Situational Leadership

1. Introduction

The basic premise of situational leadership is that there is no one single best method of supervision, but that a supervisor needs to adapt his or her style to the situation. Keen assessment skills and flexibility are the key concepts for this type of supervision.

2. Styles

There are two variables that determine the style of supervision. These are task oriented and person oriented supervision; or directing and supporting.

- Direction, task oriented supervision, is giving specific instructions and checking the execution of tasks precisely.
- Support, person oriented supervision, is encouraging, asking for suggestions and explaining decisions.

Four styles are formulated with these two variables:

- Instructing: lots of direction and a limited amount of support;
- Convincing: less direction and lots of support;
- Coaching: very little direction, lots of support;
- Delegating: very little direction, very little support

Elements that determine task oriented supervision: structure, control and monitoring.
Elements that determine person oriented supervision: praise, listening and facilitation.
Task oriented behavior is more one-way; top-down.
Person oriented behavior relies more on the relational side of communication, is more between two equals; bottom-up.

Directive, task oriented behavior is suitable in situations that require quick decisions, when risks are great. When there is a fire, it is hardly appropriate to form small project groups to outline a plan of action; action needs to be taken quickly.
This style is also suitable for directing people who have little experience but ample potential for learning: an enthusiastic beginner for example.
The person oriented, supportive style is suitable for situations that call for influence on the motivation of the PhD student. Reinforcement, encouragement and good listening skills are then required.

3.Taxation

The Situational Leadership model describes four stages in terms of task maturity. The style needed in approaching a PhD student regarding a certain task depends on two elements that determine the PhD student's performance: competence and willingness. Competence is the product of knowledge and skill and is acquired through education, training and experience. Willingness is a combination of motivation or commitment and self confidence in a PhD student to carry out the task. With these two variables four levels are distinguished regarding carrying out a certain task. These levels are:

    level 1:   low competence, low motivation
    level 2:   low competence, high motivation
    level 3:   high competence, variable motivation
    level 4:   high competence, high motivation

At level 1 PhD students are neither competent nor willing to carry out a certain task. When it slowly becomes clear how a PhD student needs to tackle a certain task, the level of willingness rises (level 2), but the PhD student is still not competent enough to carry out this task independently. Next the PhD student learns more about the exact nature of the task and realizes his competence is limited, and sometimes loses interest in the task. This makes motivation and/or self confidence drop (level 3).

As competence increases, self confidence grows. Finally the PhD student is competent and the execution of the tasks becomes 'intrinsically rewarding' (level 4). At this level someone can work entirely independently and satisfaction is mainly gained from the work itself. People reward themselves as it were.

Job maturity PhD student	Suitable supervision style	Influence technique
Level 1 low competence low willingness	Instruction Structure, control and monitoring	Prescriptive
Level 2 low competence high willingness	Advising Direction and support Convince	Prescriptive Logical Motivational
Level 3 High competence variable willingness	Coaching Praise, listening and facilitation	Logical Motivational Relational
Level 4 High competence strong willingness	Delegating Transfer responsibility for the daily decision making	Relational

4. Tasks

The supervisor who wants to approach his students this way will need to take various ground rules into account. One important factor for example is that the assessment of the competence and willingness of a PhD student is an open process in which both parties participate. The supervisor needs to communicate clearly to what extent he or she judges the student to be competent at specific tasks.

In this regard the student needs to enter into some type of contract about his or her performance. If this is neglected, it remains vague to the student how the supervisor makes the assessment. Concretely this means that the relevant tasks need to be discussed, as well as which performance/efforts are to be expected. The task must contribute to the total package of activities.