



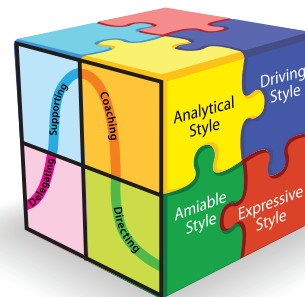
**TRACOM GROUP**

THE CREATOR OF **SOCIAL STYLE**<sup>®</sup>

A T R A C O M G R O U P W H I T E P A P E R

## SOCIAL STYLE<sup>SM</sup> and Situational Leadership<sup>®</sup> II

by Dr. Casey Mulqueen, TRACOM's Director of Research



OVERVIEW

Situational Leadership<sup>®</sup> II (SLII<sup>®</sup>)<sup>1</sup> by the Ken Blanchard Companies is a popular model for learning to improve leadership effectiveness. The model describes four unique leadership styles, or strategies, that can be used when interacting with followers depending on the person's development level for a specific task or situation.

The SOCIAL STYLE Model can enhance the effectiveness of the SLII model by describing a framework for understanding the behavioral style and preferences not only of followers, but of leaders themselves. As this whitepaper explains, awareness of SOCIAL STYLE and Versatility is fundamental for utilizing the SLII model accurately and effectively. Style awareness, and employing high Versatility, can help leaders during each step of the situational leadership process.

### *SOCIAL STYLE Connections*

SOCIAL STYLE is the world's most effective interpersonal skills model. The *Connections* Whitepaper Series looks at how SOCIAL STYLE complements and supports other popular workplace programs including Situational Leadership, Emotional Intelligence, Crucial Conversations and The Five Dysfunctions of a Team.

## Situational Leadership II: An Overview

The SLII model is based on the premise that followers require different types of leadership in different situations, based on two factors:

- (1) their commitment to the task and
- (2) their competence to perform the task.

A person with high commitment but low competence requires a different type of leadership strategy than a person with both high commitment and high competence.

The model describes four development levels for followers, ranging from low (D1) to high (D4). Likewise, for each development level an associated leadership strategy is offered (S1 to S4). The four leadership strategies differ in terms of the amount of direction and support that are provided by the leader. The table below shows each development level and associated leadership strategy.

In order to determine which strategy a leader should implement in any given situation, the model describes a threestep process to be followed.

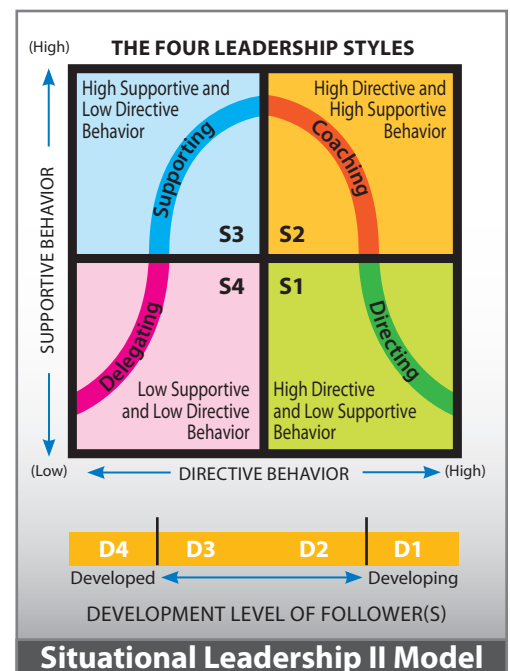
**Step One – Set Goals.** This is a standard process of developing goals for a task. In conjunction with the follower, the leader needs to determine the goal and performance standards that will be used to measure goal attainment.

**Step Two – Diagnose Development Level.** With the specific goal and situation in mind, the leader needs to determine the follower's development level using the four categories described previously.

**Step Three – Match with the Appropriate Leadership Strategy and Deliver.** The leader decides which of the four leadership strategies is most appropriate for the follower's development level, and then practices the strategy with the follower. If progress is made, the leader can progress through the strategies. If there are setbacks, the leader moves to a lower leadership strategy as appropriate.

These three steps should be taken for each follower and for each situation. A common mistake is for leaders to make generalized assessments of each of their followers, believing that they are at a specific development level regardless of the specific tasks they are working on. As we will discuss, this error of judgment is often related to SOCIAL STYLE and Versatility.

