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SITUATIONAL APPROACH IN MANAGING THE POLICE ORGANIZATION: SITUATIONAL LEADERSHIP EFFECTIVENESS

Podejście sytuacyjne w zarządzaniu Policją: aspekt efektywności przywództwa sytuacyjnego

Małgorzata Adamska-Chudzińska
Cracow University of Economics, WSB University Dąbrowa Górnicza, Poland
e-mail: achm@uek.krakow.pl
ORCID  0000-0001-6771-9202

Norbert Andraszak
National Police Headquarters, Poland
e-mail: andraszak@interia.pl
ORCID  0000-0002-9190-7577

Abstract

The need for agile action in precarious and non-standard organizational situations triggers a renewed interest of managers in situational leadership. In the management of employees of the Police, the situational approach appears to be particularly desirable due to the specificity of its statutory tasks and the increasing tendency of employee departures. The article aimed to identify the scope of the effectiveness of situational leadership in the Police and the adequacy of the management styles given the determinants of a given management situation. Based on the assumptions of the SLT model, quantitative research using the CAWI method was carried out based on the LEAD questionnaire on the effectiveness and adaptability of managers. The Delphi method partially validated the questionnaire to adapt the wording to the specificity of the work in the Police. The study covered managers of all levels of management of the Lesser Poland Voivodeship Police (basic, medium, and higher). The obtained results showed that the analyzed managerial staff of the Police effectively uses the situational approach in management. However, further actions to increase the level of effectiveness are needed. The analysis of managers' ability to adapt management styles to management situations, taking into account the levels of management occupied by the respondents, revealed a significantly higher level of adaptability of middle managers in relation to the basic level and a slight decrease in these skills in senior managers in relation to the medium level. Of the three groups of managers surveyed, only middle-level leaders effectively use all management styles. Police managers and other organizations operating in times of dynamic socio-economic changes can use the presented conclusions to increase the effectiveness of situational leadership.

Keywords: situational approach in management, situational leadership, adaptability of managers, management effectiveness, management styles, police management.

Streszczenie

Potrzeba zwinnego działania w wysoce zmiennych i niestandardowych sytuacjach organizacyjnych wyzwała ponowne zainteresowanie menedżerów przywództwem sytuacyjnym. W zarządzaniu pracownikami Policji podejście sytuacyjne jawi się jako szczególnie pożądane ze względu na specyfikę jej zadań statutowych i wzrastający trend odejść pracowniczych. Celem podjętym w artykule było zidentyfikowanie zakresu efektywności przywództwa sytuacyjnego w Policji oraz rozpoznanie adekwatności wykorzystywanych stylów zarządzania wobec determinant danej sytuacji zarządczej. Na podstawie założeń modelu SLT zrealizowano badania ilościowe metodą CAWI w oparciu o kwestionariusz LEAD dotyczący efektywności i zdolności adaptacyjnych menedżerów. Kwestionariusz poddano częściowej walidacji metodą delficką w celu dostosowania sformułowań do specyfiki pracy w Policji. Badaniem objęto menedżerów wszystkich szczebli zarządzania małopolskiej Policji (podstawowy, średni i wyższy). Uzyskane wyniki wykazały, że analizowana kadra menedżerska Policji efektywnie wykorzystuje podejście sytuacyjne w zarządzaniu, jednak pożądane są dalsze działania zwiększające poziom efektywności. Analiza zdolności menedżerów w zakresie adaptacji stylów zarządzania do sytuacji zarządczych z uwzględnieniem szczebli zarządzania zajmowanych przez badanych ujawniła zdecydowanie wyższy poziom zdolności adaptacyjnych menedżerów średniego szczebla w odniesieniu do podstawowego oraz niewielkie obniżenie tych zdolności u menedżerów wyższego szczebla w odniesieniu do średniego. Spośród trzech badanych grup menedżerów tylko przywódcy średniego szczebla efektywnie wykorzystują wszystkie style zarządzania. Przedstawione wnioski mogą być wykorzystane przez menedżerów Policji w celu podnoszenia efektywności przywództwa sytuacyjnego, a także innych organizacji funkcjonujących w czasach dynamicznych zmian społeczno-ekonomicznych.

Słowa kluczowe: podejście sytuacyjne w zarządzaniu, przywództwo sytuacyjne, zdolności adaptacyjne menedżerów, efektywność zarządzania, style zarządzania, zarządzanie Policją.

Introduction

The constant evolution of modern organizations makes managing human resources an increasingly complex task for managers. The high volatility, complexity, and uncertainty of the organization's functioning conditions cause noticeable unsteadiness in employee engagement. One of the most critical organizational challenges has become the phenomenon of weakening employee attachment to the organization.

