

### Situational Leadership

1 Lippitt (1969) asserted, "Leadership must be flexible in style to meet the need of a particular situation" (p. 2). 2 Situational leadership involves changing or adapting the methods of leading an organization depending upon the situation or organization's needs. There are 3 four situational approaches to leadership briefly described below: Fiedler's Contingency Model, Path-Goal Theory, Hersey and Blanchard's Situational Leadership, and Leader-Member Exchange Theory.

4 *Fiedler's Contingency Model*. This particular model contends that there are three factors which determine the amount of influence a leader will have over his followers. The 5 first factor, titled *position power*, refers to the leader's power to administer reward or punishment to his/her constituent. 6 The higher position a leader has, the greater the influence he holds over the followers. 7 The second factor, titled *task-structure*, refers to a leader's flexibility, or lack thereof, in delineating the steps that must be carried out in order to 8 complete a task. The third factor, *leader-member relations*, refers to the sense of loyalty, trust, affection, and respect, in other words, the relationship, between the leader and the follower (Hackman & Johnson).

9 *The Path-Goal Theory*. This is a leadership theory based upon the needs, abilities, values, and personalities of followers; yet, it also takes into account the structure and clarity of assigned tasks and duties. 10 In each situation that arises, the leader determines the proper approach to communication depending on the task involved and the followers' level of skill, confidence, experience, and commitment. For instance, 11 when an unsure or inexperienced follower must complete an unstructured task, this theory

asserts that a directive communication approach is most beneficial for the leader to take.

12 If the follower possesses the necessary skills yet lacks the confidence or the commitment to the structured task, the leader must take the approach of using a supportive

communication style. If both <sup>13</sup> followers are unsure and the task unstructured, the most beneficial style for a leader to enlist is a participative communication style, which is designed to elicit ideas and suggestions from followers. <sup>14</sup> Finally, if a follower is experienced and must perform an unstructured task, the leader's best bet is to use an achievement-oriented communication style, which is designed to demonstrate the leader's confidence in the follower to complete the task successfully (Hackman & Johnson).

<sup>16</sup> Hersey and Blanchard's Situational Leadership Theory takes into consideration the readiness levels of followers. Within this particular theory, <sup>17</sup> a follower's readiness level refers to his/her combination of skill level and motivation. <sup>15</sup> Similar to the Path-Goal Theory, unskilled or unmotivated followers with low readiness require the leader to use a *telling* approach, which involves providing specific instructions followed by close supervision. Therefore, these followers must be given structure and guidance. They trust in and thrive on the security of leaders who determine the priorities in given situations. <sup>18</sup> If a follower is a willing participant but does not possess the necessary skills, the leader must use a *selling* approach, which involves an explanation followed by an opportunity for clarification. This approach requires less supervision; yet, these followers still need to be convinced that goals are appropriate. <sup>19</sup> If a follower is skilled and capable but has little or no motivation, the leader should use a *participating* approach, which includes the follower in the decision-making, creating more buy-in and, thus, increased motivation.

These followers have proven themselves *ready* to be involved in the goal-setting necessary for the cause. <sup>20</sup> Finally, if the follower possesses both high skill and motivation, the leader's approach should be that of *delegating*. During the delegating process, a leader simply turns over responsibility to the follower to make and implement decisions. These followers have the capability of accepting and independently executing organizational duties. (Hackman & Johnson).

<sup>21</sup> The Leader-Member Exchange Theory is one that focuses primarily on the relationship developed between the leader and follower. When followers first become part of an organization, they fall in touch with either the leader's in-group or his/her out-

part of an organization, they fall in rank with either the leader's in-group or his/her out-group. The leader's <sup>22</sup> in-group consists of trusted followers who are assigned to make some of the decisions of the group and have input into the direction and future of the organization. <sup>23</sup> Members of the out-group are simply required to satisfactorily perform their duties but are not allowed any autonomy or participation to which the members of the in-group are privy (Hackman & Johnson).