Follower's Development Levels & Associated Leadership Strategies	
Follower's Development Level	Leadership Strategy
<b>D1</b> Low competence, high commitment	<b>S1 Directing</b> High directive, low supportive behavior
<b>D2</b> Some to low competence, low commitment	<b>S2 Coaching</b> High directive, high supportive behavior
<b>D3</b> Moderate to high competence, variable commitment	<b>S3 Supporting</b> Low directive, high supportive behavior
<b>D4</b> High competence, high commitment	<b>S4 Delegating</b> Low directive, low supportive behavior



## How SOCIAL STYLE and Versatility Enhance SLII

The real value of SLII is that it recognizes the importance of the situation to leadership, and it provides a mechanism for leaders to adjust their behavior based on situational differences. However, just as different situations affect both leaders and followers, so do their unique SOCIAL STYLES.

It is easy to see how some leaders would prefer specific leadership strategies to others. For example, a Driving Style leader would be much more comfortable using the Directing strategy than the Supporting strategy, while an Amiable leader would prefer to use the Supporting strategy over the others. This is because these strategies naturally fit these leaders' SOCIAL STYLE preferences and habits.

Likewise, followers will respond differently to leaders of different Styles, even when they're using the same leadership strategy. An Amiable Style follower would respond very differently to the Supporting leadership of a Driving Style leader than he would to the Supporting leadership practiced by a fellow Amiable. This is because these two leaders will display noticeable SOCIAL STYLE differences in how they interact with the follower, even though they are both practicing a Supporting strategy.

A Driving leader might quickly explain what needs to be done, without providing any recommendations, and then hastily ask the follower if he needs anything to get started. He would then leave the person alone, expecting him to deliver results without further interaction.

The Amiable follower would respond to this form of Supporting strategy by indicating that he is okay to move forward. However, in fact he may be

confused about what is required of him but is too intimidated to follow-up with this leader. On the other hand, an Amiable leader would spend more time with the follower and would share decision-making responsibility rather than leaving all decisions up to the follower. He would not be overly directive, but he would frequently and openly give support as needed. The Amiable follower would feel more comfortable with this form of Supportive leadership, and would be more likely to succeed at his assignment.



In this example, the Amiable leader has a slight advantage because he is using the leadership strategy that is most natural for him. However, unlike the Driving leader, he is also practicing high Versatility by customizing his approach to an Amiable follower. If he were working with a Driving follower, he would have to tailor his approach to that person by changing some of his behaviors.

Therefore, for leaders it is vitally important to understand their own and their follower's Styles, and to act with high Versatility. Without this awareness and accompanying adjustment to behavior, there is a risk that the SLII method will be used inaccurately, undermining its effectiveness. In this section we describe how SOCIAL STYLE and Versatility affects each step of the SLII method.

## How SOCIAL STYLE and Versatility Enhance SLII – cont.

### Step One- Set Goals

Though setting goals may seem straightforward, there are fundamental differences in how people respond to goals and work towards them. A leader who is aware of his followers' SOCIAL STYLEs can use this awareness to insure that they are responsive to the goals that are being established.

For example, discussing a new project with an Expressive person is different than starting a project with an Analytical person. With the Expressive person, a leader should describe the task in broad terms and let the follower explore his ideas. The leader will have to return to the discussion at a later time in order to establish more concrete specifics around the assignment. In contrast, discussing the same project with an Analytical person will take on a different tone. In this case the leader should be prepared to discuss details of the task and exactly how the goal will be attained and measured. This person may be slower to start the project because he spends more time with initial planning.



Again, in the example above a leader would need to understand Style differences as a starting point for how to approach the goal-setting process, and then he would need to practice Versatility by communicating effectively with each follower. Without a solid understanding of his followers' Style differences, a leader may simply approach each of them in the same way. Typically, it will be the leader's SOCIAL STYLE that rules the day. A Driving leader will be very brief in how he describes a new goal and may simply tell the follower what to do without considering other important information, whereas an

Amiable leader will be casual and may be unclear about the exact requirements of the task. As the project progresses, this early miscommunication can lead to confusion or even resentment among both followers and leaders.

