# Personal Leadership Effectiveness:



# Leadership Skills

## A guide to help you review your interpersonal skills and leadership style

The range of activities you undertake as a manager is substantial with the result that the variety of skills needed to succeed is broad. This guide is designed to help you to review capacity in terms of your interpersonal skills and leadership style.

# Personal Leadership Effectiveness: Leadership Skills Guide

This guide should be read in conjunction with the Personal Leadership Effectiveness Guide.
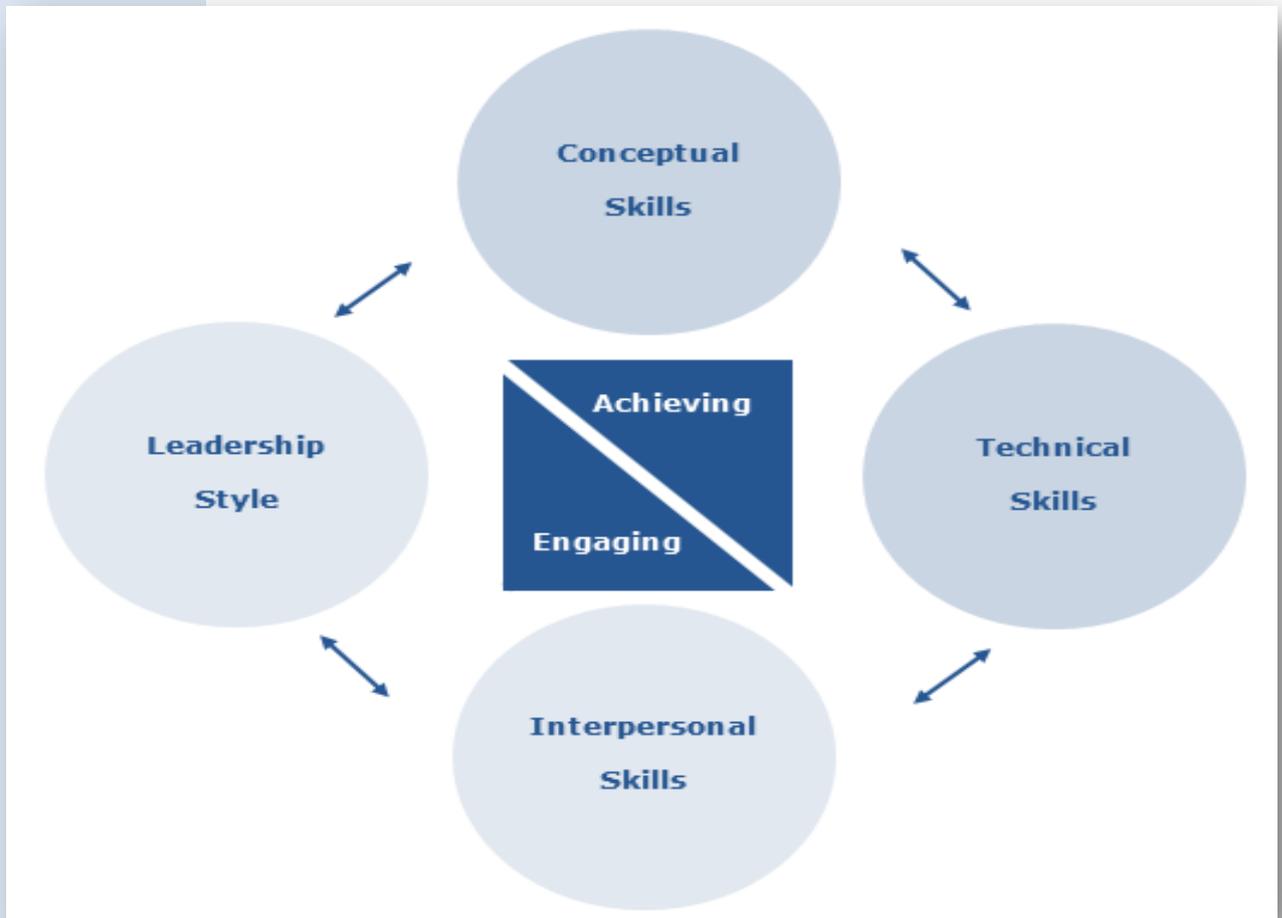
# 1. Introduction

