

Adaptive Leadership

Leadership Styles

Hersey and Blanchard characterized leadership style in terms of two kinds of behavior, the amount of direction and of support the leader gives to his or her followers.

The aim of directive behaviour is to increase competence.

Key behaviours to direct the task

- Setting goals and objectives
- Planning and allocating work
- Establishing priorities and deadlines
- Clarifying roles and responsibilities
- Making and communicating decisions
- Determining evaluation methods
- Evaluating staff members' work
- Showing/telling staff how to do specific tasks

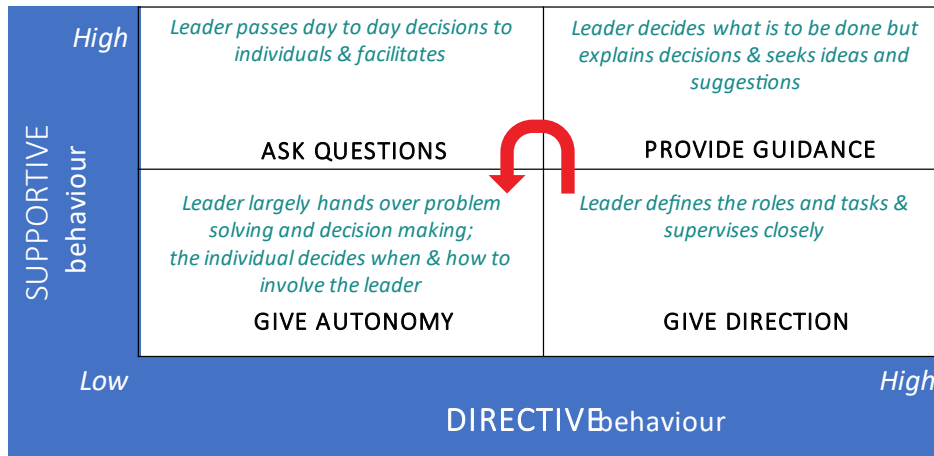
The aim of supportive behaviour is to increase confidence, motivation, commitment

Key Behaviours to support the person

- Listening to staff members' problems (job/non-job related)
- Showing interest in staff members' feelings and ideas
- Encouraging and praising in appreciative/ affirming ways
- Asking for suggestions or input
- Communicating feelings about the organisation's values and goals
- Disclosing information about self
- Facilitating problem solving
- Aiding team building

They created a simple grid to represent this. We offer different labels to the quadrants that make more sense in the MSF context (see below):

Adaptive Leadership Style



Adapted from Hersey and Blanchard



1. Giving direction

Leaders define the roles and tasks of the ‘follower’, and supervise them closely. Decisions are made by the leader and announced, so communication is largely one-way. This approach may be ideal for people who aren’t yet very competent, but are enthusiastic and committed. They need direction and supervision to help them get going.

2. Providing guidance

This involves a strong focus on establishing trust and building relationships with individuals. Leaders still define roles and tasks, but seek ideas and suggestions from the follower. Decisions remain the leader’s prerogative, but communication is much more two-way. This approach works well for people who have some competence but lack commitment. They need direction and supervision because they are still relatively inexperienced. They also need support and praise to build their self-esteem, and involvement in decision-making to restore their commitment.

3. Asking questions

Leaders pass day-to-day decisions, such as task allocation and processes, to the follower. The leader facilitates and takes part in decisions, but control is with the follower. This approach can work well with direct reports who have competence but lack confidence or motivation. They do not need much direction because of their skills, but support is necessary to bolster their confidence and motivation.

4. Giving autonomy

Leaders are still involved in decisions and problem-solving, but control is with the follower. The follower decides when and how the leader will be involved. Here, direct reports have strong competence and commitment. They are willing and able to work on a project independently with very little supervision or support.

Ideally, you want to recruit competent, committed team players who can work well independently or as part of a team. However, as leaders, we must realize that we will be required to provide clearly defined direction, coaching and plenty of support in order to help our followers succeed. Effective leaders are versatile in being able to move around the grid according to the situation, so there is no one right style. However, we tend to have a preferred style, and in applying Situational Leadership you need to know which one that is for you.

Development Level

Clearly the right leadership style will depend very much on the person being led - the follower - and Blanchard and Hersey extended their model to include the Development Level of the follower. They said that the leader's style should be driven by the Competence (task knowledge and transferable skills) and Commitment (motivation and confidence) of the follower. They came up with four levels: D1, D2, D3 and D4 reflecting a scale of development/skill level from low (D1) to high (D4).

Development Levels are also situational. I might be generally skilled, confident and motivated in my job, but would still drop into Level D1 when faced, say, with a task requiring skills I don't possess. For example, lots of managers are D4 when dealing with the day-to-day running of their department, but move to D1 or D2 when dealing with a sensitive

employee issue. Blanchard and Hersey said that the Leadership Style of the leader must correspond to the Development level of the follower - and it is the leader who must adapt.

When you adapt your leadership style to suit your follower's development level, work gets done, relationships are built up, and most importantly, the follower's development level will rise to D4, to everyone's benefit.

Source: The Leadership Journal (edited)

<http://www.theleadershipjournal.com/?tag=blanchard-hersey>