The trend of the employee's weak bond with the organization and the related numerous resignations are referred to as the great resignation developed due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Hopkins & Figaro, 2021, pp. 393–400). According to the results of international research carried out in the conditions of pandemic reality, as many as 41% of employees consider resigning from work in a given company (Ciesielska, 2021). This problem also affects such an institution as the Polish Police. According to data from the first quarter of 2022, the number of police officers departing in Poland amounted to 2838 people. While in the comparable period of 2021, there were 2027 of them. This means an increase in the departure of officers from the Police by approx. 40% (Mikołajczyk, 2022).

It is worth noting that this issue is particularly significant among the Police. The lack of stability in the employment of highly engaged employees prevents the proper implementation of their statutory tasks, i.e., guaranteeing the protection and safety of

the functioning of the entire society. These issues seem to be extremely important in the conditions of constant changes in the organization's functioning, causing several threats to the safe, reliable implementation of tasks and the functioning of their employees. In turbulent and uncertain times, the success of companies in maintaining the continuity of organizational activities must be supported by the diligent work of institutions minimizing the sense of instability and threat. The police have an essential job to do here. Therefore, it seems necessary to look for ways to solve this problem in organizations of national importance, especially the Police. A specific proposal in this respect may be the adoption of a situational approach in management by managers.

The article assumes that using a situational approach in the management of police employees is desirable in highly variable and uncertain conditions of the organization's functioning and may contribute to increasing the effectiveness of management and employee bonding with the company for a longer period. The article aimed to verify the scope of the effectiveness of situational leadership in the Police and the adequacy of the management styles given the determinants of a given management situation. The structure of the study includes a literature review, which considers the essence of the situational approach and the concept of situational leadership. Then, the research methodology was carried out using the quantitative method among managers of the Police of various levels, and the results were presented. Finally, the conclusions were drawn based on the analysis of the obtained results, and the hypotheses were referred to. The research limitations were also considered, and the directions of broader research in the analyzed area were indicated.

1. Theoretical background

1.1. The essence of the situational approach in management

The central assumption of the situational approach in management was formulated by H. Shermann (1966). The author assumed that the specificity of such an approach is determined by the perspective of relativism and pragmatism of managers in the organization's management. Relativism, in contrast to the doctrines of classical management schools, assumes the dependence of organizational activities on the situational context. However, pragmatism is expressed in their selection for a given situation so that these activities bring the most expected results.

A significant contribution to the development of the situational approach in management is attributed to P. Lawrence and J. Lorsch (1967). Based on the conducted research, the researchers concluded that organizations should not act schematically, but look for solutions in the context of the situation in which the problem occurred (Maracz 1983, pp. 274–310). The situational approach in management does not create rigid and strict rules of conduct, assuming that each situation is unique. Synchronizing the organization and the environment should reflect the specific situation.

J. Karcz (2016) also points to the importance of accurately interpreting the situation in relation to the organization's external environment. I. Wlizo (2021, p. 45) adds, that what determines the manager's behavior in the described approach, is the situation he finds himself in. On the other hand, G. Morgan (2005) perceives the situational approach in management in terms of adapting the organization to the environment and indicates that the selection of the most appropriate solution should be consistent with the goals, tasks, and conditions of the organization's environment.

S. Lachiewicz and M. Matejun (2011, pp. 125–133) claim that the manager's role in the situational approach is to select a management method that, under certain conditions and at a specific time, will best serve to achieve the assumed goal. J.R. Schermerhorn (2008, p. 357) defines the situational approach in management as the manager's search for and adaptation of the most appropriate action and effective response to specific, unique problems that characterize the situation. Kapotwe and Bamata (2023) add that in the situational approach, the leader must differentiate his or her own behavioral strategies towards each of the subordinates depending on the current situation and the subordinate's ability and commitment to work. According to the mentioned researchers, the leader first analyzes the situational needs of the organization and then applies the most appropriate leadership style, depending on the employees' competences and commitment in task areas.

B. Hanisch and A. Wald (2012, p. 7), as a key statement in the theory of situational approach in management, assume that each activity in the area of management should be subject to a comprehensive and all-embracing analysis, and the actions taken by the manager – appropriately selected for a specific situation. A. Peszko (2002, p. 27) adds that the assumption of the situational approach is not to question the achievements of classical management schools, but to combine the theory with the practice of management through empirical research and use them as recommendations for the managerial staff when making decisions in accordance with the requirements of a particular situation.