The range of activities you undertake as a manager is substantial with the result that the variety of skills needed to succeed is broad. To summarise, you could say that everything you do as a leader can be grouped into two areas:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| *Engage* | Engage **People** to ensure their commitment, competence and motivation | **The 'leading' part** |
| *Achieve* | Harness that engagement by focusing on **Process** to ensure productivity, efficiency and quality, in order to achieve the **Performance** and results required. | **The 'managing' part** |

To be successful, you therefore need to both lead *and* manage and the variety of skills needed to do so is extensive. Actually, any skill possessed can in some way be put to good use on the leadership stage; of course, the reverse is true too and your skills gaps quickly become a liability. The best leaders have talents across four skill sets:

Now, it would be laughable to suggest that every successful manager masters all these skills to the same degree, but they do have talents in all these areas which allow them to:

**Conceptual:** see the big picture and ensure that the organisation, or that part of it for which they are responsible, is consistently in tune with a changing operating environment. They are good at recognising and analysing complex issues, problem solving and decision-making.

**Technical:** get to grips with the range of technical skills such as planning or financial management relevant to their level in the organisation.

**Interpersonal:** communicate effectively so that they really connect with others.

**Leadership Style:** adjust how they deal with and respond to the roller coaster ride that is life in organisations today.

# 2. Interpersonal Skills

Relationship building is a vital part of the management role and it is the quality of your interpersonal skills which facilitate the building of relationships with others. As such, regardless of your current level of experience, you should pay a lot of attention to your strengths and weaknesses in this area because you can all develop your ability to better relate to others and doing so will help you to lead more effectively. The prime interpersonal skill is the ability to communicate.

## 2.1 The art of communication

You have probably heard the phrase 'the art of communication' before, but you might not realise just how difficult an art it is to master. Every day we see people around us interacting and assume that communication is happening. Sadly, we tend to equate quantity with quality in relation to how we tend to equate quantity with quality in relation to how we communicate.

But lots of talking does not mean lots of communicating: it can often mean the opposite.

It is a fact that, for all of us, our ability to communicate is a greater area for improvement than we might think. Most of us believe that we are good at it and rarely does someone openly admit that they are not.

But if we all have such strong communication skills, then;

- ❑ Why are there so many communication breakdowns in our daily lives?
- ❑ Particularly in a work context, why are there so many communication related problems?
- ❑ Why are there so many misunderstandings and disputes?
- ❑ Why do two people often hear the same message, but end up with two differing perceptions of what it meant?

There must be something behind these and other failings and it is useful to explore the issue, so that you can clearly define steps to help you to improve your ability to communicate. One of the difficulties that arise in relation to how we communicate is the fact that it is seen as a natural activity, one which we have being doing in one form or another since we were born.

Even in the absence of being able to speak you could still let your feelings be known as a baby! You do not get up first thing every morning and think, okay, now I am going downstairs to interact with my family at breakfast. You just do it and it requires little thought.

That is part of the problem and our belief that communication is a natural process is actually one of the underlying causes for our collective shortcomings in this area.