### Step Two- Diagnose Development Level

Once a goal has been established, it is the leader's responsibility to determine the follower's capacity to accomplish the goal. This judgment is based on the person's competence and commitment. In other words, the leader needs to determine the person's ability to perform the task, and his willingness to complete the assignment. Unfortunately this assessment is not always as straightforward as it seems. Leaders' biases can result in highly inaccurate decisions about followers' development levels.

A great deal of research from the social sciences shows that people prefer others who are similar to themselves. We are more likely to become friends with people who have similar backgrounds, ages, race, and physical characteristics. Research in the workplace has shown that leaders suffer these same biases; they are more likely to hire and promote people who match their own qualities, including their perceived personality and behavioral characteristics. Thus it shouldn't be surprising that many leaders will judge their followers based on how well these individuals' characteristics correspond to their own.

## How SOCIAL STYLE and Versatility Enhance SLII – cont.

This bias towards one's own SOCIAL STYLE can be dangerous when leaders evaluate their followers. Leaders are likely to view followers with the same Style as more capable and therefore at a higher development level than followers with different Styles. For example, an Analytical Style leader is likely to judge an Analytical Style follower as more capable due to similarities in the ways they work and accomplish objectives. They both are cautious and thorough, and prefer to get things done "right" rather than quickly. Because of this bias, this same leader is likely to evaluate an Expressive Style follower as less capable. The Expressive person works quickly and has different standards for performance. Unless the leader is aware of this bias, he may inadvertently make unwarranted and inaccurate judgments about followers' development levels.

This form of bias is typically subconscious; most people do not deliberately choose to have these personal preconceptions. This is why it is critical for leaders to be fully aware of their own SOCIAL STYLE and the types of behaviors that they are likely to value and devalue. A fundamental awareness of SOCIAL STYLE will help leaders prevent this type of biased judgment.

It is also important for leaders to assess not only their followers' willingness and ability to perform a task, but their level of Versatility as well. A follower with high Versatility is more likely to succeed in a new assignment than someone with low Versatility. This is true even if the person has low technical competence to perform the task. A highly versatile follower will persevere through a task and will find ways to mitigate his lack of technical skill. This could include taking steps to quickly increase his competence, or involving others to assist.

Likewise, a highly versatile leader will be able to determine the best mechanisms for helping a follower to succeed.

Understanding and practicing SOCIAL STYLE and Versatility skills is critical at this step of the SLII process. An inaccurate determination of development level will lead to an incorrect choice of leadership strategy, which in turn is likely to fail. Thus, the whole situational leadership process can become tainted at this step, before any leadership strategy is even employed.

### Step Three- Match with the Appropriate Leadership Strategy and Deliver

Once the leader has determined the follower's development level, he chooses the most appropriate leadership strategy to match the follower's needs. Of course, this is where the leader's previous efforts pay off through utilizing the most effective strategy for a given follower in a given situation. Assuming the first two steps were completed accurately, the leader will implement the correct leadership strategy. However, here again SOCIAL STYLE and Versatility play significant roles for both the leader and follower.

First, the leader's own Style will affect how he employs the leadership strategy. Continuing the example above, the Analytical leader decides that a Coaching strategy is most appropriate for the Expressive follower with this task. The Coaching strategy requires a high amount of direction and support from the leader. This strategy may be challenging for the Analytical leader because these individuals usually prefer a more hands-off approach. They are Ask Assertive, so being highly directive can be challenging, and they are Control Responsive, so offering a great deal of support is also somewhat unnatural for them. Therefore, the way this leader employs the Coaching

## How SOCIAL STYLE and Versatility Enhance SLII – cont.

strategy is going to be heavily influenced by his Style. In fact, his self-described coaching behavior may come across as anything but coaching to his follower!

Second, the Expressive follower is going to be influenced by his own Style in the ways he responds to the Coaching strategy. He will appreciate the encouragement for his efforts, and in particular any personal rewards for making progress on the goal. However, he may react unfavorably to receiving too much direction since he is naturally inclined to follow his own ideas and instincts, without checking with his leader about the appropriateness of these plans. On top of this, the Analytical leader's own difficulties with employing the Coaching strategy can exacerbate the issues. The follower may perceive the leader as overly intrusive with his direction, particularly since the Analytical leader will want to provide very specific information and feedback.