According to A.G. Scherer (2005, p. 317), the assumption of empirical research in the situational approach in management is to illustrate the multidimensional approach of the organization using various situational factors. In the situational approach, the multidimensionality of the organization is taken into account, which is served by research on the impact of the organization's external environment on the intra-organizational behavior of its participants.

The basic assumption of the presented approach is the occurrence of dynamic connections at three levels of management, i.e., organization, manager, and employee. The components of the situational approach interact with each other, creating a specific situation defined by feedback occurring between them, and are subject to constant changes. The manager's role in the situational approach is to choose the management

style that may be the most appropriate in the existing conditions. This leads to the conclusion, that no optimal model of conduct can be used in any organizational situation. Each time the method used should result from an accurate analysis of the determinants of the current situation and a quick response to it. Therefore, the contemporary manager should have substantive and psychosocial competencies allowing for agile actions in precarious situations with increased uncertainty and risk.

1.2. Situational Leadership Concept

The concept of situational leadership is based on the general assumption of a situational approach in management, i.e., relativism and practicism in implementing organizational goals by managers. It takes into account feedback between the organization, manager, and employee. Based on this concept, the diversity of ways of employee participation in decision-making processes is related to the dynamics of situational conditions. It is captured in the context of changes in the perception of the employee's role in the organization, the managerial function, and the growing variability of the organization's environment. These factors, despite the rather early formulation of the assumptions of the concept by P. Hersey and K. Blanchard (2007), in the current changing organizational reality indicate its repeated topicality and usefulness in management practice.

Based on the literature review, two stages of work can be distinguished, having a fundamental impact on the formation of the concept of situational leadership. Both stages were related to analyzing the manager's behavior in the organization (Jasińska et al., 2018, p. 82) and the need to understand the irrational factor in organizational behaviors (Stręk, 2018, p. 46).

A. Halpin and W. Winer (Halpin, 1966, pp. 81–130), whose activities involve the first research stage on situational leadership, have created an initiating and supporting model for the employee. Based on the *Leadership Behavior Description Questionnaire* (LBDQ) – they developed a graphical version of this model covering two dimensions, i.e., taking into account the employee's needs and abilities and efficiency in creating a team structure (Wrinkler, 2003, p. 135). The result of the undertaken work was the definition of leadership in the context of the leader's behavior while managing an employee team to achieve the intended goal (Schriesheim & Bird, 1979, pp. 135–145).

On the other hand, W. Reddin (1967, p. 13) developed the concept of managerial effectiveness (*Tridimensional Leader Effectiveness Model*), which gained importance as a three-dimensional 3D situational concept. The term 3D refers to the most effective management style that integrates three dimensions of the manager's orientation, such as: (1) tasks, (2) subordinates, and (3) efficiency. The researcher developed a three-dimensional model in which management styles “are presented as effective, or ineffective depending on a given situation” (Reddin, 1967). According to the author, the manager's effectiveness is expressed in his situational sensitivity, flexibility in the selection of management style, and situational management skills (Rutka & Czerska, 2016, pp. 337–358).

P. Hersey and K. Blanchard (Blanchard, 2021) created a model that they initially called the *Life Cycle Theory of Leadership*, followed by the *Situational Leadership Theory* (SLT). The style of leadership and the level of maturity of the employee are considered key elements in the Situational Leadership Model (Blanchard, 2007, p. 75). Each leadership style results from a combination of task-oriented behavior and employee relationship-oriented behavior (Krsteska et al., 2023, p. 297). This concept does not answer the question of which management style is the best, but assumes that the effectiveness of various leadership styles depends on the degree of maturity of the team participant and the existing situation (Kozłowski & Piotrowski, 2006, p. 348).

Situational leadership is based on a curvilinear relationship between the manager's behavior and the employee's maturity. The authors of the Situational Leadership Model say that an employee's maturity level evolves depending on his/her competencies and level of engagement. Therefore, in the literature on the subject, one can find an interchangeable use of terminology to describe the characterized concept as an evolutionary model of situational leadership (Stoner et al., 2011, p. 463).

The evolutionary nature of the concept speaks of a smooth transition between the various stages of employee development. This process can be divided into four phases. From the phase where the employee is distinguished by a high commitment, but a low level of competence, through two successive stages where the employee is characterized by a low commitment and a low, or medium level of competence and a high commitment, and a medium, or high level of competence, to the phase of an independent expert – that is, an employee with a high level of commitment and expertise.