## 2.1.1 Elements of communication - content & context

How you currently communicate is an example of *conditioning* (learned behaviour) and you may have to change or unlearn what you currently do, as a stepping stone to becoming a more effective leader. This is clearly not going to be easy, but it is achievable. First, you need to look again at the basics of how you communicate. From that you can
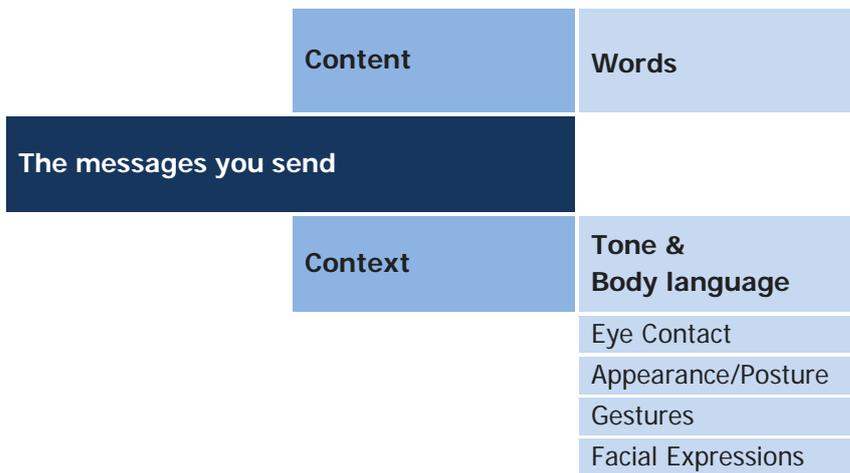
develop a roadmap to guide your improvement efforts. As you do so, we will primarily focus on the most common form of communication utilised by a leader at work, namely face to face interaction.

When you talk directly to an individual or group, you are in effect sending and receiving messages. Sounds simple, but as you know this isn't always the case. To have real communication, there must be common understanding as a result. When you look more closely at what's really going on, it becomes clearer why the process is more complex than it seems at first.

When you interact directly with another person, you know that the message is made up of three components, Words, Tone and Body Language.

You might have been on training courses over the years where you were given a rule such as; any message is made up of Words 7%, Tone 38% and Body Language 55%, or something similar. Whilst this is useful in highlighting the importance of the tone and body language, it is not really very practical, as it tries to put something neatly into a box which may not fit on all occasions.

Perhaps it is more appropriate to think of the messages you transmit as having two dimensions; **content** and **context**.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Content** | **Words** | |
| **The messages you send** | | |
| **Context** | **Tone &**<br>**Body language** | |
| | Eye Contact | |
| | Appearance/Posture | |
| | Gestures | |
| | Facial Expressions | |

It is clear that the *content* of your messages is provided by the words you use, whereas the *context* is delivered by your tone and body language. Let's totally forget about percentages and say that to be an effective communicator, the *content* and *context* of your message must always be in alignment. When you look more closely at the context of the message, you see that it is in fact made up of your emotions – how you feel about what you are saying. When happy, your tone and body language change as they do when you are sad, angry, hurt and so on. This is where the link can be made between your ability to keep in control and your effectiveness as a communicator.

## 2.1.2 Communicating more effectively

In seeking to become a better communicator, you naturally need to consider both content and context. Some basic points to think about when seeking to get the content right;

❑ Preparation is really important and the longer, or more important the interaction you are facing, the more you need to prepare.
❑ Even for short every day interactions, be clear as to what you wish to say and get your thoughts organised in your own head, before you open your mouth. Think, then speak.
❑ Match the content of what you have to say with the requirements of your audience, be that one person or many.
❑ Consider what they need to know, what they know already and how best to devise the message to make it 'stick' for them.
❑ Be clear, concise and don't waffle.
❑ Be knowledgeable about your work and up-to-date with current trends. Take proactive steps to build your knowledge base.
❑ Avoid instances where you are put on the spot for immediate answers to complex issues. Naturally, there will be plenty of occasions where a quick answer is required and you will need to cope effectively with that.
❑ When you don't have the answer, don't bluff or lie. Be honest and tell them you will get back to them. Then make sure you do.
❑ Avoid overuse of meaningless jargon and buzzwords, or you could end up sounding like a walking cliché machine. Never feel that you need to join the jargon club – clear and simple is best.

In seeking to get the context right, things become somewhat more complicated for a lot of what you are currently doing in relation to tone and body language is subconscious. As stated, having leadership qualities like *self-control* will help you here, as it will allow you to manage your emotions more effectively and therefore improve how you communicate. Your inner emotions rush out through your external behaviours and that is why you need to work on your self-control as part of your attempts to become a better communicator. There are too many interpersonal situations to cover how you should manage context in each one, but it is possible to show the impact on context of three emotional states:

