Improving Employee Engagement and Team Development through the Implementation of Flexible and Adaptive Situational Leadership

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ABSTRACT

Situational leadership has a significant impact on employee engagement and team development in organizations. This leadership theory emphasizes the importance of leaders to adapt their style according to the conditions, abilities, and needs of employees. Leaders who are flexible in choosing the right approach for a given situation can create a more productive and collaborative work environment. By approaching employees individually and adapting their leadership style to the circumstances at hand, employee engagement can be improved, and team development can run smoothly. High engagement improves motivation, work quality, and builds a more solid team. Meanwhile, good team development can contribute to achieving organizational aims more efficiently. It is important for leaders to have emotional intelligence and the ability to assess situations well in order to manage teams effectively. Sustainable training and organizational support to strengthen these skills are needed for optimal implementation of situational leadership. This will bring long-term benefits to both individual development and overall organizational success.

INTRODUCTION

Situational leadership has become an important concept in management studies because of its focus on the need to adapt leadership styles to changing situations and conditions. The model was first developed by Paul Hersey and Kenneth Blanchard, who pointed out that the effectiveness of a leader depends largely on the situation at hand and the level of readiness of his or her followers. This flexible leadership style allows leaders to choose the right approach to improve employee engagement and team development, according to individual needs in a given situation (Hersey & Blanchard, 1982). his dynamic approach is a central aspect of effective leadership strategies, specifically studied in the context of improving change management and enhancing overall team performance (Mardikaningsih & Darmawan, 2022). In this way, situational leadership can play an important role in optimizing the results achieved by teams and organizations (Waller et al., 1989). Situational leadership enables leaders to adopt different approaches based on the context, which results in greater efficiency and effectiveness in achieving organizational objectives (Northouse, 2025).

Employee engagement and team development are two key elements in organizational success. Employee engagement can improve motivation, productivity, and quality of work, while effective team development can foster better collaboration, faster problem solving, and more efficient achievement of common aims. A leader's influence in shaping a responsive organizational culture is pivotal in creating an environment that fosters such engagement and development, especially in the face of ongoing change (Al Hakim et al., 2022). Many organizations strive to create conditions that support employee engagement and team development (Yildiz, 2023). Leaders who are able to implement situational leadership wisely are expected to significantly influence both aspects. This influence is a composite of various factors, including the leader's interpersonal skills and their overall leadership style, which directly impact employee work effectiveness (Hariani & Sigita, 2022).

While situational leadership is widely praised for its ability to adapt to different situations, not all leaders can implement this leadership style

effectively. In practice, many leaders find it difficult to determine the right approach according to the level of employee readiness or the existing team dynamics. This can result in low levels of employee engagement, which ultimately affects the performance of the team and the organization as a whole. Performance outcomes are deeply interconnected, as employee performance is significantly influenced by leadership, innovative behavior, and work engagement collectively (Putra & Mardikaningsih, 2022). The success of situational leadership models relies heavily on an understanding of the individuals Sand teams being led (Farmer, 2005).

In some organizations, leaders tend to implement a more authority-centered style or rely too much on a more laissez-faire approach without considering the situation at hand. In fact, a leadership style that does not match the needs of the team or individual can hinder employee engagement and maximum team development (Manepatil, 2013). It is important to carefully assess how situational leadership affects these two aspects, in order to create a more productive and dynamic work environment.

One of the main problems associated with the implementation of situational leadership is the mismatch between the leadership style implemented by the leader and the readiness of employees to face a particular task or challenge. In many cases, leaders struggle to accurately assess the level of employee readiness, both in terms of skills and motivation, so they may implement a leadership style that does not match the needs of the team. This can lead to confusion and lowered employee engagement, which ultimately affects organizational performance (Northouse, 2018). In times of uncertainty, specific leadership approaches are required to preserve the quality of services and products, highlighting the need for adaptability and situational awareness (Irfan & Putra, 2021).

Another problem is the lack of adequate training or support for leaders to implement situational leadership effectively. While the theory provides clear guidelines regarding the leadership style that suits a particular situation, not all leaders have sufficient skills or understanding to adapt their leadership style. This can result in ineffectiveness in leading, hinder team development, and lower employee engagement levels. Irfan (2022) reinforces this understanding by identifying that employee performance is a product of several key variables, including work discipline, work motivation, and, last but not least, the leadership style applied. In fact, low employee engagement can have a direct effect on reducing productivity and the quality of teamwork (Goleman, 2000).

