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SLII.®

Powering
Inspired
Leaders™

Why a Situational Approach to Leadership Makes All the Difference

Great leaders see the promise in everyone and champion their futures by showing a path to success for their team and the organization. For decades, directive and supportive leader behaviors have been vital to this leadership promise and to a leader's effectiveness. Leadership contingency theories introduced the concepts of *initiating structure* (the degree to which a leader defines, directs, and organizes their role and the roles of followers) and *consideration* (the degree to which a leader shows concern and respect for followers, looks out for their welfare, expresses appreciation to them, and supports them) as distinct leader behaviors that are key to successfully leading and developing others.

In the groundbreaking meta-analysis by Judge, Piccolo, and Ilies of two traditional leadership behaviors—initiating structure (direction) and consideration (support)—the researchers examined *163 independent correlations for consideration* and *159 correlations for initiating structure*.

Specifically, Judge et al. found that direction and support were strongly correlated with desirable organizational outcomes. Consideration (support) was more strongly related to an individual's satisfaction (leader satisfaction, job satisfaction). Motivation, leader effectiveness, and initiating structure (direction) were slightly more strongly related to leader job performance and group–organization performance.

The SLII® framework has four leadership styles representing different levels of *supportive* (consideration) and *directive* (initiating structure) behaviors, which correspond to follower development levels ranging from Developing (D1; low competence and high commitment) to Developed (D4; high competence and high commitment).

D1 **D2** **D3** **D4**
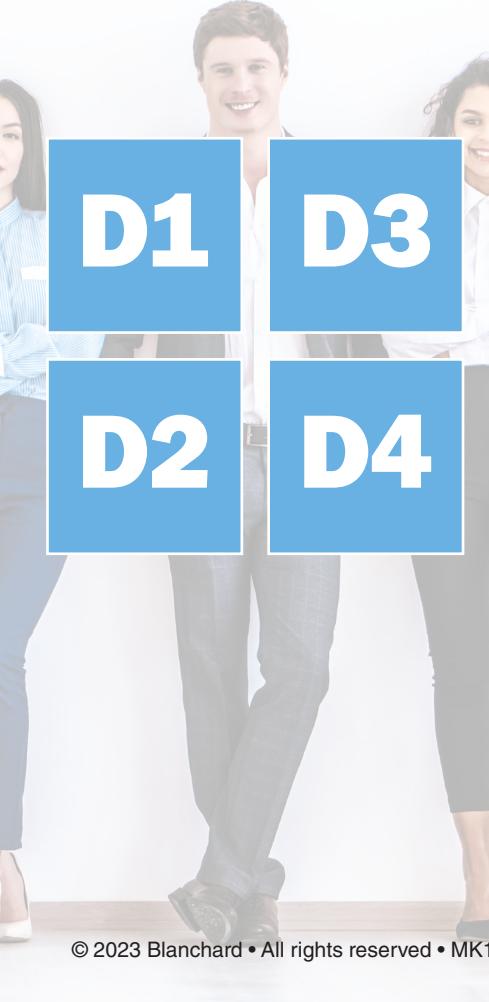
These leadership styles use different combinations of direction and support, which correspond with four follower development levels; leaders flexibly use a combination of direction and support depending on the needs and development level of their people.

DIRECTING *S1; high directive and low supportive behaviors*

COACHING *S2; high directive and high supportive behaviors*

SUPPORTING *S3; low directive and high supportive behaviors*

DELEGATING *S4; low directive and low supportive behaviors*

D1 **D3**

D2 **D4**

Effective leader behaviors are context-specific, matching the development level of the follower on a particular goal or task. Leaders who learn how to match their leadership style to the situation (an individual's development level) inspire and ensure greater performance and satisfaction from the people they lead.

DIRECTING

COACHING

SUPPORTING

DELEGATING

The SLII framework holds that *no single-best leadership style exists;* any one of the four leadership styles can be appropriate, depending on the diagnosis of the situation. Effective leaders shift their leadership style for the situation and the person they are leading—the skill of leader flexibility is paramount to leader effectiveness.

