Fact sheet – Situational Leadership

Situational leadership

Blanchard's model of leadership, Situational Leadership II suggests that people's ability to undertake a task can be grouped into:

- ◆ Competence – Task specific | Knowledge | Skills to undertake
- ◆ Commitment – Motivation | Confidence | Enthusiasm

If one was to assign 'low' or 'high' simplistic scores to these, you can build a matrix of development styles:

|	Development stage	Competence	Commitment
D1	Enthusiastic Beginner	Low	High
D2	Disillusioned Learner	Low	Low/Variable
D3	Capable but Cautious Performer	High	Variable
D4	Self-Reliant Achiever	High	High

We tend to think of development needs fitting to a person and this although true, does also need to be tempered with the task that is being undertaken at the particular time. For example, One of your best operatives could be a D4, self-reliant achiever in most every instance, however, if that person is then given a task they are not used to or if they are promoted into a more senior role requiring different skills they will slip down typically through a D3 potentially D2. what is clear is that they will need a different leadership style for the one that is normally adopted for this person, hopefully we can see there for but the leadership style that is adopted in any particular situation needs to be flexible.

Another good example perhaps comes in your own world of management and the management of people in particular. Most managers after a period of time of dealing with people become both very competent and committed to the development of their teams, in Blanchard's model of leadership this would be described as D4. However, often when a sensitive employee issue is raised and requires dealing with, an area many managers are not as confident in the development stage of the manager will be reduced to either D3 or D2. It is a hard thing for a new manager dealing with complex personal issues and often they end up getting it wrong. As a new manager yourself it is worth recognising this I'm making sure but as you go into these sort of situations you have had some coaching and some support from your manager. This gives both you and the employee the best opportunity to get a good outcome, and as such is the fair and ethical thing to do

A short word of caution for all the engineers reading this text, it has been my observation the engineers and engineering managers are often very prescriptive in the application of the various categories. This is a natural follow on from the personality characteristics of an engineer often requiring logical outcomes to situations. It is important to remember the people a very different to the technical activity that we undertake and often the lines between the various categories described above become blurred, and that is okay!

To help with that cautionary comment it is sometimes best to think of the development forming a continuous development from D1 to D4 and this is often described as the learning curve:
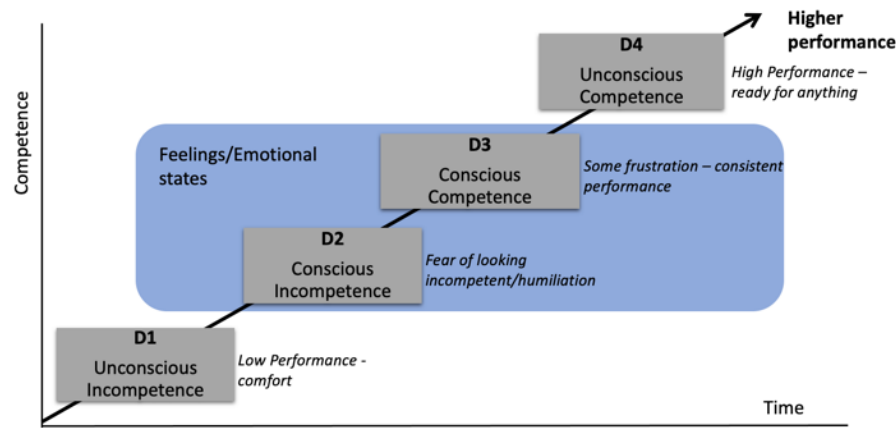
If you recall in the course we discussed learning to drive. When you first start learning, by observing your parents you think driving is easy. You are State 1, which in the Blanchard model is classed as D1. As you pester your parents and finally apply the 'L' plates and step into the car and start it up…..stall!! Restart, ….stall!! Eventually you get the car moving and try the gears and steering for the first time you realise how hard it is and become D2. You have become consciously incompetent, you know you don't know how to drive. At this stage, it is crucial you receive the right encouragement, support, direction or leadership in other words. It is good leadership that takes you from D2 in this case and you start taking lessons and move on to the test and hopefully pass, you have become D3 – you know you are competent as you have a certificate saying so!

But anyone who is driven for a period of time understands but as soon as you've passed your test you haven't become what we could term a competent driver. The novice driver has to layer on experience in different situations before they start reaching the stage of high performance what is termed in Blanchard's model D4. At this stage in the driving example we were considering the driver has now become unconsciously competent and is able to deal with all sorts of situations they would never even consider in the learning phases of the task.