| | Out of Control<br>Being too shy or Passive | In Control | Out of Control<br>Being too angry, or Aggressive |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Tone of Voice** | • Quietly spoken<br>• Obviously nervous<br>• Overly apologetic<br>• Soft spoken<br>• Dry mouth | • Firm<br>• Calm<br>• Clear | • Loud<br>• Raised voice<br>• Shouting |
| **Words** | • Talking around the subject<br>• Avoiding getting to the issue<br>• Overly apologetic in choice of words<br>• Qualifying everything you say | • Concise<br>• No waffle<br>• Clearly expressing your opinion<br>• Using 'I' but in a non-selfish way | • Abrupt<br>• Threatening<br>• Accusing<br>• Using 'you' in a blaming fashion<br>• Swearing |
| **Eyes** | • Uncomfortable making eye contact<br>• Looking down or away a lot | • Maintaining good eye contact<br>• Not seeking to intimidate | • Staring down<br>• Eyes bulging<br>• Trying to intimidate |
| **Hand Gestures** | • Nervous gestures<br>• Fidgeting<br>• Hand-wringing | • Open hand gestures | • Lots of pointing<br>• Clenched hands<br>• Thumping table |
| **Body Language** | • Inward posture<br>• Obviously uncomfortable<br>• Hunched, self-Protecting | • Upright posture<br>• Head up<br>• Using active listening | • Forward posture<br>• In your face<br>• Leaning<br>• Threatening |

Clearly, there is no easy answer as to how to manage the context of your communications, but a natural starting point is to be clear on where your current areas for improvement lie. The key message here is that to be an effective communicator, your goal should be to ensure that what you say and how you say it always complement each other.

In terms of your external body language, the ability to make positive eye contact is of utmost importance for a leader, because it signals attentiveness, confidence and honesty.

## 2.1.3 Improving your listening skills

As well as thinking about how you send messages, you need to think about how you receive them too and to communicate more effectively you must be a good listener. Some people, even experienced managers, are terrible at it.

In discussing listening, you should consider it from two perspectives; first, you need to see listening as a frame of mind and second you must view it as a skill in its own right.

Operating with a leader's mindset, you must always be prepared to listen to your employees, individually and collectively. There should be structured communication channels in place which provide you with formal opportunities to sit down and communicate with your team. In addition, on a day to day basis you will need to make time to listen to the people around you.

You must also view listening as a skill to be developed, designed to encourage your team members to open up and to prevent you from doing all the talking in any given situation. We often assume that as we have two ears and don't have any hearing defects, then listening is not a problem for us. But it is very easy to be distracted by noise, or movement and our attention spans can be quite short.

Becoming a better listener means using active listening techniques such as:

| | |
|---|---|
| **Maintaining Eye Contact** | Obviously, this shows you are actually willing to listen, but it also helps you to read body language, which can often tell you that something in the content of what the other person is saying doesn't stack up. |
| **Nodding** | This again is an obvious sign that you are attentive and it encourages the speaker to keep going. |
| **Encouraging** | Simply, interjecting on occasion with 'Yes, go on' gets them to continue to open up. This has less impact if you are not making eye contact too. Saying it whilst shuffling through your papers doesn't work! |
| **Allowing short silences** | Most of us hate silences and often try to quickly fill the gap. Don't be afraid to let short silences occur, as it lets the other person know that you are not automatically going to jump in and often this will encourage them to continue. |
| **Paraphrasing** | This means showing the person that you have got the gist of what they have said by saying things such as; 'So what you are saying is...' |
| **Summarising** | This means confirming in precise detail what they have said to show that you have understood what was said. |

Active listening is about concentration and focus. Some people help us to do this because they are good communicators and make us want to listen. Others can make it very hard for us to listen to them. In a leadership role, you must continuously strive to become a better listener regardless of the context that the other person uses for their delivery.