It is important to pay attention to the relationship between situational leadership, employee engagement, and team development as these greatly affect the long-term performance of an organization. Amidst the rapidly changing dynamics of the workplace, leaders who are able to adapt their leadership style to the needs of their team can create a more flexible and responsive work environment. This adaptability is also foundational for building employee work loyalty, which is significantly shaped by both leadership and the prevailing work culture (Hariani & Irfan, 2022). Effective leaders can improve employee engagement, which leads to improved productivity and job satisfaction.

Optimal employee engagement and team development will create a work culture that is more collaborative, innovative and positively impacts the achievement of common aims. Given that organizations that successfully create high employee engagement tend to excel in terms of performance and adaptation to change, it is imperative to explore how situational leadership can be implemented to improve these aspects in the developing world of work.

The main objective of this topic is to identify how the implementation of situational leadership can influence employee engagement and team development. By understanding the relationship between the leadership style implemented and the level of engagement and team development, it is hoped that a more effective approach to leading and optimizing organizational performance can be found.

RESEARCH METHOD

In the literature study on the effectiveness of situational leadership on employee engagement and team development, this approach relies on analyzing various relevant and well-documented sources. The literature study allows researchers to collect and analyze theories, models, as well as previous research results on this topic from various perspectives. In this case, the literature included proven leadership theories such as the situational leadership model developed by Hersey and Blanchard (1982), and Goleman's (2000) theories of motivation and employee engagement. Transformational leadership continues to be a key driver of employee engagement. Recent studies demonstrate that transformational leaders, who inspire, challenge, and support their employees, lead to higher levels of job satisfaction, performance, and organizational commitment (Ng & Lucianetti, 2016). This literature study includes not only scientific journal articles, but also textbooks, industry reports, as well as other related articles that are relevant to explore the relationship between situational leadership styles and their influence on team

engagement and performance in organizations.

The literature study approach allowed the researcher to gain greater insight into this topic without conducting experiments or direct observations in the field. By analyzing various existing sources, the researcher was able to assess the diversity of views on the relationship between situational leadership and team development. These references serve as a basis for building a conceptual framework that helps in evaluating how diverse leadership styles can affect the level of employee engagement and how teams develop in the face of certain challenges. Relevant sources in this literature include articles from leading management and leadership journals such as Leadership Quarterly and Journal of Organizational Behavior, which provide empirical data and findings on the topic (Yukl, 2013; Northouse, 2018).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Situational leadership is one of the most relevant concepts in managing today's organizational dynamics. Leaders who are able to adapt their leadership style to the needs of the team and the existing conditions are often more successful in managing human resources. In a fast-growing organization, the ability to adapt to the challenges and needs of employees becomes very important, especially when dealing with diverse and complex situations. Situational leadership is not just about choosing the right approach, but also about understanding every element engaged in the process. Effective leaders must be able to carefully assess the situation and provide direction and support according to the readiness and capacity of their team (Widyadharma et al., 2020). This adaptability is crucial for preserving the quality of services and products, particularly amid periods of significant organizational uncertainty (Irfan & Putra, 2021).

Employee engagement and team development depend heavily on the way a leader interacts with his or her members. Situational leadership emphasizes flexibility and adaptability of style that allows the leader to provide the needed support based on the specific situation. These leadership styles can contribute significantly to improving employee motivation, morale and confidence. By adjusting leadership styles according to individual and team needs, leaders can create an environment conducive to improving productivity and work quality (Zurlinden et al., 1990). The role of leadership and a supportive work environment are fundamental drivers of worker satisfaction, which directly underpins engagement and performance, as evidenced in diverse settings such as construction projects (Radjawane & Darmawan, 2022).

Leaders who demonstrate flexibility in their leadership styles based on the needs of their team members foster greater engagement, collaboration, and performance. This adaptability helps to cultivate a positive organizational culture where individuals feel supported in reaching their potential (Northouse, 2018).

