

Situational Leadership and Group Development Theory for the Outdoor Leader

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Abstract

Tuckman's group development model has been used by many researchers to examine the stages of groups participating in an outdoor recreation experience (Sutherland & Stroot, 2010). Similar research has been conducted to examine outdoor leaders' leadership actions in the framework of Hersey and Blanchard Situational Leadership model (Sibthorp, Paisley, & Gookin, 2007). These experiences have ranged from weekend climbing trip to week-long canoeing expeditions. This research paper seeks to examine the elements that define the stages of group development and the characteristics of situational leadership in an outdoor context. Through this examination this paper will connect the Hersey and Blanchard's Situational Leadership model with the leadership elements necessary for an outdoor leader through the stages of Tuckman's model.

Introduction

In the field of outdoor recreation leaders have the opportunity to work with groups of participants as they develop new skills and abilities related to the activity in which they are participating. The skills that are developed may vary widely depending on the activity involved, i.e. rock climbing vs. canoeing, but in these cases the experience happens in the context of a group of people. Individual technical skill development, while an integral part of an outdoor leader's repertoire, must also be coupled with an understanding of the group development as a whole that also takes place and the leadership styles necessary to facilitate a successful experience during these varying stages of development.

This paper will use the Tuckman group development model as a basis for describing the stages through which the participants are moving (1965). It will contrast these stages with the leadership styles presented by Hersey and Blanchard in their Situational Leadership model (1981). In doing so, this paper seeks to use the Hersey and Blanchard model to describe the differing leadership styles necessary as a group develops in an outdoor recreation setting.

Situational Leadership

The Situational Leadership model developed by Paul Hersey and Kenneth Blanchard in 1970, (originally as the Life Cycle Theory) was a response to their examination of the data collected by a 1945 research study at The Ohio State University on leadership (Hersey & Blanchard, 1974). In this examination Hersey and Blanchard noted that while leadership styles ranged greatly from leader to leader some leaders tended to focus more on structuring the activities of those who followed, while other leaders spent more time focused on the development of socio-emotional support (Hersey & Blanchard, 1974). Hersey and Blanchard developed these two observations into "task behavior" and

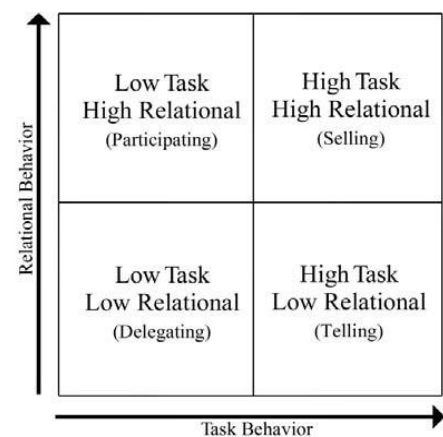


Figure 1. Situational Leadership Model

“relationship behavior” (Hersey & Blanchard, 1974). The observed leadership styles did not demonstrate an either/or delineation between the task and relationship styles, but instead they proposed both styles could be described along a spectrum (Hersey & Blanchard, 1974). The two aspects of situational leadership were then plotted on separate axes to create a quadrant matrix (model) that showed varying levels of both task and relationship behavior (see Figure 1). The four quadrants that were created were labeled as high or low task and high or low relational behavior (Hersey & Blanchard, 1974).

In 1970 Hersey and Blanchard examined the aspects of the group for which these four situational leadership styles would be appropriate. These were based on the concept of group maturity, which was defined as “achievement-motivation relatively independent and ability to take responsibility of an individual or group” (305). This means that as a group developed in maturity they would recognize a greater sense of internal motivation in order to achieve instead of needing the external motivation of a leader, as well as being able to take responsibility for their own actions instead of a leader's specific direction being necessary. As the group being led grows in maturity the leadership should begin at high task and low relational behavior, secondly moves to high task and high relational behavior, then provides high task and high relational behavior leadership, and finally ends using low task and low relational behavior leadership styles (Hersey & Blanchard, 1970). These styles of leadership levels have been described in the simpler terms of telling, selling, participating, and delegating (Weber & Karman, 1991).

This research strongly suggests that outdoor recreational leaders must be able to adjust their leadership styles to meet varying situations. These findings mean they must have the skill to employ either high or low relational and high or low task-oriented behaviors as indicated by evidence of the group maturity. Though the group maturity level provides some basis to discuss group change, the Tuckman model of group development provides a more detailed examination of this process.