The priority task of the situational leader is multidimensional scaling of the level of maturity of the employee and the environment of the organization in order to accurately adjust the appropriate management style to the level (stage) of development of a given employee. The leadership style depends on the behavior of the person trying to influence others (Podgórska & Detko, 2023, pp. 376–380). The leader's behavior may be directive (task-oriented), or supportive (relationship-oriented). Directive behavior is characterized by giving instructions, setting goals and deadlines for achieving them. In turn, supportive behaviors allow group members to feel good about themselves, their colleagues and the situation.

K. Blanchard and P. Hersey (1969) list four management styles a manager may have at his/her disposal. The first is the instructional (directive) style, which provides the employee with guidelines at various stages of the task implementation and indicates what competencies should be acquired to achieve a higher level of maturity. In terms of consultative style, the manager, in addition to providing guidance and advice, should provide mental support to the subordinates, thus building their involvement. The supportive style consists in providing the employee with mental support and a joint search for gaps in competencies that may hinder the implementation of the task. The last style,

i.e., delegation, boils down to indicating the task the employee is to perform and determining the date of its completion. The delegating style can only be applied to the most experienced and committed employees achieving the highest level of maturity.

The creators of the SLT model supplemented the theoretical area of reflection on situational leadership with a practical aspect. They developed a questionnaire on the effectiveness and adaptability of managers managing employee teams (*Leadership Effectiveness and Adaptability – LEAD*), which in practice can be used to diagnose the current management style and select the most appropriate one in a given situation (Bogert, 1986, p. 1).

C. L. Graeff (1997) revised the theoretical basis and pragmatic usefulness of the SLT model. Based on the review of the evolution of the situational leadership theory, he questioned its logical and internal inconsistency, conceptual ambiguity, and the incompleteness and general confusion associated with many versions of the model. Nevertheless, the essence of situational leadership has not been undermined, although critical references have temporarily diminished the interest of researchers.

The difficulty related to ambiguity around the "competence and involvement of employees" in the SLT model was again taken up by G. Thompson & L. Glasø (2015), who in the conducted research adopted different perspectives for determining the level of employee development. The authors stated that measuring the degree of consistency between the leader's assessment of the competence and involvement of subordinates and the self-assessment of a subordinate is a key issue in determining the competence and involvement of subordinates. SLT predictions were found to be more likely when the leader's rating and employee's self-assessment are convergent, compared to using the leader's rating alone.

In the research of H. Luo & S. Lui (2014), the scope of application of situational leadership was extended beyond the culture of Western countries. The impact of situational leadership and the scope of employee maturity on organizational civic behavior (OCB) in Chinese culture was examined. The positive impact on the OCB of almost all management styles adequately selected for the scope of maturity of employees was demonstrated, except for the directive style, in which the manager acted as a trainer and the employee required detailed instructions.

Results of Mulyana et al. (2022) showed that situational leadership used in times of radical social changes (e.g., a pandemic) varies depending on the context and culture of the organizations in which it is used. It has been shown that the essential aspect of the competence of a situational leader is socio-emotional skills, i.e., the ability to cope with stressful situations, and the readiness to react quickly to changes in socio-cultural life and make decisions about maintaining the continuity of the company's operations.

Most of the existing research on SLT has so far focused on service-oriented organizations in education, healthcare, or the financial sector (Thompson & Glasø, 2015). The

study subjects were managers and employees of these institutions, and only a few considered situational leadership in the context of radical socio-economic changes. No research was identified whose subject of analysis in the field of SLT would be Police managers, whose tasks, in the conditions of current high volatility and uncertainty of the organizational environment, took on greater significance than before due to their general social tone.

Taking into account the above considerations, a research question was formulated: does the Police management effectively use situational leadership and accurately adapt management styles to the situational conditions? Moreover, the following research hypotheses were put forward:

H1: The Police managerial staff effectively uses the situational approach in management.

H2: The ability of Police managers to adapt management styles to management situations increases along with the level of management occupied in the organization's structure.

2. Research methodology

In order to verify the presented research hypotheses, quantitative research was carried out using the survey method. The research tool was an electronic questionnaire for the effectiveness and adaptability of managers managing employee teams (*Leadership Effectiveness and Adaptability – LEAD*). This questionnaire is an original measurement tool by P. Hersey and K. Blanchard (1988), which was developed to measure the effectiveness of situational leadership and the parameters of the four styles of employee management included in the SLT concept. The questionnaire was narrowly validated so that certain statements corresponded to the specificity of the Police service. For this purpose, the Delphi method was used, which was carried out by the four rules set out by R. Plummer, D.R. Armitage (2007), i.e., (1) deliberate selection of experts due to their specialist knowledge, (2) interaction between participants in the field of validation of statements contained in the questionnaire, (3) feedback between experts, (4) generating opinions and recommendations in the scope of the analyzed issue. As a result of consultations between 10 Police managers, the descriptions of the situations were slightly modified to make them more understandable for police officers – managers of various levels of management.