In organizational development, developing competent and efficiently functioning teams requires not only technical skills, but also requires leaders who understand how to encourage their members. Situational leadership allows leaders to play a role in improving individual and team development through a more personalized and contextual approach. Leaders who are able to adapt their style appropriately will see better results in terms of employee engagement and team performance. This development of adaptive leadership capacity is itself a critical outcome of effective leadership training, which enhances an organization's ability to respond to complex social and operational challenges (Corte-Real et al., 2021). The ability to understand these leadership theories and implement them in organizational practice is critical to long-term success.

Situational leadership is a theory that suggests that there is no one leadership style that fits all situations. Effective leadership relies on the leader's ability to adapt their style to the needs of the employees and the conditions at hand. The situational leadership model, first introduced by Hersey and Blanchard (1982), identifies four basic leadership styles that should be implemented based on the level of readiness or maturity of employees. The situational approach is one of the most practical leadership models because it focuses on the behaviors of the leader and the development level of the followers (Northouse, 2018). This principle of adaptability aligns with servant leadership practices, where focusing on the growth and well-being of team members is a critical success factor for improving team effectiveness and organizational performance (Irfan & Al Hakim, 2022). These flexible leadership styles can have a direct impact on employee engagement, as employees feel supported according to their level of readiness to handle a particular task or challenge.

One important aspect of situational leadership is its ability to improve employee engagement. When leaders can tailor their approach to individual and group needs, employees feel more valued and motivated. A leadership style that adjusts the level of supervision and support according to employees' needs can improve their sense of responsibility and engagement in their work. For example, at low readiness levels, leaders who provide clear and supportive direction can improve employees'

confidence and enthusiasm to contribute. In contrast, at high readiness levels, leaders may provide more autonomy and opportunities for more independent decision-making (Hersey & Blanchard, 1982). the specific leadership style adopted by a manager has a direct and measurable relationship with employees' affective commitment to the organization, a core component of deep engagement (Anjanarko & Arifin, 2022). Effective leadership relies on an understanding of follower readiness and the ability to adapt leadership style to the needs of individuals or groups at different levels of readiness (Northouse, 2018).

Situational leadership also plays an important role in team development. With a flexible and adaptive style, leaders can create a collaborative working atmosphere and support the growth of individuals in the team. Leaders who are able to adapt their style to specific situations can facilitate the team's learning and development process. For example, when the team faces a new challenge or difficult task, the leader can implement a "sales" style by providing clearer directions and more support to ensure the team stays on track. Conversely, when the team has mastered a particular task, the leader can shift to a "delegation" style, giving more autonomy to team members to take initiative and develop their own solutions.

In organizations that embrace the principles of situational leadership, this diversity of leadership styles can strengthen cooperation among team members. When leaders adopt different styles according to the needs and dynamics of the team, they not only improve engagement but also enable team members to contribute more fully. The adoption of various leadership styles helps teams tackle challenges and problems in a more structured way and based on the most effective approach for the situation. It also improves self-confidence among team members and makes them feel more valued as they can see that their leader is attentive to individual needs and the overall group dynamics (Yukl, 2013).

One of the reasons why situational leadership can improve team development is its ability to create flexibility in interacting with team members. Leaders who are able to adapt to changes in team needs or circumstances will have a greater chance of facilitating the sustainable development of team members. Leaders who are responsive to employee readiness levels and the challenges faced will lead in a more effective manner, and this will enable the team to develop faster and better in the face of increasingly complex tasks.

Situational leadership can help improve team performance by ensuring that each team member is provided with the attention and support they need.

Employee engagement and team development rely heavily on healthy interactions between leaders and their members. Leaders who are able to recognize when they should provide clearer direction or when they can provide more space for employees to innovate will create productive and harmonious working relationships. When leaders adjust their style or situationally, they allow team members to thrive and feel more confident in carrying out their tasks, which will ultimately improve overall team performance (Goleman, 2000).

While situational leadership can provide significant benefits, its implementation in organizations is not always simple. One of the problems that can arise is the leader's inability to read the situation properly or to adjust their leadership style accordingly. When leaders fail to recognize employees' readiness levels or team dynamics, it can lead to confusion in providing the right direction or support. For example, a leader who continues to use an overly dominant leadership style even when team members have a high level of readiness can stifle initiative and reduce team motivation (Northouse, 2018). Leaders need to have a high awareness of their ability to assess the situation and choose the most effective style for each condition and situation.