Group Development Process

In 1965 Bruce Tuckman presented the developmental sequence through which group behaviors typically change over the course of time together. In his examination of therapy groups he found consistent patterns that emerged as the groups spent more time together. These consistent patterns formed the basis for his stages of development theory (Tuckman, 1965). The process includes the stages of Testing and Dependence, Intragroup Conflict, Development of Group Cohesion, and Functional Role-relatedness (Tuckman, 1965). Today they are known more informally as forming, storming, norming and performing (Bonebright, 2010). The following will briefly outline each of these four stages in more detail.

Stage of Testing and Dependence (Forming)

In this first stage Tuckman characterizes the group as, “the strong expression of dependency need by the members towards the [leader]” (391, 1965). He continues to describe group members in this stage as relying very much on structure provided by the leader and the arbitrary norms of the group that tend to instantly develop (Tuckman, 1965). In this stage the group is focused almost entirely on orientation and will be accepting of most group goals that are presented to them (Tuckman, 1965). The group members are not free with discussion and try to come to a consensus (Johnson, 2010). The stage is reflective of relationship development among the group

members and with the leaders which lead to the movement from the forming to the storming stage (Bonebright, 2010).

Stage of Intragroup Conflict (Storming)

The second stage represents a period of interpersonal conflict (Bonebright, 2010). Tuckman observed that this stage has the interesting combination of both dependence and hostility among the members of the groups (Tuckman, 1965). During this stage rivalries can begin to occur as members position themselves within the hierarchy of the group (Tuckman, 1965). Tuckman describes the group members during this stage as moving from a general dependence on the structure to provide comfort to an overwhelming emotional response to task demands (1965). This emotional response can lead individuals into unfamiliar areas of interpersonal relations and can leave them lacking the security they may have felt during previous stages (Bonebright, 2010).

Though seeming counter intuitive to group development, the storming stage is a necessary struggle for personal influence within the group (Johnson, 2010). That group structure that provided support is now seen as a barrier to individuality which they tend to resist. This resistance can extend to the leadership as well (Bonebright, 2010). As groups move through this stage and determine a group hierarchy, members of the group begin to come together once more at a different level of interactions. In the outdoor recreation field research from group members has shown that during the stressful time the group members are consistently looking to find their place among the group (Sutherland & Stroot, 2010).

Stage of Development of Group Cohesion (Norming)

The norming stage is characterized by group cohesion once more becoming a priority (Tuckman, 1965). In this phase group and shared values emerge that the majority of group members agree upon (Tuckman, 1965). Tuckman observed that during this stage many group members showed "affection bonds" and a general "we-feeling" while now having a greater sense of identity as a member of the group (Tuckman, 1965, p. 392). The leader's response to the group develop during this stage is more muted than previous. As the group has developed the necessary skills the leader is now tasked with healing interpersonal rifts that have come from the storming stage. The increased sense of identity and acceptance leads individuals to find the most effective ways of working with each other which provides the opportunity to move into the fourth stage (Bonebright, 2010)

Stage of Functional Role Relatedness (Performing)

In the performing stage the group becomes task oriented but in a way in which it seeks discovery and opportunity to experiment in new ways on its own (Tuckman, 1965). The group provides mutual support to its members, acceptance of all, and has developed norms that reflect the nature of the groups (Tuckman, 1965). This group is now developed to solve problems that it is presented with on its own without significant input from a leader (Bonebright, 2010). Since the development has advanced the group to this ability the leader's role becomes one of maintenance over management to keep the group on track while allows them to make decisions internally.

A fifth stage introduced in 1977 by Tuckman and Jensen is the adjourning stage. In this stage the group moves through a separation phase as the activity ends (Bonebright, 2010). In the re-examination of Tuckman's earlier work it was seen that there was a distinct ending phase in which the activity comes to a conclusion and the group must disband. The resulting change in the group was different and it was necessary to add this fifth stage (Tuckman & Jensen, 1977). This is obviously of great importance in this fifth stage in the group formation process, this presentation sought to examine the course of leadership through the activity. Because of the continued nature of the group's development after the leadership has ended, this paper's review ends at the performing stage.

Combining Models for Leadership Effectiveness

The research has indicated that both Hersey and Blanchard's situational leadership model and Tuckman's group development model can be effectively used to describe the fundamental experiences of a group participating in an outdoor recreational activity. In addition they both provide a structure to examine the leadership involved in those activities, separately. Research into the combination of these two models has yielded some definitive results for outdoor leaders. Weber and Karman have noted that a group understands of the

task, their maturity level, and the required relationship assistance interacts to suggest appropriate leadership styles (1991). Recognition of this necessary style must be done in conjunction with the recognition of the group development level at which the group resides in order to properly match the two (See Figure 2). The following shows the appropriate combinations along with specific steps an outdoor leader may take in each of the situations.