This scenario would be quite different if the leader demonstrated high Versatility. A highly Versatile Analytical leader would have a good understanding of his Style and the challenges he has with a Coaching strategy, and would consciously work on his communication and leadership approach. In this situation, his Feedback skills would be particularly important. Through effective communication, he would use empathy to accurately gauge the Expressive follower's Style and needs, and he would adapt his leadership approach to meet these needs. He would provide encouragement in an enthusiastic way, but he would alter the type of direction he provides. Instead of providing his own detailed opinions about the right way to do things, he would collaborate with the follower to determine strategies for completing the task. This would make all the difference for increasing his effectiveness using the Coaching leadership strategy in this situation, with this particular follower.

This example serves to describe how SOCIAL STYLE affects the situational leadership process. Without an awareness of Style and Versatility, leaders run a risk of utilizing SLII in ways that can lead to frustration and failure. Unfortunately, a leader would not necessarily understand why the strategy is failing, and may abandon the approach altogether and revert to his typical style of leadership without considering the situation or his followers' development needs. With Versatility and Style awareness, leaders have a much higher probability of successfully implementing the SLII approach.



## Benefits & Summary:

Situational Leadership is an effective model for enhancing leaders' effectiveness. Leaders can quickly learn and utilize the model. However, there are risks that the SLII strategy can backfire when the leader does not have a grasp of behavioral style differences. SOCIAL STYLE is a straightforward model that describes Style differences in a way that can be quickly grasped and practiced.

In addition, Versatility provides insight and mechanisms for more successfully interacting with others. Thus, the SOCIAL STYLE and SLII models complement one another quite well. When leaders use Style as an overarching framework, their efforts to employ situational leadership strategies will have a higher chance of success.



### TRACOM GROUP

THE CREATOR OF SOCIAL STYLE®

6675 South Kenton Street, Suite 118  
Centennial, CO 80111  
303-470-4900  
[www.socialstyle.com](http://www.socialstyle.com)

#### About the Author

##### Casey Mulqueen, Ph.D. — Director of Research & Product Development

Casey Mulqueen oversees the research and development of TRACOM's various assessment instruments and products. He has experience developing a wide variety of assessments such as personality inventories, 360-degree feedback programs, performance appraisal systems, and employee opinion surveys. His expertise in cross-cultural assessment and norming has helped ensure that TRACOM's global surveys are valid and reliable throughout the world. He is a writer who has authored a variety of materials including books, book chapters, and peer-reviewed journal articles. Casey has an M.S. in clinical psychology and a Ph.D. in industrial/organizational psychology.

#### Related Whitepapers

[Emotional Intelligence: What's New, What's True — Improving EQ with Behavioral Styles](#)

[SOCIAL STYLE<sup>sm</sup> and The Five Dysfunctions of a Team](#)

[SOCIAL STYLE<sup>sm</sup> and Strengths Based Leadership](#)

[SOCIAL STYLE<sup>sm</sup> and Crucial Conversations](#)

#### References

i. [www.situational.com](http://www.situational.com)



**TRACOM GROUP**  
THE CREATOR OF SOCIAL STYLE®

## More Performance Resources are a Click Away

TRACOM offers a variety of whitepapers, research and productivity tools to help individuals and organizations achieve high performance [www.socialstyle.com](http://www.socialstyle.com) or any of the links below:

### YouTube

The “[TRACOM SOCIAL STYLE](#)” Channel features short videos explaining the SOCIAL STYLE Model and how it benefits Managers, Sales Professionals and Individual Contributors.

### Blog

[Our High Performance Blog](#) is an interactive forum for discussions on a wide range of performance topics and our [Performance Library](#) is your one-stop source for all TRACOM resources.

### Find us on: **facebook**

Follow TRACOM using popular [Social Media](#) sites including LinkedIn, Twitter and Facebook.



Watch [On-Demand Webinars](#) discussing Emotional Intelligence and Best Practices in Global Training



TRACOM also publishes a [SOCIAL STYLE Tip of the Day](#). Each Tip contains Style-specific, practical advice for improving your productivity and that of those around you.