The LEAD questionnaire consisted of a description of 12 different situations and four possible variants of actions that the manager can take in response to the described situation. Response options identify the manager's preferred management styles, which according to the SLT concept, include instructional, consultative, supportive, and delegative styles. Individual styles are assessed in the context of adaptability to the existing conditions. According to the instructions of the tool used (Hersey, 1975, pp. 167–174),

the degree of adaptation is assessed in the point range: +2, +1, -1, -2. The authors of the survey questionnaire consider a situation in which the manager has adaptation skills +24 points as an ideal model, and this result also informs about the effectiveness of situational leadership. The point range of the variant of effective situational leadership is above 0 up to +24 points. On the other hand, values below 0 up to -24 points inform about the inefficient use of the analyzed model in employee management.

The reliability of the situational leadership questionnaire was analyzed using the method of estimating the absolute stability of the test (test-retest) (Jankowski & Zajenkowski, 2009, pp. 86; Kennedy, 2022, pp. 19–20). For this purpose, a pilot study was carried out two weeks before the commencement of the actual study. Spearman's correlation coefficient was used as a measure of interperiodic compatibility. The correlation analysis showed that the measurement of situational leadership at measurement 1 was significantly, positively, and strongly related to the measurement of situational leadership at measurement 2 ($\rho = 0.98, p < 0.001$). These results indicate that the measurement of situational leadership is characterized by intra-individual stability over time, which means that the survey questionnaire used in the study was characterized by high measurement reliability.

The subject of the research was a uniformed formation – the Police. Following the applicable regulations in the Police (Police Headquarters, 2020), obtaining survey data was preceded by a request to the Provincial Police Commander in Krakow to consent to obtain opinions from police officers on the discussed issue. The empirical research covered police officers performing managerial tasks in the area of functioning of the garrison of the Lesser Poland Police. The selection of people subjected to the research procedure was non-random (non-probabilistic) and deliberate.

The research covered 89 Police managers, of which 57 represented the basic level of management (e.g., team/platoon commander, cell manager), 28 medium (e.g., company commander, chief, or their deputies), and four higher (e.g., district/city commander or their deputies). Among the respondents, men dominated – 97%. The largest group represented officers aged 36–45 – 51%. On the other hand, police officers aged 26–35 and 46 and over were 25% each. There were no indications for age 25 and below. It can be concluded, that the surveyed police managers are well educated because 74% of respondents have a higher education degree, while 26% have a secondary education degree. Most of them, 35%, indicated that their length of service in the Police ranges from 13 to 19 years. Subsequently, 31.5% of Police managers were officers with service experience of 20–26 years, 25.5% ranging from 6 to 12 years, and the smallest group of respondents were people with service experience in the Police of 27 years, or more – 8%. The data presented are not sufficient to infer the wider population.

The empirical data obtained from the questionnaires were subjected to a statistical analysis carried out in Excel, taking into account the indications of the key attached to the LEAD questionnaire. In accordance with the indications, a number of calculations

and averaging data related to the level of efficiency and adaptability of Police managers were made.

3. Results

The analysis of the results was carried out in two stages. In the first one, calculations were made and presented for the entire surveyed population in the area of adaptability relating to four situational management styles (instructional, consultative, supportive, and delegative). The second stage was to determine the effectiveness of situational leadership for all respondents and differentiate according to their management levels in the organizational structure of the Police (i.e., basic, middle, and higher management levels).

The results obtained regarding the adaptability of managers in terms of flexible adjustment of the management style to the situation showed, that the values were positive in terms of areas relevant to the consultative and supportive management styles. However, the values were negative in areas representative of other management styles, i.e., for the instructional and delegative. *Differentia specifica* between positive and negative values is that the first of these means that a specific management style is matched correctly to the management situations described in the questionnaire. Negative ones, on the other hand, suggest inflexible management decisions, resulting in improper adaptation of a given management style to the existing situation.

The first of the analyzed areas of adaptability of Police managers, in which a positive value was found, referred to the consultative style. The obtained result was at the level of +1.887 points. An example of a situation in which the respondents often chose the consultative style as a way of acting is the situation described as follows: *You have entered a well-functioning police department/unit. Your predecessor was in strict control of the situation. You would like to keep things productive, at the same time turning the environment more people-friendly.* Thirty-eight managers decided that in such a situation, the best solution is to involve the team in decision-making while ensuring that the goals are achieved. The assessment of the degree of adaptability for the mentioned variant of action was high (+2 points).