Because little formal examination of the interactive effects of direction and support on employee outcomes had been conducted, the researchers at Blanchard® designed a study to investigate the effectiveness of the four leadership styles of the SLII model, which evolved from initiating structure and consideration.

Specifically, the study was designed to answer three questions:

*Would individuals report that they **received** all four leadership styles from their leader?*

*Would individuals feel they **needed** all four leadership styles from their leader?*

When an individual received the level of direction and support they felt they needed, were they more positive about their leader and their work environment?

The validated instruments that were used in the study are

Leader Action Profile, *which originates from the SLII framework and measures how often respondents' managers demonstrate directive and supportive leadership behaviors*

Work Intention Inventory, *which measures an individual's intentions to behave in ways that benefit the organization*

Positive and Negative Affect Scale, *which measures respondents' subjective feelings about their job*

Affective and Cognitive Trust Scale, *which assesses direct reports' perceptions of their level of affective and cognitive trust in their leader*

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STUDY FINDINGS – HYPOTHESIS 1

All four leadership styles will be reported as being received by a cross-sectional survey population. **Supported**

In the proportional breakout for received leadership, only 3 percent of employees reported receiving Style 1 (S1, high direction/low support), while 33 percent reported receiving Style 2 (S2, high direction/high support), 22 percent reported receiving Style 3 (S3, low direction/high support), and 42 percent reported receiving Style 4 (S4, low direction/low support). Three out of the four leadership styles were used frequently by managers.

Regarding the low use of Style 1, leaders might be sensitive to overusing high direction. It is also possible that the individual's development level in our sample did not warrant high use of that leadership style.

STUDY FINDINGS – HYPOTHESIS 2

All four leadership styles will be reported as being needed by a cross-sectional survey population. **Supported**

In the proportional breakout for needed leadership styles, 2 percent of respondents reported needing S1 (high direction/low support), 59 percent reported needing S2 (high direction/high support), 26 percent reported needing S3 (low direction/high support), and 12 percent reported needing S4 (low direction/low support).

For this sample, these findings suggest that the frequency of Style 1 being needed and received was a close match, meaning that followers infrequently reported needing Style 1.

STUDY FINDINGS – HYPOTHESIS 3

Followers who report receiving their needed leadership style from their manager will demonstrate more favorable scores on selected employee-outcome variables. **Supported**
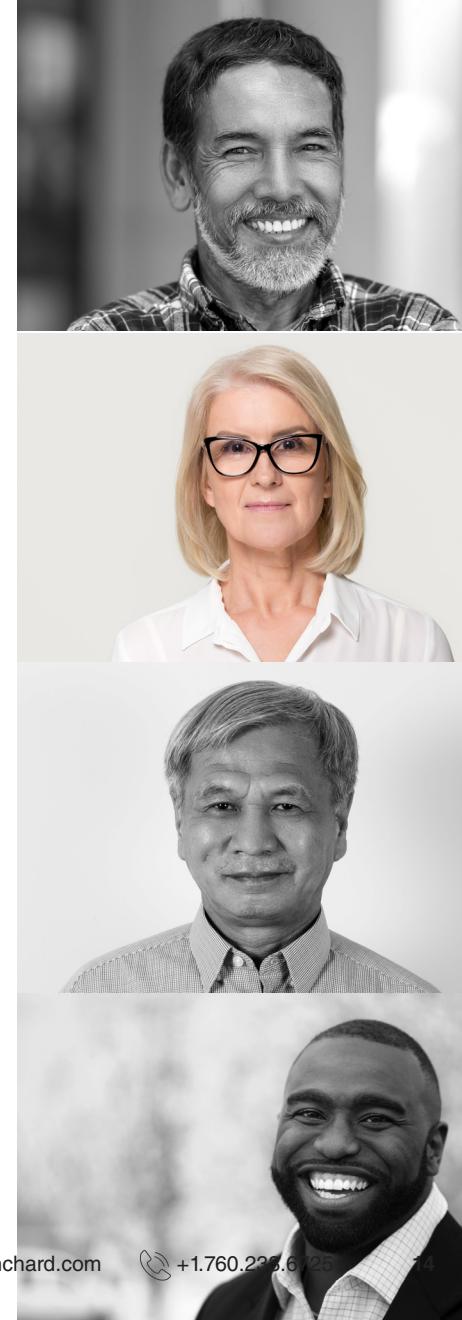
For nine out of ten organizational outcomes, when followers reported a fit between their manager's leadership style and their needed leadership style, they demonstrated more favorable scores on outcome variables regarding trust in their leaders, and more positive feelings about their job and work intentions.