Critical commentary of this model as highlighted but there is probably fifth level of competence higher than D4. At this level the commentary then suggests that the operator , or the driver in this case has become complacent. Whether or not you consider there is a fifth level it is always worth thinking about your highest level performer and how do you continually keep that person challenged and engaged, for if you don't you run the risk that they do start to become complacent.

So, selecting the right leadership style is important, too much direction will lead to de-motivation as will too little direction. The same is true of over or under supporting your staff.

Linking to behaviours matrix

If we are to reflect back to our fact sheet on behaviours and values, there is a clear link between the Blanchard's situational leadership styles required and the behaviour patterns exhibited by people in our teams. Again there's a challenge here for managers of people not to just say somebody is a performer in everything they do, they may flip between performer and developer depending on the

task, and your skill as their leader will determine how quickly you can return them always to the performance stage.

Reflecting on the learning curve above it is always good to take the high performer, D4 person and challenge them by moving them further down the learning curve effectively by giving them additional responsibilities but in the nicest sense stretched them a little. In doing this you risk their behaviour shifting from good, as they grapple with the new tasks they have been given.

The key mantra is to **remain flexible at all times**.
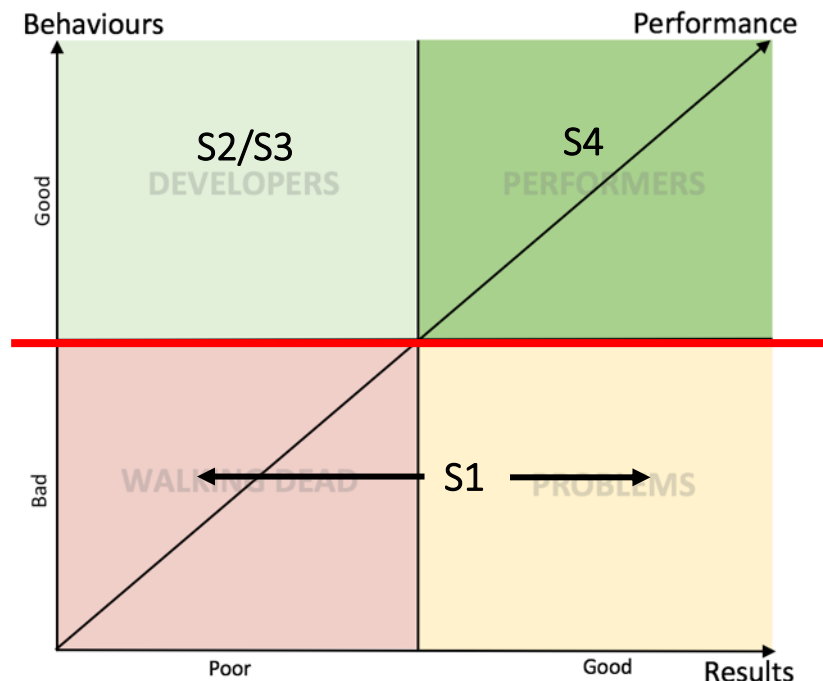
Leadership of people is not an exact science but looking at the above behaviour matrix together with the development continuum that we described below we can see where the best types of leadership style are adopted in different situations.

For the performers the S4 leadership style is without doubt the most effective, management delegation or in other words giving those people more responsibilities and trusting them to undertake work correctly is an exceptionally motivating leadership style to adopt. A good leader will always keep an eye on the persons behavioural characteristics to spot any changes which might be indicative of the person becoming complacent or misaligned in some manner. In my experience the problem children in an organisation were yesterday's performers that have been in some way disaffected by either management action or their own lack of improvement. Good leaders spot this early and don't let this happen.

For people who are below the behaviour line, the bold red line above, the leadership style of direct feedback, S1, is the only style that will have any impact whatsoever. Often I hear junior managers talking about trying to develop The Walking Dead, if you develop such a person all you are in fact doing is building yourself a problem child for the future. The people who are below the behaviour line, with your support and guidance, in the way of direct feedback, have a choice to make to either behave correctly or quite simply leave the business. Now please don't read into this that I'm suggesting you automatically manage these people out of the business, as you are far better always to manage

someone's performance upwards rather than outwards. However, make sure you keep it in your mind as a potential long range option.

