

## Lesson Four: Situational Leadership

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### A. Key Learning Points

1. We all have a preferred or dominant leadership style.
2. Our preferred leadership style may not be the style best-suited for our most significant leadership challenges.
3. Our leadership prospects improve when we increase our awareness and use of diverse leadership styles.
4. Structural leaders emphasize rationality, analysis, logic, facts and data; they are likely to believe strongly in the importance of clear structure and a well-developed management system.
5. Human resource leaders emphasize the importance of people; they believe the central task of management is to develop a good fit between people and the organization.
6. Political leaders believe managers and leaders live in a world of conflict and scarce resources; they emphasize building a power base, allies, networks, and coalitions.
7. Symbolic leaders believe the essential task of management is to provide vision and inspiration.
8. Effective leaders select and use a mix of leadership styles most appropriate for the situation.

### B. Real World Examples and Considerations for Practitioners

1. We all have a preferred or dominant leadership style.

On our individual life paths, each of us has developed a distinctive portfolio of interests, knowledge, skills, perspective, and experience. This personal and professional style has evolved through trial and error, success and failure. We rely on it for survival and advancement at home, in our community, and at work.

By understanding our stylistic preferences and biases and the styles of people we live and work with, we're arguably better equipped to appreciate why and how we communicate and interact with others. This is why styles inventory and personality assessments like Myers-Briggs and Enneagrams are so popular and potentially valuable.

This lesson focuses on understanding, selecting, and using an appropriate mix of four leadership styles: structural, human resource, political and symbolic.

2. Our preferred leadership style may not be the style best-suited for our most significant leadership challenges.

The famed psychologist, Abraham Maslow, is often quoted as saying, "If the only tool we have is a hammer, every problem looks like a nail." This analogy suggests that, regardless of the situation or circumstance, we tend to utilize the style (tool) that is most familiar and convenient for us – even though an alternate style (tool) might be more appropriate.

Have you ever used a hammer when you would have been better advised to use a screwdriver? Although the hammer and nail create a quick and inexpensive bond, the result is unsatisfactory if we require a more permanent, secure, and clean bond. Over time, the nail will likely separate and perhaps tear a hole in the wall.

Just as we need the tool that is most appropriate for the task, we are well-advised to select the leadership style that is most appropriate for the leadership challenge.

Unfortunately many leaders tend to hammer away at leadership opportunities and challenges with excessive dependence on their dominant leadership styles and little awareness of alternate leadership approaches. In many instances, this stylistic dependency compounds problems – especially when those problems were created by the same leadership style chosen to resolve them.

3. Our leadership prospects improve when we increase our awareness and use of diverse leadership styles.

When we diversify our leadership skills and styles we become better prepared to address the complexity and diversity of leadership opportunities and challenges. This is especially true in today's society and market place which is more diverse and complex than ever.

Our greatest leaders demonstrate the power that proceeds from a diverse mix of leadership styles and skills.

Although one might say Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s greatest strengths were in symbolic and human resource leadership as manifest in his gift of speech and interest in actualizing people's potential, he understood the importance of politics and structural organization that were essential to leverage and sustain the civil rights achievements he helped create by words and personal actions.

By contrast, one might say Dwight D. Eisenhower emphasized structural and political leadership as Supreme Commander of Allied Forces in World War II, architect of D-Day, and President of the United States. But President Eisenhower likewise appreciated the power of people and symbolism that are essential components of a winning military or presidential campaign.

Our experience with students and clients suggests that most people are most familiar, comfortable, and skillful at structural and human resource leadership. The challenge for leaders aspiring to greater and higher levels of achievement is to strengthen the styles that are least familiar. By doing this, you will increase your prospects to succeed in circumstances that otherwise might stump you.

3. Structural leaders emphasize rationality, analysis, logic, facts and data; they are likely to believe strongly in the importance of clear structure and a well-developed management system.

Structural leadership is most effective in circumstances that require organization, analysis, and control. By definition, structural leadership brings order and discipline that is less apparent when other leadership styles are applied. At its best, structural leadership provides efficiency, effectiveness, and consistency that contribute directly to quality, predictability, and reliability.

Some approaches and tools structural leaders tend to use include: formal job descriptions and classifications, performance evaluation/review, meetings (with agenda and minutes), schedules and deadlines, job title/rank/position, process design and management, measurement and data-based decision making.

Certain businesses and industries tend to value structural leadership more than other leadership styles. Heavily regulated, scientific, technical, engineering, and manufacturing businesses are good examples. Likewise, banks and financial services have traditionally emphasized structural leadership – although this emphasis is less apparent in recent years due to deregulation of financial services.

Structural leadership is less well-suited for creative enterprises and service businesses that, by definition, have a high people orientation.