## Activity 1 – Reflect upon your current strengths and areas for improvement as a communicator.

**Consider the following questions:**

1.  Are you an open-minded individual and are you willing to change your viewpoint based on the valid opinions/arguments of others?
2.  Do you prepare for all communications (large and small) and really think things through before you speak, or do you have a tendency to speak first and think later?
3.  Do you always try to tailor your message to suit the person(s) you are talking to, or do you focus more on what you have to say?
4.  Do you find it easy to listen to what other people have to say without interrupting them?
5.  Are you good at making eye contact with people when you are talking to them?
6.  Are you intimidated by situations where you must communicate with difficult employees or customers?
7.  Are you confident when you talk to people and do you speak clearly without mumbling?
8.  Are you good at getting your point across in a clear, concise manner without waffling?
9.  Do you find it easy to concentrate on what others are saying without losing your focus and concentration?
10. When others are speaking, do you begin planning your response without really listening to what they have to say?
11. Are you the type of person who thinks their opinion is the most important in the room?
12. Are you the type of person who only speaks up if you have something valuable to contribute to the conversation and do you avoid talking just for the sake of it?
13. Do you make a conscious effort to match your body language to the message you want to convey?
14. Are you good at reading the body language of others?
15. Can you keep your cool when talking to other people even if you feel angry about what they are saying?
16. When other people in the group are quiet, do you encourage them to contribute?
17. When in a heated conversation, are you the type of person who shouts and points at people a lot?
18. When group discussions get heated, are you good at keeping everyone calm and on the point?
19. Do you feel comfortable holding meetings and/or speaking in public?
20. Are you good at summarising the key points of conversations which you have with other people, or do you quickly forget what has been said?

These questions will help you to reflect upon what you do well and where you might need to improve as a communicator. It can also be useful to ask people you know and trust in a work context for their opinion too. The key of course is to actually do something to address any shortcomings identified.

# 2.2 Influencing & Persuading

At times, any leader must impose their will on their employees and when you do so in a firm but non-aggressive manner, that is simply part of being in a leadership position. However, if that's all you ever do, you will find that your employees will disengage, or simply wait to be 'told' what to do. Therefore, modern day leaders need to spend a lot of time influencing and persuading others too. Sometimes, you need to do so in relation to your employees - where you have the position and authority to support you - but you will also have to persuade superiors, customers and other stakeholders where the reality is that the power lies with them, not you.

The term 'influencing' means changing another person's attitudes or actions without having to resort to force or authority. In practical terms, to influence someone else, you have to prove to other people that accepting your proposal helps them to solve their problems or achieve their objectives. There is no magic answer to how to influence others but the best 'influencers' always have a healthy combination of interpersonal, communication, presentation and assertiveness skills. They are good at adapting and modifying their personal style to suit the needs of the situation or the audience, be that one or many.

As touched upon above, some managers over-rely on exerting their influence through coercion and manipulation. This might succeed in getting things done; but it isn't influencing. It's forcing people to do what you want, often against their will. By coercing others, you won't have succeeded in winning real support for what you want them to do and you will pay for that later. Pushing, bullying, or threatening people do not work, particularly over the long term. Indeed, if you force someone to do something, without taking their point of view into consideration, then you damage the relationship and see the result of it in lower productivity.

Most people are prepared to meet you half-way when they feel acknowledged, understood and appreciated. They may even end up doing or agreeing to something they wouldn't previously have done because they feel good about making the choice. Influencing is therefore as much about understanding yourself and the effect or impact you have on others. Sometimes you can get so used to your own personal style, or way of being, or pattern of communicating that you don't think of how it is being received by others. Becoming a better influencer means first knowing the impact you have on others.

**Common Mistakes when seeking to influence or persuade:**

❑ Not being really clear on the outcome you want.
❑ Pushing too hard or not hard enough.
❑ Believing that because you see the benefits of your ideas that others automatically will too.
❑ Not 'selling' the ideas in terms that are meaningful to the target audience.
❑ Focusing on your needs, not theirs.
❑ Believing that you can treat people badly most of the time and then suddenly win them over when you need to.
❑ Having a personal style, or an approach to communication that 'rubs' others up the wrong way.

