

LEADERS' EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION TOOLS AND THEIR IMPACT ON FOLLOWERS' DEVELOPMENT LEVEL

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***Abstract:** Each leader's goal is to optimize the motivation of his/her followers in order to achieve the highest efficiency of the organization itself. Many authors have researched different leadership styles. One of the approaches to leadership that gives special attention to the influence of the leader on followers is the Situational Leadership Theory. Scholars point out that there are different development levels of followers classified into four groups, depending on the level of competence and dedication of the followers and their mutual relations. One of the most important roles of the leader is to help the development of followers. This paper examines the influence of the leader's communication on the development level of the followers, relations of content and coding of the message depending on the recipient's competence. The authors of the paper proposed communication tools, forms of tasks and reports, as well as their dynamics, with a flexible appearance of bidirectionalities in the communication process. Using new knowledge and tools in this work, leaders will be able to effectively adapt their communication style with followers and optimize organizational performance.*

***Keywords:** Communication Tools, Followers Development, Motivation, Leadership Styles, Situational Leadership Theory.*

INTRODUCTION

In the motivation of employees, one of the basic criteria is the self-affirmation of the individual, that is, personal self-awareness of professionalism and business abilities. As quoted by Vukajlović *et al.*, (2012), the main strategic direction of management in the organizational structure is the satisfaction and motivation of employees. This type of motivation is considered as the non-material aspects of motivation, and it indicates that the employee's work in the given organization provides more than satisfying only the existential needs. Incentive sentences, occasional

interviews on personal interests and active listening to an employee are one of the effective tools of communication between the higher and lower instance, (Buntak *et al.*, 2013: 213-219).

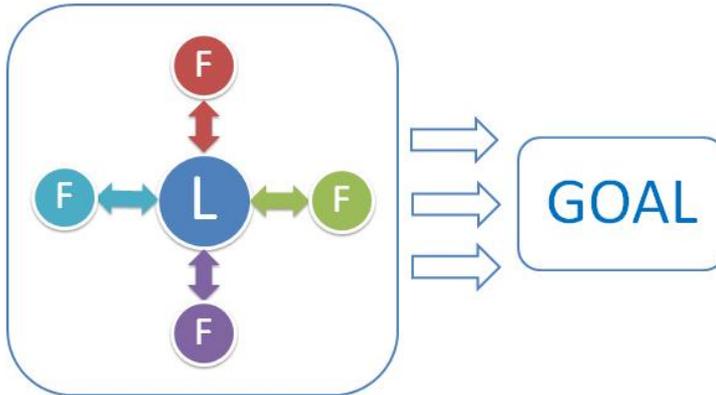
In each team it is necessary to establish the basic postulates of the functioning of the team, which are closely linked to the results, motivation, competences of each member and their synergy. Key starting points are, of course, the methods / tools of motivation, interpersonal and formal communication, providing opportunities for raising the development level of each member individually, their mutual communication as well as a clearly defined way of sending feedback for evaluation of results and improvement of further activities, (Krtinić, 2014:21; Garača; & Kadlec, 2011:118-125).

Brajić *et al.* (2017) point out the necessary good bilateral communication between the leader and their followers. The dynamism of the modern environment is conditioned by the rapid flow of information in order for the results to be in accordance with the defined goals of the organization and any form of community. The role of the leader is to anticipate emerging changes in such circumstances, to create a vision and to offer effective models to overcome problem situations.

Communication is one of the most influential motivational tools - employees build their effectiveness based on what they hear from their colleagues, they conclude that there is space for their personal development and the possibility of professional development and internal communication as a psychological and sociological approach is often more important than material forms of motivation. (Yeomans & FitzPatrick, 2017:49)

FOLLOWERS IN SITUATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Leadership is a phenomenon that is important factor of every successful organization (Urošević, *Et al*, 2018). There are numerous leadership theories. Some authors (Stogdill, 1974; Bolden, 2004) point out that there are as many leadership definitions as authors that tried to define leadership, but to date, there is no definite and unique definition of this subject. Researchers generally agree that leadership is a process that represents a mutual relationship between leaders and followers in which the leader influences the group to undertake certain activities to achieve a common goal (Mirčetić, 2018), as it is shown in Picture 1.



Picture 1. Graphic representation of leadership definition
 Source: Mirčetić, 2018.