When individuals get the levels of direction and support they believe they need, they are more inclined to

- **Trust their leaders**
- **Be more positive about their work environments**
- **Be more positively inclined to perform at their best**
- **Stay with their organizations**
- **Behave in ways that benefit their organizations**
- **Endorse their organizations to colleagues, family, and friends**

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN LEADERS OVERUSE STYLE 4?

This study illuminated one pitfall: Many leaders inappropriately fall back on using a delegating style (low direction and low support) for reasons not connected to their followers' needs. Forty-two percent of respondents perceived that their managers were using Style 4, which was almost four times more than respondents' perceived need (12 percent). This may have to do with the manager's own workload, having too many direct reports and being spread too thin, or not having a deep-enough understanding of the direct reports' roles. *In this case, the leader–follower reporting relationship needs to become more of a two-way street where the leader emphasizes supporting the follower in their own development.*

LEADERSHIP STYLE MATTERS … BUT DO LEADERS KNOW HOW TO DELIVER?

When people get the leadership style they need, they are happier in their roles, more likely to trust their leader, and more likely to behave in ways that benefit the organization than those who don't.
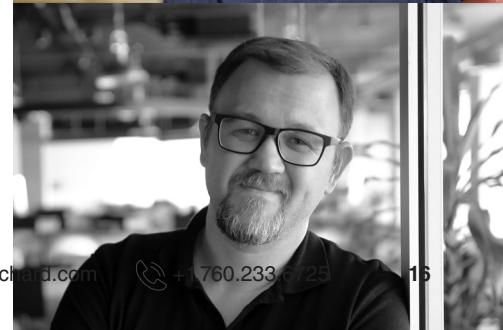
But that doesn't mean leaders automatically know how to do this.

It's important to train leaders in the skills of diagnosing their people's development levels, to flexibly understand which leadership style corresponds to the diagnosed development level, and to be able to appropriately deliver the necessary levels of direction and support for that person on a specific project or task.

Research shows that employees need different levels of direction and support depending on their level of competence and commitment. Problems occur if managers use only one or two leadership styles that they apply to everyone, in every situation.

Effective leaders give their people exactly what they need, when they need it. They offer guidance, caring, and autonomy, and provide just the right amount of direction and support to help their team members succeed. They know how to develop competent, self-reliant contributors who deliver faster results for your organization.

It's a new world for leaders. Business moves at breakneck speeds and the complexities of today's workplace are especially daunting. Only those who lead situationally will be able to inspire their teams to rise to today's challenges.

That kind of inspired leadership is essential for delivering competitive advantages. Those who lead situationally will be positioned to ignite their teams to rise to new challenges and inspire their colleagues to do the same.

The best leaders see their people as a top priority, sincerely caring about their success and growth. By taking the time to build meaningful relationships, these leaders understand not only their people but also their coworkers and what inspires them, so they can be there for them in any situation.

That's SLII—empowering leaders to have authentic conversations that drive performance and unleash talent. Because when inspired leaders inspire others, there are no limits to greatness.

A full copy of the original research paper can be obtained at

**resources.kenblanchard.com/whitepapers/
why-a-situational-approach-to-leadership-matters**

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Powering Inspired Leaders™

SLII leaders build **meaningful connections** *that drive* **exponential impact**

Learn more at blanchard.com/SLII

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Blanchard® is a global leader in leadership development, consulting, and coaching. For more than 40 years, Blanchard has partnered with organizations to maximize individual achievement and organizational performance – bringing measurable progress and true transformation. Blanchard's SLII® is the global leadership model of choice, powering inspired leaders for more than 10,000 organizations worldwide. Blanchard also offers a suite of award-winning solutions through flexible delivery modalities to meet the specific needs of clients and learners.

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