The situational theory of leadership suggests that no single [leadership style](https://www.verywellmind.com/leadership-styles-2795312) is best. Instead, it depends on which type of leadership and strategies are best-suited to the task. According to this theory, the most [effective leaders](https://www.verywellmind.com/ways-to-become-a-better-leader-2795324) are those that are able to adapt their style to the situation and look at cues such as the type of task, the nature of the group, and other factors that might contribute to getting the job done.

**Situational Leadership**

Situational leadership theory is often referred to as the Hersey-Blanchard Situational Leadership Theory, after its developers, Dr. Paul Hersey, author of "The Situational Leader," and Kenneth Blanchard, author of "One-Minute Manager."

**Leadership Styles**

Hersey and Blanchard suggested that there are four primary leadership styles:

* **Telling (S1)**:In this leadership style, the leader tells people what to do and how to do it.
* **Selling (S2)**: This style involves more back-and-forth between leaders and followers. Leaders "sell" their ideas and message to get group members to buy into the process.
* **Participating (S3)**: In this approach, the leader offers less direction and allows members of the group to take a more active role in coming up with ideas and making decisions.
* **Delegating (S4)**:This style is characterized by a less involved, [hands-off approach to leadership](https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-laissez-faire-leadership-2795316). Group members tend to make most of the decisions and take most of the responsibility for what happens.

**Maturity Levels**

The right style of leadership depends greatly on the maturity level (i.e., the level of knowledge and competence) of the individuals or group.

Hersey and Blanchard's theory identifies four different levels of maturity, including:

* **M1**: Group members lack the knowledge, skills, and willingness to complete the task.
* **M2**: Group members are willing and enthusiastic, but lack the ability.
* **M3**: Group members have the skills and capability to complete the task, but are unwilling to take responsibility.
* **M4**: Group members are highly skilled and willing to complete the task.

**Matching Styles and Levels**

Leadership styles may be matched with maturity levels. The Hersey-Blanchard model suggests that the following leadership styles are the most appropriate for these maturity levels:

* Low Maturity (M1)—Telling (S1)
* Medium Maturity (M2)—Selling (S2)
* Medium Maturity (M3)—Participating (S3)
* High Maturity (M4)—Delegating (S4)

**How It Works**

A more "telling" style may be necessary at the beginning of a project when followers lack the responsibility or knowledge to work on their own. As subordinates become more experienced and knowledgeable, however, the leader may want to shift into a more delegating approach.

This situational model of leadership focuses on flexibility so that leaders are able to adapt according to the needs of their followers and the demands of the situation.

The situational approach to leadership also avoids the pitfalls of the single-style approach by recognizing that there are many different ways of dealing with a problem and that leaders need to be able to assess a situation and the maturity levels of subordinates in order to determine what approach will be the most effective at any given moment.

Situational [theories](https://www.verywellmind.com/leadership-theories-2795323), therefore, give greater consideration to the complexity of dynamic social situations and the many individuals acting in different roles who will ultimately contribute to the outcome.

**Situational Leadership II**

The Situational Leadership II (or SLII model) was developed by Kenneth Blanchard and builds on Blanchard and Hersey's original theory. According to the revised version of the theory, effective leaders must base their behavior on the developmental level of group members for specific tasks.

**Competence and Commitment**

The developmental level is determined by each individual's level of competence and commitment. These levels include:

* **Enthusiastic beginner (D1)**: High commitment, low competence.
* **Disillusioned learner** **(D2)**:Some competence, but setbacks have led to low commitment.
* **Capable but cautious performer (D3)**:Competence is growing, but the level of commitment varies.
* **Self-reliant achiever** **(D4)**: High competence and commitment.

**SLII Leadership Styles**

SLII also suggests that effective leadership is dependent on two key behaviors: supporting and directing. Directing behaviors include giving specific directions and instructions and attempting to control the behavior of group members. Supporting behaviors include actions such as encouraging subordinates, listening, and offering recognition and feedback.

The theory identifies four basic leadership styles, including:

* **Directing (S1)**: High on directing behaviors, low on supporting behaviors.
* **Coaching (S2)**: High on both directing and supporting behaviors.
* **Supporting (S3)**: Low on directing behavior and high on supporting behaviors.
* **Delegating (S4)**: Low on both directing and supporting behaviors.

The main point of SLII theory is that not one of these four leadership styles is best. Instead, an effective leader will match his or her behavior to the developmental skill of each subordinate for the task at hand.

**Key Factors**

Experts suggest that there are four key contextual factors that leaders must be aware of when making an assessment of the situation.

**Consider the Relationship**

Leaders need to consider the relationship between the leaders and the members of the group. Social and interpersonal factors can play a role in determining which approach is best.

For example, a group that lacks efficiency and productivity might benefit from a style that emphasizes order, rules, and clearly defined roles. A productive group of highly skilled workers, on the other hand, might benefit from a more [democratic style](https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-democratic-leadership-2795315) that allows group members to work independently and have input in organizational decisions.

**Consider the Task**

The leader needs to consider the task itself. Tasks can range from simple to complex, but the leader needs to have a clear idea of exactly what the task entails in order to determine if it has been successfully and competently accomplished.

**Consider the Level of Authority**

The level of authority the leader has over group members should also be considered. Some leaders have power conferred by the position itself, such as the capacity to fire, hire, reward, or reprimand subordinates. Other leaders gain power through relationships with employees, often by gaining respect from them, offering support to them, and helping them feel included in the [decision-making process](https://www.verywellmind.com/decision-making-strategies-2795483).

**Consider the Level of Maturity**

As the Hersey-Blanchard model suggests, leaders need to consider the level of maturity of each individual group member. The maturity level is a measure of an individual's ability to complete a task, as well as his or her willingness to complete the task. Assigning a job to a member who is willing but lacks the ability is a recipe for failure.

Being able to pinpoint each employee's level of maturity allows the leader to choose the best leadership approach to help employees accomplish their goals.

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