# 2.2.1 The Process of Influencing

It's not necessarily a step-by-step process, but consider the following:

✓ **Be very clear on what your objectives are.** Maybe you cannot influence or persuade people to move fully in the direction you want them to go all at once. However, you can get them to take the first step now and then build on that later.
✓ **When interacting with people, consider what you can achieve in the time available.** If the meeting only lasts 30 minutes there is only so much you can achieve.
✓ **Use emotion to win people over;** be passionate
✓ **Learn as much as possible about the people you are trying to influence.** Try to anticipate how they might respond.
✓ **Tailor your arguments to address their needs.**
✓ **Use hard evidence;** such as facts and figures that can support your argument, or practical, simple, non-technical examples to illustrate your point.
✓ **Listen to and address people's concerns.**
✓ **Constantly monitor and measure progress.** Are they moving in the direction you want them to go?

**"**

*if you lack credibility you face an*

**"**

*uphill task*

Influencing others is as much about the person as the process. If people trust and respect you, then you are already in a strong position to influence them on any matter – and in fact the process becomes less important. If you lack credibility in the eyes of those you are trying to influence, then you face an uphill task.

**Activity 2 – Think of a recent situation where you were required to influence and persuade others on an important matter.**

**Consider the following questions:**

✓ How did you handle the situation? Did you achieve the goal of persuading them, or did you have to resort to forcing your opinion on them?

✓ How did you feel during the interaction, were you stressed, or did you manage to stay calm and in control?

✓ How did you handle any objections that might have arisen to what you were proposing? Did you spend time explaining your position, or did you try to shut down the discussion and move on from the objection raised, without really dealing with it?

✓ Do you think that the way you prepared for the interaction made it run more effectively, or did lack of preparation cause you problems? If there were issues with lack of preparation, what were they?

✓ Do you think that you made a strong case for what you were proposing? Did you sense that the individual/group were 'onside' with your suggestions? How might you have made a better case if things didn't go as well as you had hoped?

✓ Try to really picture yourself in the situation again, but now try look at it through the eyes of the individual/group involved. From their perspective, would they have considered you as being strong and confident in the situation, or would they have felt you were a bit unnerved by it all? How would they have rated your communication skills on a scale from *clear/concise* to *waffling/unclear?* Would they have sensed a real passion from you for what you were proposing, or would they have thought you were just going through the motions?

✓ Based on your self-analysis of this scenario what will you do differently the next time you are faced with having to influence and persuade others to get an even better result?

# 3. Leadership Styles

Fundamentally, all leadership style models say more or less the same thing. They are differentiated mostly by their levels of complexity. All theories describe the styles of leadership on the basis of whether the focus of the leader is on the *Task* or the *People*.

Early theories defined two polar opposite styles; the more task-focused the leader, the greater the probability that they were *autocratic* in nature. The more people focused, the more likely they were to be *democratic* in their approach. However, this was too simplistic an analysis, because it is too black and white, as you know the realities of leading are shrouded in many shades of grey.

Later theories and models built on this basic assumption, but identified a range of styles. Some defined a sliding scale approach from autocratic to democratic, whereas other models defined styles against a matrix based on the interrelationship between the task and the people. More recent approaches define styles based on different situations, or on the ability of the leader to inspire others by their actions.

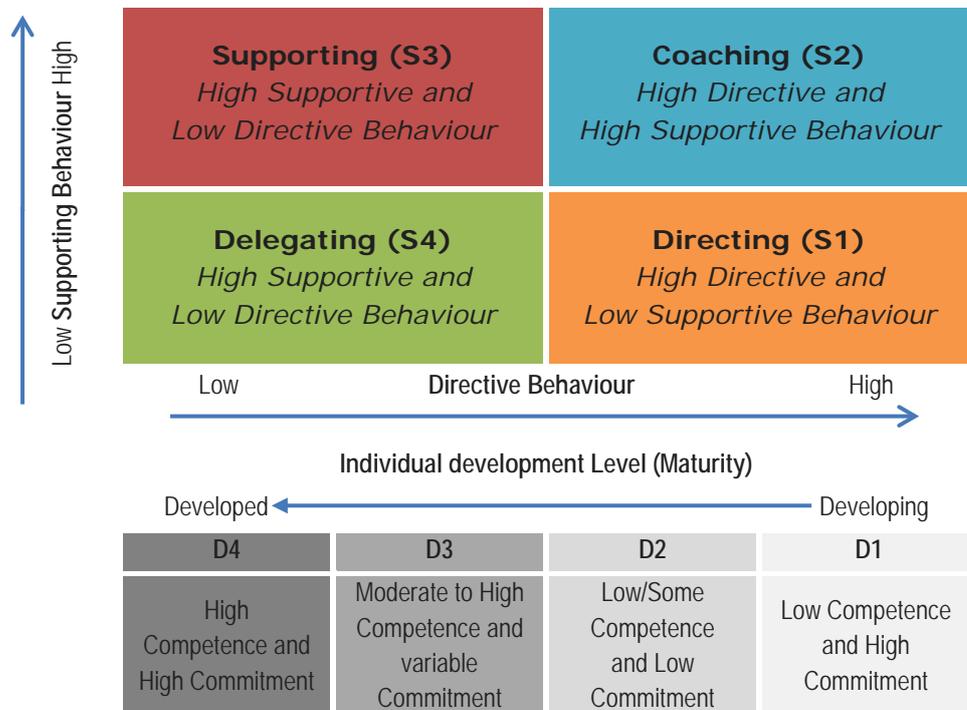It is the situational approach which will be of focus here.