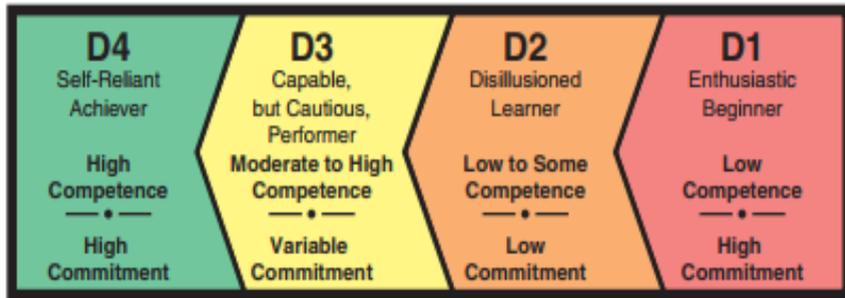
Theoretical researches regarding leadership indicate that there is a consensus on the existence of several components that constitute leadership such as a process, influence, group, and goal (Northouse, 2016; Shackleton, 1995). Some authors went even further and conducted researches regarding the relationship between the behavior of the leader and the development level of followers.

Development level is a combination of two factors related to followers, competence and commitment (Blanchard, 1985). Competence represents demonstrated task-specific and transferable knowledge and skills on a goal or task of an individual. Commitment is described as a person's motivation and confidence on a goal or task.

One of the indicators of successful leadership is determining the development level of the followers (Cvijanović *et al.*, 2018). There is no right leadership style, there is only a matching style. A leader should not apply the same leadership for all situations. He/she needs to adapt his/her leadership to the given situation and his/her followers (Day & Antonakis, 2012).

According to Blanchard (2000) and his Situational Leadership II (SLII) classification, there are four development levels of followers, as it is shown in Picture 2:

1. D1 – Enthusiastic Beginner (low competence, high commitment);
2. D2 – Disillusioned Learner (low to some competence, low commitment);
3. D3 – Capable, but Cautious, Performer (moderate to high competence, variable commitment);
4. D4 – Self-Reliant Achiever (high competence, high commitment).



Picture 2. Follower’s development level

Source: Blanchard, 2000:4.

Enthusiastic Beginner (D1) is a follower that is unfamiliar to a team or given task. He/she has no experience in relation to the new role, but he/she is very enthusiastic, excited, optimistic and willing to learn. Because they lack experience there is a good chance they make mistakes. The leader needs to provide clear goals and specific direction and additionally shows and tells how tasks are completed and provide feedback on the follower’s results. Guiding D1 followers is very important in their development.

Disillusioned Learner (D2) is a follower that works and learns for some time in a group or on a task. Because of the time spent, he/she becomes more familiar with tasks and group activities. He/she is still not completely competent and he/she feels discouraged, confused and demotivated. The leader needs to guide D2 followers and make sure that they know that they are in development and learning process and also that mistakes are part of the process.

D3 follower is a capable but cautious performer. He/she is a group member for the time that is enough to become moderate or highly competent in relation to a given task or organization itself. He/she is able to fully understand given tasks and to push the organization towards a mutual goal, but a problem is that his/her motivation may vary. Although he/she makes productive contributions, there is a chance he/she gets bored with the tasks or demotivated. The leader should give him/her an opportunity to practice his/her own ideas, but also keep constant checking of his/her motivation.

The followers' highest development level according to the SSII classification is the Self-Reliant Achiever (D4). This follower is familiar with the business policy of the company he/she works for as well as the tasks he/she performs. He/she does the activities independently and achieves results. He/she is extremely competent and very committed to achieving results but there is a risk that he/she is delegated more tasks than he/she should due to that, which may lead to demotivation, poor realization, delays and missing deadlines. Moreover, there is a possibility that the tasks get

uninteresting to him/her over time and that he/she downgrades to D3 level. In this case, the leader's job is to identify the change and motivate him/her to regain D3 development level.

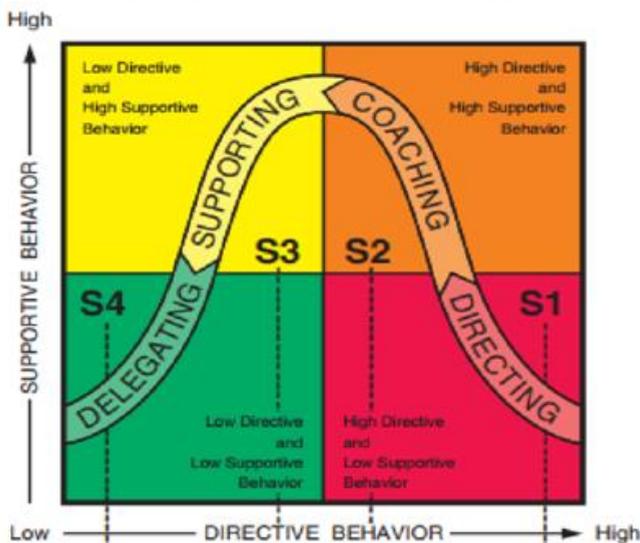
LEADERSHIP STYLES IN SITUATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Leadership style is the behavior template the leader uses and the task of the leader is to determine which style to choose in relation to the level of development of the follower and situation.

