theory

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The **Situational Leadership® Model** is a model developed by [Paul Hersey](#) and [Ken Blanchard](#), while working on *Management of Organizational Behavior*.^[1] The theory was first introduced as "Life Cycle Theory of Leadership".^[2] During the mid-1970s, "Life Cycle Theory of Leadership" was renamed "Situational Leadership Model."^[3]

In the late 1970s/early 1980s, the authors both developed their own models using the situational leadership theory; Hersey - Situational Leadership Model and Blanchard et al. Situational Leadership II Model.^[4]

The fundamental underpinning of the Situational Leadership Model is that there is no single "best" style of leadership. Effective leadership is task-relevant, and the most successful leaders are those who adapt their leadership style to the Performance Readiness (ability and willingness) of the individual or group they are attempting to lead or influence. Effective leadership varies, not only with the person or group that is being influenced, but it also depends on the task, job or function that needs to be accomplished.^[3]

The Situational Leadership Model rests on two fundamental concepts; [leadership style](#) and the individual or group's Performance Readiness level.

Leadership styles[]

Hersey and Blanchard characterized leadership style in terms of the amount of Task Behavior and Relationship Behavior that the leader provides to their followers. They categorized all leadership styles into four [behavior](#) types, which they named S1 to S4:

- **S1: Directing** – is characterized by one-way communication in which the leader defines the roles of the individual or group and provides the what, how, why, when and where to do the task;
- **S2: Coaching** – while the leader is still providing the direction, he or she is now using two-way communication and providing the socio-emotional support that will allow the individual or group being influenced to buy into the process;
- **S3: Supporting** – this is how shared decision-making about aspects of how the task is accomplished and the leader is providing fewer task behaviors while maintaining high relationship behavior;
- **S4: Delegating** – the leader is still involved in decisions; however, the process and responsibility has been passed to the individual or group. The leader stays involved to monitor progress.

Of these, no one style is considered optimal for all leaders to use all the time. Effective leaders need to be flexible, and must adapt themselves according to the situation.

Maturity levels[]

High	Moderate		Low
M4	M3	M2	M1
Very capable and confident	Capable but unwilling	Unable but confident	Unable and insecure

The right leadership style will depend on the person or group being led. The Hersey-Blanchard Situational Leadership Theory identified four levels of maturity M1 through M4:

- **M1** – They lack the specific skills required for the job in hand and are unable and unwilling to take responsibility for this job or task.
- **M2** – They are unable to take on responsibility for the task being done; however, they are willing to work at the task. They are novice but enthusiastic.
- **M3** – They are experienced and able to do the task but lack the confidence or the willingness to take on responsibility.
- **M4** – They are experienced at the task, and comfortable with their own ability to do it well. They are able and willing to not only do the task, but to take responsibility for the task.

Maturity levels are also task-specific. A person might be generally skilled, confident and motivated in their job, but would still have a maturity level M1 when asked to perform a task requiring skills they don't possess.

Developing people and self-motivation[]

A good leader develops "the competence and commitment of their people so they're self-motivated rather than dependent on others for direction and guidance."^[5] According to Hersey's book,^[5] a leader's high, realistic expectation causes high performance of followers; a leader's low expectations lead to low performance of followers. According to Ken Blanchard, "Four combinations of competence and commitment make up what we call 'development level.'"

- **D1** - Low competence and high commitment^[4]
- **D2** - Low competence and low commitment
- **D3** - High competence and low/variable commitment
- **D4** - High competence and high commitment

In order to make an effective cycle, a leader needs to motivate followers properly.

Situational Leadership II]

Hersey Blanchard continued to iterate on the original theory until 1977 when they mutually agreed to run their respective companies. In the late 1970s, Hersey changed the name from Situational Leadership Theory to "Situational Leadership", and Blanchard offered Situational Leadership Theory as "A Situational Approach to Managing People". Blanchard and his colleagues continued to iterate and revise A Situational Approach to Managing People, and in 1985 introduced Situational Leadership II (SLII).^[4]

In 1979, Ken Blanchard founded Blanchard Training & Development, Inc., (later The Ken Blanchard Companies) together with his wife Margie Blanchard and a board of founding associates. Over time, this group made changes to the concepts of the original Situational Leadership Theory in several key areas, which included the research base, the leadership style labels, and the individual's development level continuum.^[4]

Resources]

- Hersey, P. and Blanchard, K. H. (1977). *Management of Organizational Behavior: Utilizing Human Resources* (3rd ed.) New Jersey/Prentice Hall, [ISBN 978-0132617697](#)

References[[edit](#)]

- 1 Hersey, P. and Blanchard, K. H. (1969). *Management of Organizational Behavior – Utilizing Human Resources*. New Jersey/Prentice Hall.
- 2 Hersey, P. & Blanchard, K. H. (1969). "[Life cycle theory of leadership](#)". *Training and Development Journal*. **23** (5): 26–34.
- 3 Hersey, P. and Blanchard, K. H. (1977). *Management of Organizational Behavior 3rd Edition– Utilizing Human Resources*. New Jersey/Prentice Hall.
- 4 Blanchard, Kenneth H., Patricia Zigarmi, and Drea Zigarmi. [Leadership and the One Minute Manager](#): Increasing Effectiveness through Situational Leadership. New York: Morrow, 1985. Print.
- 5 Hersey, P. (1985). *The situational leader*. New York, NY: Warner Books. [ISBN 978-0446513425](#)
- 6 "[Motivation and cognitive abilities: An integrative/aptitude-treatment interaction approach to skill acquisition](#)." *Journal of Applied Psychology*. **74** (4): 657–690. Aug 1989. [doi:10.1037/0021-9010.74.4.657](#).
- 7 Fernandez, C. F., & Vecchio, R. P. (1997). "Situational leadership theory revisited: A test of an across-jobs perspective". *The Leadership Quarterly*. **8** (1): 67–84. [doi:10.1016/S1048-9843\(97\)90031-X](#).
- 8 Vecchio, R. P. (1987). "Situational Leadership Theory: An examination of a prescriptive theory". *Journal of Applied Psychology*. **72** (3): 444. [doi:10.1037/0021-9010.72.3.444](#).

External links[

- [Situational.com](#)
- [kenblanchard.com](#)