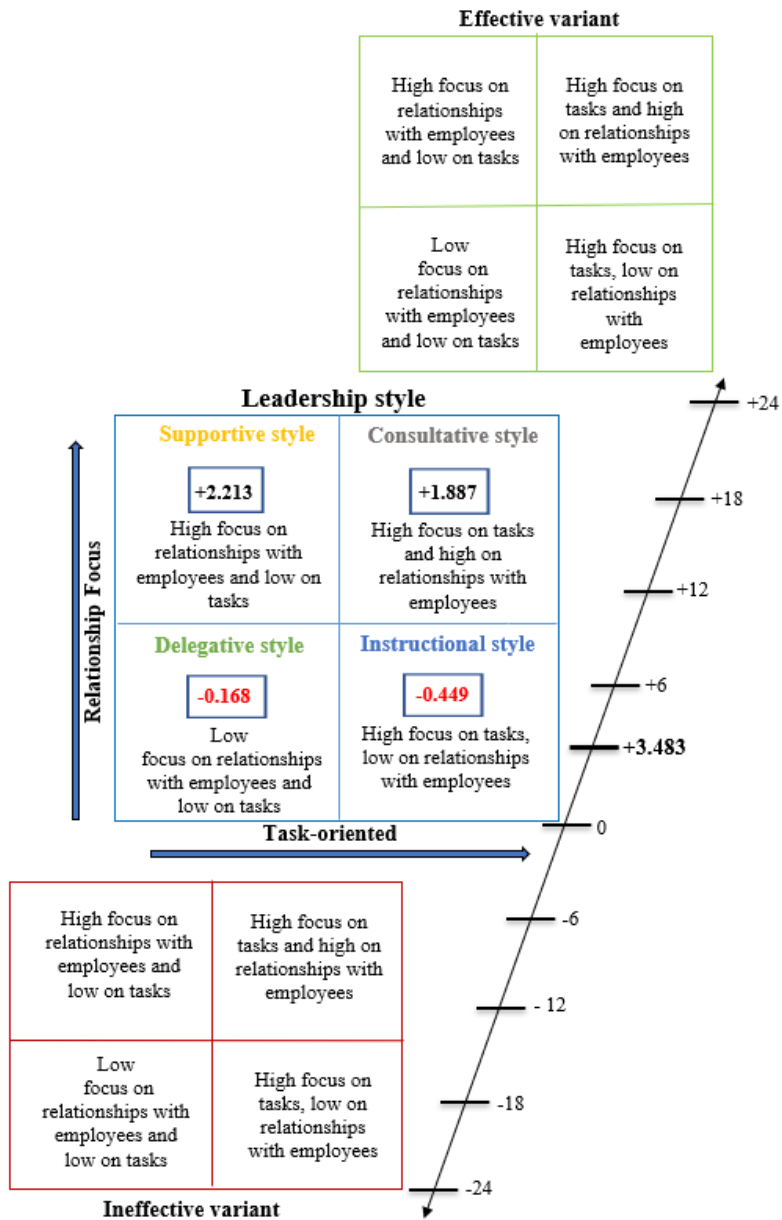
Regarding adaptability related to the supportive style, the result was +2.213 points. An example of a situation in which managers willingly reached for a supportive style – as a way to solve it – is included in the description: “You have been promoted to a new position. The previous supervisor was not involved in the group’s issues, and the group had adequately handled the tasks and objectives. Group relations are good”. As many as 54 out of 89 managers decided that in such a situation, the right choice is to involve subordinates in decision-making and to strengthen the sense of positive contribution. This option was also highly rated in the area of adaptability of managers (+2 points).

In the area of adaptability associated with the instructional style, the score was -0.449 points. One example of a management style mismatch may be a tendency regarding the situation described in the survey questionnaire: Your team members cannot solve the problem independently. "You used to leave them with it. The results in the group and interpersonal relations were good". Twenty respondents chose the option of action presented as: "You act quickly and decisively to make improvements and indicated the direction of action" – which, after decoding, had a low adaptive value (-2 points). For this situation, the most desirable action of the manager is to encourage the team to work on the problem and support its efforts, which corresponds to the supportive style (+2 points).