In accordance with four follower's development levels, there are also four leadership styles in situation leadership (Blanchard, 2000) that comes from combining two main leader behaviors, directive and supportive behaviors. Blanchard (1985) defines directive behavior as the extent to which a leader engages in one-way communication; spell out the follower's role and tell the followers what to do, where to do it, when to do it and how to do it; and then closely supervises performance. Supportive behavior is defined as the extent to which a leader engages in two-way communication, listens, provides support and encouragement, facilitates interaction and involves the followers in decision-making (Blanchard, 1985).

Four leadership styles in situational leadership, as shown in Picture 3 are:

1. S1 – Directing (high directive, low supportive behavior);
2. S2 – Coaching (high directive, high supportive behavior);
3. S3 – Supporting (low directive, high supportive behavior);
4. S4 – Delegating (low directive, low supportive behavior).



Picture 3. Leadership styles in situational leadership
 Source: Blanchard, 2000:6.

Directing style (S1) is referring to leadership style composed of a high directive and low supportive behavior. The leader needs to give detailed guidelines to followers, what, how, when and where to do something. Additionally, the leader should monitor the follower's effects in order to both receive and give feedback on the performed tasks.

Coaching style (S2) is determined by high supportive and high directive behavior. Control over decision-making remains with the leader, who is giving followers detailed directions regarding tasks. Two-way communication is increased because the leader listens to followers and exchange ideas.

Supporting style (S3) is used if the leader is showing high support with low directing. The aim of this style is to provide recognition, motivate followers and exchange ideas with them. Active listening, facilitating problems with tasks or decisions made by subordinates and motivating are a valuable segment of S3 leadership style.

Delegating (S4) is a leadership style that exists when the leader has confidence in a follower and because of that uses low directive and low supporting level. The leader discusses tasks and problems with followers and when a mutual agreement is achieved further process is fully delegated to the follower.

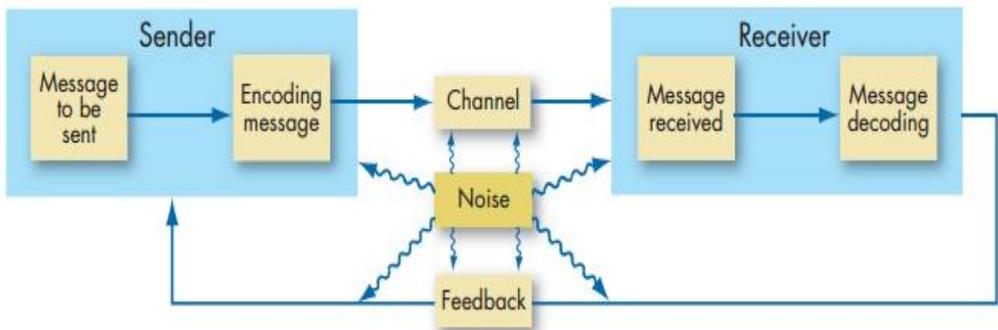
COMMUNICATION

Language is a symbolic expression of the characteristic stylistics and the denotative and connotative potential of the word in relation to the context, the community and the outlines of the element in general. Rhetoric is undoubtedly one of the key skills that has always been represented in interpersonal communication aimed at achieving goals. Some authors consider communication as a mechanism of establishing social relations or relations in some social group or between groups (Šijaković & Vukotić, 2018). Let us remind ourselves of Aristotle's words that "it is very important that the speaker be presented as a man of certain qualities and that his listeners gain the conviction that they are in some way sympathetic, that they too would be kind to them". (Aristotle, 2000)

Stylistic and spoken figures in oral and written discourse are not part of exclusively literary creations. We can notice the poetic elements of the language to a significant extent in addressing the leaders to the followers. This is because of the strong analogy and associativity, as well as the illustration and rapprochement of the message to the recipient-follower, whose denotative significance is directed towards real goals, while concisely approaching personal ambitions, feeling of belonging and

attaining personal ideals. According to Nušić's review (2017), the basic distinctive component of whether rethoric is an art or a skill is the performance technique so rethoric as a skill is a performance, i.e. reproductive phenomenon.