Situational leadership can also face challenges in organizations that have a very strict hierarchical structure. In highly bureaucratic structures, leaders may feel limited in their ability to adapt their leadership style because of rules or procedures that limit such flexibility. This can inhibit the leader's ability to adapt to the needs of individuals within the team, which in turn can reduce employee engagement and hinder team development (Bass, 1990). In such organizations, team development may become more difficult due to structural barriers that do not allow for flexibility in leadership approaches (Davis, 2010).

The development of situational leadership skills in organizations can strengthen a leader's ability to handle diversity and complexity in teams. In an increasingly changing and dynamic world of work, having leaders who are able to adapt to different leadership styles can help create an environment that supports positive change. When leaders can adapt to the needs of employees, they not only develop employee engagement but also improve the team's ability to face challenges and achieve aims more effectively (Ji et al., 2022). Investing in leadership training that engages situational skill development should be a priority for many organizations.

As a next step, organizations can improve situational leadership effectiveness by providing training that focuses on developing skills in assessing

situations and adjusting leadership styles. Through this training, leaders can gain an understanding of how to identify team members' readiness levels and needs, and how to implement appropriate leadership styles (Bedford & Gehlert, 2013). This will improve leaders' effectiveness in improving employee engagement and supporting team development, which will further improve overall organizational performance.

Situational leadership should also be implemented with the understanding that not all situations can be resolved with one leadership style. Effective leaders must be able to evaluate situations in real-time and adjust their approach quickly according to changes in team dynamics (Fahmi, 2020). The main key in situational leadership is flexibility and willingness to adapt, which requires skills and expertise that can be acquired through experience as well as proper training.

The implementation of situational leadership in organizations opens up great opportunities to improve employee engagement and team development simultaneously. Leaders who understand how to adapt their leadership style to the readiness and needs of the team have a greater chance of creating a productive and collaborative work environment. When leaders provide support that matches the circumstances and abilities of team members, they facilitate faster development and improve employee morale and commitment to organizational aims. Effective team development, supported by the right leadership approach, will strengthen organizational performance in the long-term (Mustofa & Muafi, 2021).

Successfully implementing situational leadership requires deep skills and a high level of awareness from the leader in assessing the situation at hand. Leaders who are unable to adapt their style to changing situations can hinder team development and lower employee engagement. It is important for leaders to continuously hone their ability to understand team dynamics and lead with a flexible approach. There is no one leadership style that fits all situations, and only leaders who are able to adapt well can achieve success (Johansen, 1990). Adaptive leadership is increasingly

viewed as a crucial skill in modern organizations, where rapid change requires leaders to continuously develop their strategies and behaviors (Day et al., 2017).

Finally, optimizing situational leadership styles will bring better results to the organization in terms of employee engagement, team development, and aim achievement. Leaders who understand the importance of flexibility and adaptation in leadership will lead their teams through challenges and ensure productive team performance. By improving awareness about the importance of implementation of situational leadership, organizations can create a more collaborative and sustainable culture, which will further strengthen their position in the market.

CONCLUSION
Situational leadership is proven to play a very important role in improving employee engagement and team development in organizations. Leadership styles that can be tailored to the needs and conditions of employees, as exemplified in situational leadership theory, encourage leaders to provide the right support at each stage of employee development. Leaders who can effectively adapt their approach to individual and team situations and conditions tend to be more successful in creating an environment that supports growth and collaboration. The implementation of situational leadership that is adaptive and based on an understanding of working conditions is key in improving employee engagement and overall team quality.

To ensure effective implementation, leaders need to have the ability to carefully assess team and individual readiness and needs. A main challenge lies in the importance of leaders' emotional intelligence and contextual understanding in exercising situational leadership, which enables them to choose the right style at the right time. Sustainable training is required for leaders to develop these skills, so that they can lead more effectively. Organizations must also ensure that support for this adaptive leadership is in place in order to create a more productive work culture and build solid, more engaged teams.

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