4. Human resource leaders emphasize the importance of people; they believe the central task of management is to develop a good fit between people and the organization.

Human resource leadership is most effective in circumstances that require people-based solutions to business challenges and opportunities. By definition, human resource leadership emphasizes approaches and activities that communicate expectations and motivate employees to achieve desired results. This emphasis on leveraging the knowledge, expertise, skills, experience, and spirit of employees as a strategic business asset is less apparent when other leadership skills are applied.

Some approaches and tools that human resource leaders use include: management by walking around, open door “policy”, individual and group celebrations, strategic hiring, recruitment, and compensation, internal promotion and career development, coaching and mentoring, open book management, gain-sharing, employee suggestions, teams, flex scheduling, peer and customer recognition.

Certain industries and businesses tend to emphasize human resource leadership more than others; service businesses that need to distinguish themselves based on positive customer perception/relationships and hotel, motel, restaurant, and entertainment are good examples. Likewise, industries where skilled workers are scarce and expensive tend to emphasize human resource leadership to hire, retain, and grow talented laborers.

5. Political leaders believe managers and leaders live in a world of conflict and scarce resources; they emphasize building a power base, allies, networks, and coalitions.

Political leadership is most effective in circumstances where resources are relatively scarce. When demands for resources exceed the resources that are actually available, the need for negotiation, lobbying, and politics increases.

Political leadership by definition emphasizes building and leveraging relationships, alliances, and coalitions that increase one’s prospects for winning scarce or limited resources. This emphasis on competition, strategic collaboration, negotiation and bargaining is less apparent when other leadership styles are applied.

Some approaches and tools political leaders use include: networking, coalition building, negotiation, lobbying, and bargaining.

Although political leadership in all business budgeting processes, certain industries and businesses tend to emphasize political leadership more than others; public sector agencies and government contractors by definition are obliged to pursue political business strategies as are businesses that require significant venture capital/financing and creative businesses that require sponsors.

6. Symbolic leaders believe the essential task of management is to provide vision and inspiration.

Symbolic leadership is most effective in circumstances where the purpose or meaning of work activity is more complicated and strategic than the complexity of the work tasks themselves.

By definition, symbolic leadership emphasizes communication of principles, purpose, potential value, standards of performance, ethics, and fundamental rights or beliefs. This emphasis on meaning and inspiration is less apparent when other leadership styles are applied.

Some approaches and tools symbolic leaders use include: public speeches, standards and principles of operation, celebrations, internal marketing and education campaigns, protests, work slow downs, and boycotts.

Certain industries and businesses are more inclined to use symbolic leadership than others. Commodity-type enterprises for example typically strive to distinguish themselves based on symbolic definition or protection

of their product's brands. Non-profit organizations also tend to be skillful at symbolic leadership and marketing.

- C. Recommended Reading Assignment & Highlights – All selections are from Stephen R. Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Successful People: Powerful Lessons in Personal Change*. (Fireside)

*Habit 5: Seek First to Understand, Then to Be Understood, Habit 6: Synergize*

*Communication is the most important skill in life. We spend most of our waking hours communicating. But consider this: You've spent years learning how to read and write, years learning how to speak. But what about listening? What training or education have you had that enables you to listen so that you really, deeply understand another human being from that individual's own frame of reference?*

*"Seek first to understand" involves a very deep shift in paradigm. We typically seek first to be understood. Most people do not listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply. They're either speaking or preparing to speak. They're filtering everything through their own paradigms ...*

*Because we listen autobiographically, we tend to respond in one of four ways. We evaluate – we either agree or disagree; we probe – we ask questions from our own frame of reference; we advise – we give counsel based on our own experience; or we interpret – we try to figure people out, to explain their motives, their behavior, based on our own motives and behavior.*

*What is synergy? Simply defined, it means that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. It means that the relationship which the parts have to each other is a part in and of itself. It is not only a part, but the most catalytic, the most empowering, the most unifying, and the most exciting part.*

*Valuing the differences is the essence of synergy – the mental, the emotional, the psychological differences between people. And the key to valuing those differences is to realize that all people see the world, not as it is, but as they are.*

- D. Additional Resources and Links to Others Sources

Lee G. Bolman and Terrence E. Deal, *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership*. (Jossey-Bass)

Terrence E. Deal & M.K. Key, *Corporate Celebration: Play, Purpose, and Profit at Work*. (Berrett-Koehler)

James B. Miller, *The Corporate Coach: How to Build A Team of Loyal Customers and Happy Employees*. (HarperBusiness)

Margaret J. Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science: Learning about Organization from an Orderly Universe*. (Berrett-Koehler)

- E. Question(s) for Reflection and Discussion

1. You've been selected to replace the CEO/formal leader of your organization, what would be your most important leadership priority? Why? How would you communicate this priority?