# 3.1 Situational Leadership Theory

To help you to review the effectiveness of your current leadership style, the Situational Leadership® model is a useful approach to consider. The model was created by Dr Paul Hersey, a professor and author of "The Situational Leader," and Ken Blanchard, author of the best-selling "The One-Minute Manager," among others.

> **"** *emphasis on the task : emphasis on relationships* **"**

In essence, their theory states that instead of using just one style, successful leaders should change their leadership styles based on the 'maturity' of the people they're leading and the details of the task. Using this theory, leaders should be able to place more or less emphasis on the task, and more or less emphasis on the relationships with the people they're leading, depending on what's needed to get the job done successfully.

The model can be depicted as follows:

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Low Supporting Behaviour High | **Supporting (S3)** *High Supportive and Low Directive Behaviour* | **Coaching (S2)** *High Directive and High Supportive Behaviour* | |
| | **Delegating (S4)** *High Supportive and Low Directive Behaviour* | **Directing (S1)** *High Directive and Low Supportive Behaviour* | |

Low     **Directive Behaviour**     High

**Individual development Level (Maturity)**

Developed ←     → Developing

| D4 | D3 | D2 | D1 |
|---|---|---|---|
| High Competence and High Commitment | Moderate to High Competence and variable Commitment | Low/Some Competence and Low Commitment | Low Competence and High Commitment |

According to Hersey and Blanchard, there are four main leadership styles:

**Directing (S1)** – Leaders tell their people exactly what to do, and how to do it.

**Coaching (S2)** – Leaders still provide information and direction, but there's more communication with followers. Leaders "sell" their message to get the team on board.

**Supporting (S3)** – Leaders focus more on the relationship and less on direction. The leader works with the team, and shares decision-making responsibilities.

**Delegating (S4)** – Leaders pass most of the responsibility onto the follower or group. The leaders still monitor progress, but they're less involved in decisions.

As you can see, styles S1 and S2 are focused on getting the task done. Styles S3 and S4 are more concerned with developing employee's abilities to work independently.

## Maturity Levels

According to Hersey and Blanchard, knowing when to use each style is largely dependent on the maturity (competence and commitment) of the person or group you're leading. In this context, they break maturity down into four different levels:

**D1** – People at this level of maturity are at the bottom level of the scale. They lack the knowledge, skills, or confidence to work on their own, and they often need to be pushed to take the task on.

**D2** – At this level, followers might be willing to work on the task, but they still don't have the skills to do it successfully.

**D3** – Here, followers are ready and willing to help with the task. They have more skills than the D2 group, but they're still not confident in their abilities.

**D4** – These followers are able to work on their own. They have high confidence and strong skills, and they're committed to the task.

Based on Situational Leadership, the key issue for any leader is flexibility and effective leaders have the ability to adjust their approach depending upon the situation or the person they are faced with. On any given day, you could in fact use all four styles depending upon what arises and the decision over which style is most appropriate will be influenced by many factors, such as:

**Team Effectiveness** – when your team is well established and performs well, you are more likely to apply *supporting* or *delegation* styles, because your employees are ready for this. On the other hand, for new teams, or when you take over an existing team for the first time you will have to utilise the *Directing* style initially as you must establish yourself among the team and get them operating to a high level. This requires high levels of direction and control at the initial stages. Over time, as the team develops in the way that you want, you can then move towards supporting or delegation styles.