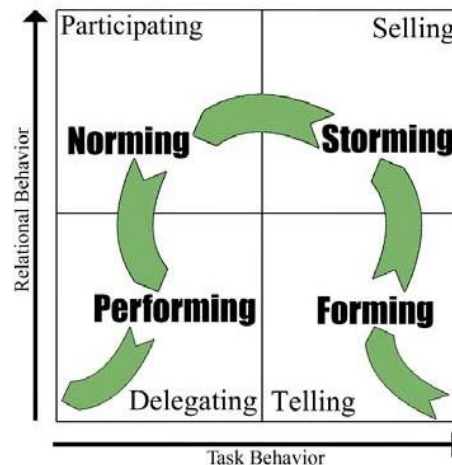


Figure 2. Integrated leadership model

Forming-Telling

The group beginning .in the testing and dependence (a.k.a., forming) stage (Tuckman, 1965) typically shows a low amount of task maturity and requires a leader to provide a structure and boundaries (Weber & Karman, 1991). Most of the motivation that is present in the group comes from a need to ensure a positive relationship is being developed with the leader, and that the members of the group are looked favorably upon by that leader (Weber & Karman, 1991). The lack of confidence in the group and the focus of the members on the leader for support correspond to the forming stage of group development. The telling style, with its high focus on task oriented behavior and lower relational focus is ideal in given the direction that a group at this stage in development needed and is ideal for providing the direction that a group at the forming developmental stage needs while at the same time focuses on the group concerns and lack of confidence (Weber & Karman, 1991).

Storming-Selling

The changes in the behaviors of members of a group that mark entry into the storming phase including increased inter-personal conflicts, withdrawal, and establishing a group hierarchy

indicate a need for leaders to shift their situational leadership style to "selling" which involves both high task and high relational behaviors (Weber & Karman, 1991). The shift to the storming stage indicates that group members are no longer as dependent upon the leader as they were during forming. In fact, they may actually begin confronting the leader or at least individually trying to divide and conquer. Due to the emerging inter-personal conflicts caused as individuals try to feel comfortable with the emerging hierarchy among the group members, they need more in-depth and intense personal interactions and a leader capable of and using much stronger relational interactions. As the hierarchy emerges, the group matures and may be ready for additional task demands (Weber & Karman, 1991). This high relational and high task behavior that must be exhibited by the leader falls into the selling style. The leader using a "selling" situational leadership style during storming is probably still employing a coerced change cycle as the group members conform to their roles within the hierarchy.

Norming-Participating

As the hierarchy among group members solidifies and inter-personal conflict begins to subside, the personal bonds and relationships among the group members strengthen. This indicates a transition into the "group cohesion," or "norming" stage during which the members may still be unable or unwilling to accept primary responsibility for their tasks and relations due to uncertainty and low self-confidence (Weber & Karman, 1991). Entry into the norming stage suggests the need for a transition into a lower task, higher relational situational leadership style ("participating") that parallels the emergence of a participative change cycle. In order for the leader to assist the group in moving forward through their development, he must reduce the task behavior and allow the group to begin to function more on their own, while still maintaining a high level of relational support (Weber & Karman, 1991). This moves the leader into the participating style

Performing-Delegating

As the group becomes more self-sustaining, indicating the emergence of the functional role-relatedness, or "performing," stage, the leader is able to reduce the amount of relational behavior he or she gives to the group. The delegating leadership style, with its low relational and low task behavior style of situational leadership allows the group to function successfully while still providing support (Weber & Karman, 1991). The concern for the group now moves to the task, and with the autonomy that the delegating leadership style provides, the group is able to be motivated through pride in a job well done and through creation and completion of challenging goals (Weber & Karman, 1991).

Conclusion

In the development of well-rounded, effective outdoor leaders, it is essential that they recognize, understand, and employ the different styles of leadership. During this presentation it was shown that knowledge and skill in situational leadership styles must be paired with adequate understanding about how groups develop over time during outdoor recreational experiences. The Hersey and Blanchard situational leadership model provides a framework for examining different situations and responding with an appropriate leadership style based on a balance of relational and task behavior. The Tuckman group development model provides a structure for understanding the socio- emotional aspects of a group as they progress through the outdoor

experience. We propose that juxtaposing the situational leadership model with the group development stages provides outdoor leaders with a powerful basis for appropriately applying leadership styles and skills to match the changing needs of their groups during outdoor recreational experiences.

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