The last area of adaptability in the situational leadership model that was analyzed referred to the delegative style. The degree of adaptation of managers to situations where the right approach in the management of employees was the delegative style reached a value slightly below zero: -0.168 points. This means that the management staff of the Police, in situations where the most appropriate management method is delegating, adjusts activities to specific circumstances in a less flexible way. It should be emphasized that the examined managerial staff in a few situations decided to mark the variants of actions that corresponded to the manner of acting in accordance with the delegative style. Moreover, when the respondents decided to make such a choice, the delegative style often turned out to have a low degree of adaptation to the situation. One example relates to a situation described as follows: "Your group's performance has clearly increased, and you have ensured that all members know their responsibilities and expected standards of operation". 24 out of 89 respondents indicated they would not take decisive action in such a situation. However, this course of action was rated the lowest (-2 points).

Based on the presented averaged sum of results relating to individual areas of adaptability of managers, the level of effectiveness of situational leadership of respondents was determined, which amounted to +3.483, as illustrated in Figure 1 on an oblique axis. Axis values above 0 to +24 mean effective variants of situational leadership, in which the adaptability of managers is identified as a good fit of the management style to the situation. The range of possible variants is quite wide (upper square of Figure 1.). On the other hand, the negative values of the axis concern ineffective variants (the lower square of Figure 1.). The centrally located square in the described drawing is divided into four quartiles, which correspond to the areas of adaptability appropriate for the analyzed management styles constituting the basis for calculating the effectiveness of situational leadership of the examined group of managers.

Figure 1.
 Visualization of the assessment of the effectiveness of situational leadership and adaptability of the examined Police managers



Source: authors' study based on the results.

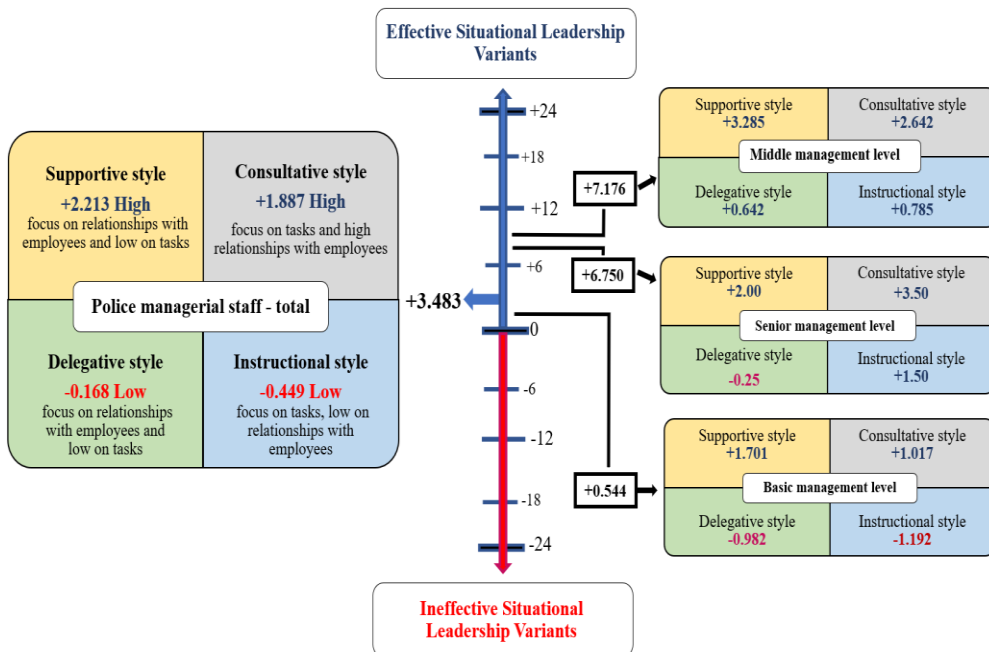
The obtained result allows one to assess the situational leadership of the Police managerial staff as effective. However, given that this result is in the first quartile of the efficiency scale (0 to +24), it should be assumed that this is the basic efficiency level.

Another study concerned groups of managers in accordance with their management levels. It was established that in all groups of Police managers, the overall results of the effectiveness of situational leadership obtained positive values. The highest assessment of the effectiveness of situational leadership was obtained by managers of the middle management level (+7.176 points), then higher (+6.750 points). In comparison, the lowest score was obtained by representatives of the basic management level (+0.544 points). Figure 2 illustrates indicators of the effectiveness of situational leadership and the adaptability to situational conditions for indicated groups of Police managers.