This then leaves the developer group and the best leadership style to adopt when dealing with these group of people is to be a mixture of coaching and developmental feedback. We will not go into the details of these here as there are fact sheets on coaching and developmental feedback, that you can refer to at your leisure.

Development continuum

The development continuum is a method we have adopted EngPro to try and describe the range of differing leadership styles that we have to adopt when managing people. In the chart below we see the different leadership styles and the different types of actions that we can take. This chart is worth reviewing with many of the associated fax sheets in this course set , such as, influencing, coaching, mentoring and feedback.
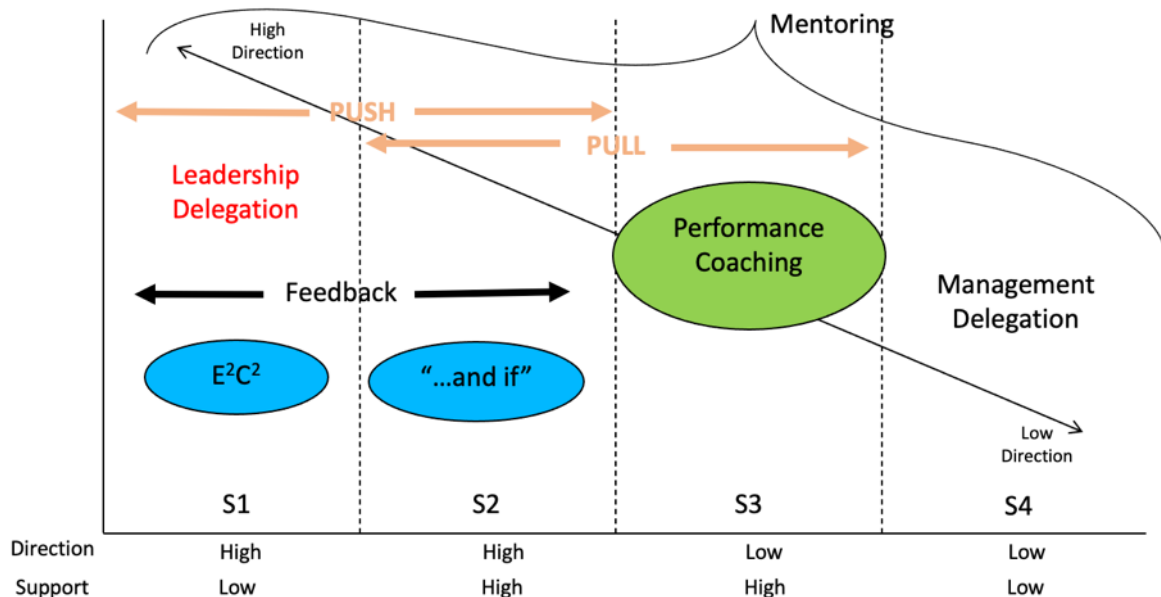
Adapting your leadership style to the situation:

It is the leader that must adapt their style to correspond with the Development Level (D1 - D4) of the follower. For example, a new person joins your team and you're asked to help them through the first few days. You sit them in front of a PC, show them a pile of invoices that need to be processed today, and leave them to their own devices whilst you deal with other commitments. They're at level D1, and you've adopted S4. Everyone loses because the new person feels helpless and demotivated, and you don't get the invoices processed.

On the other hand, you're handing over to an experienced colleague before you leave for a holiday. You've listed all the tasks that need to be done, and a set of instructions on how to carry out each one. They're at level D4, and you've adopted S1. The work will probably get done, but not the way you expected, and your colleague may be upset with you for treating them without the recognition they deserve.

Swapping the situations will significantly help to improve both scenarios. Leave detailed instructions and a checklist for the new person, and they'll thank you for it. Give your colleague a status update and a few notes they can refer to if they need them, and the outcome will be far more successful.

By adopting the right style to suit the 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.

Leadership v Management

Before we consider how we link leadership styles to development styles, let us first consider leadership and management. Like accountability and responsibility, these two words are often miss-used and having a good understanding of the distinction between the two is important.

Management – definition

> "Being able to effectively use all the available systems, processes and resources in order to achieve the required results"

Leadership – definition

> "Being able to effectively create and communicate a compelling vision, which engages, inspires and empowers others to achieve results."