It is precisely because of their effective motivational potentials that the language has, there are different theories of the motivational language as well as the principles of the "language of leadership". (Mihajlov & Mihajlov, 2010: 59-67) The power of a language, that demonstrates stimulation of attention of listeners, their mental focus on the speaker and ideas, and the feeling of closeness and identical goals of leaders and followers, is a valuable tool in which a leader builds their influence. The key stages in the communication process are clearly seen by observing the communication model (Picture 3).



Picture 3. Model of communication
Source: Robbins, &, Judge, 2013).

Following this communication process scheme, the authors of this paper will elaborate on problematic points and effective solutions for overcoming potential difficulties in communication between a leader and a follower.

USING COMMUNICATION TOOLS IN SITUATIONAL LEADERSHIP

-COMMUNICATION FORM OF TASKS AND REPORTS-

The importance of harmonizing the way of communication manifest itself in the application of situational leadership, depending on the development level of the follower. In the organizational structure, the productivity of the employee (in the organizational structure of leader's followers) is measurable in relation to the systematisation of the workplace

and the moral debt of the employee and their results. For the purpose of this paper, we will set tasks the leader delegates as the message, the leader as the sender and the employee/follower as the message recipient. The report is certainly a feedback message from the recipient to the sender. The challenge in this setting is to determine how influential the way of communication and coding-decoding process are to the employee's productivity and the correctly accomplished task taking into account the development level of the follower as the dominant criterion for the linguistic form of determining responsibilities.

Internal control mechanisms are one of the key factors in organizational management and implementation of objectives and risk management. (Živkov, 2015).

If the leader delegates the task to the development level of the follower D1 (the enthusiastic beginner-strongly motivated without much knowledge), the form of the task should be precise, tactical, detailed, explaining the problematic points in the execution-related consequences if the relevant point of the task is done in a different way. The follower's report as feedback in this communication process is relevant information on the level of the correct decoding of the message. It is desirable that within the assignment there are indicated steps when reporting is required - in order for the eventual failure of the previous activity to be corrected prior to the privatization of the next causative. The final report of the lowest level follower should be an integral version of all the previous ones within the assignment. As the follower makes progress, the dynamics of the reports are also rare and only in an integral form, while the reports in the course of the realization (if requested by the leader) are general and by the method of confirmation or negation of whether something has been done and the way or the order of realization changed, but with the intention that the goal of the responsibility remains the same as it was set at the beginning, and thus finally realized. For the purpose of reporting effectiveness, as a communication channel, besides email and oral reports, digital calendars, innovative business applications and platforms are suitable. By integrating these communication tools into internal business correspondence, the flow of information is more dynamic and more relevant.

As a follower makes progress at their development level, it is advisable for the leader to encourage the initiative of the followers with proposals and models of the implementation of certain activities during the presentation of duties, and this two-dimensionality of communication appears earlier-in the creation of indebtedness, that is, the way of realization. The followers' suggestions represent feedback on individual

activity in the narrow sense, but in a wider sense, they represent the “I” feedback to the leader about the development of followers and the skills they have mastered. The communication process where the initiator of communication on personal responsibility is the follower should be expected from level D3 when the follower is already a capable, but cautious performer. The one who has enough experience to have a moderate or high level of competence in the team but is undecided when making certain business decisions, and therefore checks everything before it comes to the realization. In this communication process, the feedback of the leader is affirmative or negative for the activity or method of realization, serves as corrections, but the followers’ message itself (the proposed activity and its ways of realization) is feedback to the leader in the broad sense of how much the successor has progressed.

Of course, it is necessary to note that the highest development level of followers D4 is no less challenging for leaders in communication mode than all other levels. Unlike the initial level where the communication processes in the largest volume include detailed delegation and execution of tasks, here communication processes are oriented to the motivation segment, the satisfaction of the follower and the affirmative component of engagement and cooperation.

CONCLUSION

Development level of followers and their responsibilities are conditioned by the communication of leaders and followers. It was determined to be in the contracted internal communication model in order to achieve the effectiveness of sending the message and ensure the coding-decoding process of the message has been realized at full capacity. By increasing the level of development of the follower, the two-way communication also appears in the formation of activities that the follower should perform to the level when the follower is the first communicator and the leader is the recipient. Undoubtedly, there is always a necessary form of bi-directionality in every communication, process of leaders and followers at all development levels.

The application of communication tools in an internal communication structure such as digital calendars, applications and platforms have proved extremely productive in the accuracy of the communication process flow. Please note that information is a key basis for productivity if it is adequately encrypted and addressed to a valid channel. Success is more achievable in cases where the presumed recipient decoded it in a correct way.

Communication is an indispensable and significant segment of all interpersonal relationships, in motivation and productivity of each organization. The effective use of communication tools in situational leadership contributes greatly to raising the follower's development level.

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