**Individual performance** – different employees will have different levels of 'maturity' (the balance between their levels of competence and commitment) and as a result will perform at varying levels; you must adjust your style for each. This change is subtle, but higher performing employees warrant less direction and control than poor performers and as such require the application of *supporting* or *delegation* styles more frequently. Equally, a new team member who is still learning the ropes will naturally require more direction and control than someone who has been doing the job for a long time and as such will require you to use the *Directing* style.

**Situations** – different situations will always require the application of different styles. For example, when time deadlines are tight you may have to use the *Directing* style to ensure outcomes are met, whereas if there are changes required to work practices this may allow for greater involvement of your team in the decision making process and as such the *Delegating* style would be better.

In light of this, flexibility is the most important word; easier said than done of course, but this is what makes the application of leadership style a skill. Some experienced managers lose sight of the flexibility requirement and end up operating from within very narrow bands with regard to the styles they adopt, and this is extremely limiting in terms of getting the best from employees today.

**Activity 3 – Think about your current leadership style, using the following questions to guide you:**

1. Do you believe that your real authority as a leader comes from your title or position, or from how you behave and interact with your employees?

2. Do you continuously think about how you lead others and are you constantly trying to improve your performance, or do you only reflect on this issue when something goes wrong?

3. Do you always try to lead by example, or is it a case of 'do as I say, not as I do'?

4. Do you genuinely treat all your team members equally and fairly, or do you have favourites that you treat differently from others?

5. Are you aggressive in your leadership style, or are you good at staying calm but being firm when need be?

6. Would your employees consider you to be a bully, or at the other end of the scale, a bit of a pushover?

7. Do you have the ability to be flexible in how you apply your leadership style in practice, or is it a case that you have only one style which you slightly tweak from time to time?

8. Can you actively apply different styles to match the requirements of each given situation? Think of a recent example where you did just that?

9. When an individual is not performing to standard, do you deal with them in an effective manner, or do you simply 'haul them over the coals' and expect them to change as a result?

10. Over the past month, how often did you lose your temper with your employees? What was the outcome?

11. When was the last time you managed to bring an underperforming employee back on track? What did you do that turned things around?

12. Do you encourage your employees to be actively involved in decision making, or do you make most of the important decisions for them?

13. Think of two recent examples where you allowed your employees a high degree of autonomy over their work? Do you think you offer too much/too little autonomy to your people?

14. When your employees achieve something, are you good at acknowledging their efforts or do they hear more about the one bad thing than all the good they do?

15. Think of your employees as a unit for a moment: do you think they really feel valued and respected by you? What evidence do you have to support your answer here?

16. Do you provide regular and meaningful opportunities where your employees can develop their skills even further?

17. Are you good at delegating to your employees, or at least to some of them who want to be delegated to?

18. If your employees were asked whether they felt you were a good role model for them in terms of leadership style, what do you think they would say?

19. Over the past month, can you think of three things you consciously did to help build team spirit amongst your employees? If not, why not?

20. How good are you at dealing with conflict within your team of employees? Do you confront it and deal with it proactively, or do you ignore it and hope that it goes away on its own?

These questions should give you an indication of where there might be room for improvement in terms of applying your leadership style.

# 4. Conclusion

The purpose of this guide has been to provide you with an opportunity to reflect on your current skillset, as it applies to your capacity for leadership. Regardless of your level of experience, don't discount the potential for self-improvement - it is possible to teach 'old dogs new tricks' – and the benefits stemming from making that effort to improve are not insignificant.  It goes without saying that what you decide to do following your self-analysis is entirely up to yourself, but even small improvements in your ability to relate to others or adjusting your leadership style can lead to significant improvements in employee performance.

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Fáilte Ireland
88-95 Amiens Street
Dublin 1

www.failteireland.ie