Of the three respondent groups surveyed, only middle management leaders effectively operate all four management styles. This means that the middle management staff in the Police most effectively selects the options of action for the existing situations. It is worth noting that in all groups of Police managers, adaptability related to management styles, in which attention is focused on high relations with employees (supportive and consulting style), has gained positive values.

Figure 2.

Visualization of the assessment of the effectiveness of situational leadership and adaptability of the surveyed Police managers according to the management level



Source: authors' study based on the results.

4. Discussion and conclusions

The obtained research data allowed one to answer the research question positively and confirmed the first hypothesis that the analyzed managerial staff of the Police effectively uses the situational approach in management. The scope of the effectiveness of situational leadership of Police managers determined by the SLT model authors' method was at the level of 3.483 (Figure 1) and in relation to the mid-level staff at 7.176. The indicated efficiency level compared with model indications is located in the first quartile of the efficiency scale, in the case of middle-level staff in the second.

The interpretation of the result should take into account the position of the author of the LEAD questionnaire, according to which the effectiveness of situational leadership in the case of as many as 83% of the managers surveyed by him ranged from -6 to +6 points (Hersey, 1975). In relation to the results achieved in practice by other organizations, the effectiveness of situational leadership of the surveyed group of Police managers can be positively assessed – as the results most often obtained by organizations were in the positive part of the scale and in the case of middle-level managers – they were exceeding this range.

In the current highly variable and uncertain conditions of the functioning of the organization in which the research was carried out, the above conclusion is important because leadership is associated with challenges and unconventional actions of the manager (Fuchs et al. 2018, pp. 306–311, Grudzewski et al., 2010, p. 96), the context of engaging people to achieve common goals (Bartkowiak 2002, p. 11) and indicating new directions to increase the effectiveness of the enterprise (Kotter, 2005, pp. 118–119). In a way, this explains that the best effectiveness was demonstrated in terms of the use of consulting and supportive styles (in no case did they take the value of -2). They are perceived as building trust and meeting the needs of employees in the context of setting goals and organizing work, as well as providing them with socio-emotional support.

The analysis of the ability of Police managers to adapt management styles to management situations, taking into account the management levels occupied by the respondents, partially confirmed the second hypothesis. There was a significant increase in the adaptability of mid-level managers in relation to the basic and no further increase in this adaptability of senior managers in relation to the mid-level (Figure 2). Thus, the similar level of adaptability of senior and middle managers, on the one hand, may prove the well-established mechanisms of proper management style choices. On the other hand, the perceived trend of a slight decline may be worrying, especially since it concerns a higher management level. Further research is needed to explore this issue in detail.

In general, it has been shown that the surveyed Police managers select employee management styles flexibly and situation-dependently. They show a high concentration of attention primarily on styles related to maintaining good relations with subordinates. The degree of adjustment of individual management styles to the situation is variable

and depends on the level of management in the structure of the Police. The highest level of adaptability was found in the middle-level managerial staff. The value obtained on the efficiency scale exceeds the level indicated by P. Hersey (1975) as achieved in practice by most organizations. It also reveals a clear pro-development trend for managers at the basic management level.

Further actions are needed to increase the scope and effectiveness of situational leadership so that decisions on the management style that may be used are more appropriate to the situation. A specific solution in this respect may be training managers and popularizing the practice of sharing the experience of managers of various levels. In addition, measures should be taken to make the adaptability of managers more flexible, especially in the area relevant to the delegative style. The participation of employees with appropriate competencies in decision-making may be meaningful in this respect. These actions can contribute to increasing the effectiveness of situational leadership in the Police and affect employees' decisions about longer professional engagement with it. The basis for all implemented activities should be the systematic monitoring of the level of effectiveness and adaptability of Police managers.

The conclusions and proposals for further actions presented should be treated with some caution due to the territorial scope of the research and the number of respondents. The research was implemented among the managerial staff of the garrison of the Lesser Poland Police, taking into account the appropriate number of managers at individual levels. Although the conclusions drawn may be treated as representative of the formation of Lesser Poland Police Officers, they cannot be generalized to the entire Police community due to the indicated limitations. Perhaps it is worth noting that no research was found in the literature on situational leadership among Police officers. The adopted methodology and test procedure, as well as the results obtained, could therefore contribute to broader research, which should include a more significant number of garrisons of the Polish Police and the surveyed managers. International research would also be interesting in order to compare the effectiveness of police management in different countries. Interesting conclusions could be obtained based on a comparison of the obtained data with the results in other uniformed organizations, or in other organizations where there is a problem of employee departures. Also, in relation to other organizational problems appearing in highly variable reality, conclusions regarding situational leadership may prove to be inspiring for potential researchers.

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