

Strengths and Weaknesses of Leadership Styles

Although no one style is effective all the time, some styles are less effective in some situations than others. Here are the strengths and weakness of each style, followed by suggestions for development actions to expand the coach's skill base.

Directing

Strengths

The directing style is good for situations in which crises frequently prevail. Directors make good military field commanders, drill instructors, or line supervisors in production situations. Directors are excellent when training beginners who need the facts and information delivered concisely and clearly in the minimum amount of time.

Weaknesses:

A pure directing style is not effective in a participatory work environment over the long run. A director will motivate employees who will always wait around for instructions.

Suggestions:

The director should learn all the interpersonal skills needed to learn to listen and ask more open questions. The director needs to give feedback, but then be prepared to hear other points of view.

Coaching

Strengths

Generally speaking, the coaching style is universal. If you can both direct and support, you can vary either to meet the needs of the employee. You are able to meet a variety of needs in one basic style and provide most things to most folks.

Weaknesses:

The only time the coaching style is ineffective is when the employee has developed beyond specific feedback and merely needs general encouragement to keep growing. The habitual coach must learn when to step back and let the players play.

Suggestions:

The coach's only real need is to learn to let go. This means allowing mistakes to occur without running in to support the employee. When they are at a high development level, employees learn from their own mistakes.

Supporting

Strengths:

The supporting style provides lots of warmth and understanding or strokes. Thus it is very useful in a highly participative environment. It works well with developed employees who are competent, but in need of just a little reinforcement and encouragement to grow.

Weaknesses:

When dealing with employees of low development, the supporter might find himself or herself supporting and encouraging poor or inadequate behavior. When dealing with very developed employees, the supporter might get in the way of results by wanting to participate unnecessarily.

Suggestions:

Practice giving corrective feedback and asking closed, directive questions to get quick answers. Avoid wasting time in drawn-out meetings when simple, quick management decisions will serve.

Delegating

Strengths:

To be able to truly delegate and get both results and development of employees is a great strength. To delegate well, you must know your people well, be willing to trust them, and be able to create very clear expectations.

Weaknesses:

Delegators are dangerous when they have raw recruits to handle. They tend not to be good developers of people, merely efficient producers. They can confuse and frustrate employees who are not self-starters or very proficient.

Suggestions:

Delegators must relearn most of the communication skills. They must listen to determine the needs of their people, ask questions to gather information, and provide feedback when they are dealing with those not at the D4 level.

The Developmental Levels

The situational leader adapts his or her style to the development of the team member. Development is a combination of competence and confidence.

D1: Enthusiastic Beginner:

The team member is high in commitment and ready to go, but lacks real experience and competence.

Low Competence:

The team member does not know the technical requirements of the job. He or she may require detailed training and guidance.

High Commitment:

The team member is excited about the work and glad for the new opportunity, yet unsure about the difficulties or challenges.

D2: Realistic Learner:

Even with increased competence, the commitment has decreased. The team member has learned how much he or she doesn't know and how difficult and complex the job is likely to be.

Some Competence:

The team member has moderate successes in doing the tasks in the job. You still observe this member gradually increasing his or her skill level.

Moderate Commitment:

Team member feels less sure of himself or herself with the realization that the job is tougher than he or she thought. Some of the early confidence may be lost.

D3: Uncertain Contributor:

Unable to make a real contribution, the team member must be urged to keep trying. Competence is high, but commitment is variable and the leader must praise and support when possible.

High Competence:

Team members at this stage have mastered most of the job demands and can function effectively when left alone.

Variable Commitment:

Nevertheless, they are unwilling to take risks or engage in new ventures without support and participation.

D4: Empowered Performer:

High in both commitment and competence, the employee is fully able to contribute, motivate and reward himself or herself.

High Competence:

These team members have mastered the tasks and no longer need coaching or feedback to improve. They provide their own feedback.

High Commitment:

Since they operate autonomously in their jobs, these team members need little or no encouragement from others. They have developed a sense of ownership and full empowerment. They set their own goals and often identify the rewards they want for success.