

JACA  
1(1994): 15-22

# **The Impact of Situational Elements Upon an Internship Director's Supervisory Style: A Model**

SHELLY SCHAEFER HINCK  
WILLIAM O. DAILEY

**I**N this essay we argue that to be effective, internship directors must examine the constraints and objectives of their program and then select an appropriate supervisory style. Our argument is developed along three lines. First, we recognize that internship programs are essential components of speech communication curriculum. Second, however, we note that the internship literature does not address the issue of adapting supervisory style to program needs. Third, we argue that effective internship programs must match resources and objectives with educational activities, and that only by doing so can internship programs optimize educational outcomes in line with their potential. Toward this end we propose a model of supervisory styles for internship directors.

## **THE NEED FOR A MODEL OF SUPERVISORY STYLE**

Making the transition from backpacks to briefcases occurs quickly and often traumatically (Bialec and Washington, 1985). One moment students are dressed in blue jeans, listening to lectures on communication theories and working independently in the library; the next moment students are wearing business suits, focusing on product output and working interdependently with various corporate departments. Internships help students make this "leap" from the academic culture to the business culture by providing a safe environment where they can assess their ability to efficiently and effectively communicate in a complex organization (Hellweg and Falcione, 1985), developing students' skills for assimilating corporate culture (Hyre and Owens, 1984), and enabling students to discover how flexible

and adaptive they are to the business environment (Breslin, 1980).

Considering the many benefits associated with the internship experience, it is not surprising that over one thousand colleges and universities in the United States offer some type of internship program (Hanson, 1984). Mason (1985) reports that nearly 75% of all speech communication departments include an internship or comparable experience in their communication curricula.

What is surprising is that internship directors looking for suggestions on internship administration find little research devoted to developing effective administrative decisions. Such research is needed since Raffield (1986) notes that faculty coordinators are generally highly competent classroom teachers but often lack the training necessary for effective internship supervision. When internship directors turn to the literature in the field for guidance, they find that it has focused on two basic areas: (1) the benefits of internship programs (Breslin, 1980; Downs, Harper, and Hunt, 1976; Hellweg and Falcione, 1985; Hyre and Owens, 1984; McClam and Kessler, 1982; Ross, 1985; Ross, 1987; Taylor, 1989) and (2) the description of general strategies for new, or improving existing, internship programs (Hanson, 1984; Hyre and Owens, 1984; Ross, 1985; Ross, 1987; Raffield, 1986).

Although descriptions of internship programs provide internship coordinators with information about experiences that are offered at other institutions and the benefits their students experienced, it is often difficult to apply these suggestions to one's own program. Programs often differ in terms of the availability of organizations willing to sponsor an intern, the budgetary outlays a department is willing to allocate for the program, released time available to the internship director, and the educational objectives of the program. Available research does not reveal how internship directors should match the resources and objectives of their own programs with the strategies offered by the researchers. For example, while some internship directors can find the time to actively recruit new organizations and hold group meetings with their interns, this might not be possible for all internship directors. Unless an internship director has the majority of his/her interns working within close proximity of the university and has a program that is located in an area that has an abundance of possible host organizations, these types of activities will not be an effective use of his/her time and energy given the constraints and resources of this particular program.

This gap in understanding affects administrators at different levels in important ways. Although internship directors might lack advice concerning supervisory decisions, they are still subject to evaluation like any other faculty members. Downs, Harper, and Hunt (1976) found that although interns evaluated their internship experience as one of the best experiences they had, students evaluated the role played by internship supervisors less positively. And while many departments are committed to the idea of offering internship programs to their students, not all departments can commit the same resources to a director. The evaluation of internship directors and programs should be conducted according to a fit between available resources and stated educational objectives.

By matching factors such as educational philosophy and internship resources with the types of activities and educational requirements an internship director includes in his/her program, we think internship directors will be able to maximize both educational outcomes and the investment of departmental resources. Conversely, the misalignment of resources and objectives will result in an inefficient use of those resources. For example, if a department sees significant growth of their internship program as an important goal, yet still expects the internship director to visit all organization sites without increasing the amount of released time available to the internship director, a growing disjuncture between the objectives of the program and the resources available will develop. Clearly, departmental resources and educational objectives must be aligned. Toward this end, we offer a model of supervisory styles as a way to match resources with program objectives.

## THE IMPACT OF EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY AND PROGRAM RESOURCES ON ADMINISTRATIVE DECISIONS OF INTERNSHIP COORDINATORS

After examining the literature on internship supervision we found two variables affecting choices made by internship coordinators: educational philosophy of the supervisor and program resources. Each will be discussed in regard to how they impact the decisions made by the internship supervisor.

### *Educational Philosophy*

A criticism often voiced concerning internship programs is the difficulty of assuring the “academic soundness” of the program (Page, 1981). Placing students in an educationally rich environment and then evaluating the quality of student learning is the charge of the internship coordinator; but how to evaluate the learning process is the dilemma faced by each coordinator. The internship experience requires that the coordinator relinquish direct control over the learning environment, yet s/he is still responsible for the academic rigor of the program.

Specifically, this dimension refers to whether or not a director hopes to add insight and understanding beyond the experience that the interns gain on the job. Some directors may feel that learning will best be accomplished through dialogue between the director, the student, and the site supervisor. This approach to learning might include getting students to reflect about their experiences and getting them to explore a certain work situation more completely to uncover parallels with ideas taught in the classroom. The relationship between the intern, the faculty coordinator, and the site supervisor may be of a helping nature whereby the faculty coordinator consults with and advises the intern with the hope of improving the intern’s understanding of the communication principles operating in the internship. Some directors, on the other hand, may feel that learning is the responsibility of the student, hence the particular workplace becomes the primary locus of education through the internship. Work samples and the creation of a work portfolio may be used to assess the “learning” of the interns. In this particular approach to supervision, the product of an internship, that is to say the work samples produced by an intern, may be stressed more than the cognitive process of understanding how communication theories are applied.

### *Resources*

Another important factor impacting choices made by the faculty coordinator is the amount of support available. In fact, McNutt (1989) claims that support is the primary issue in the planning, implementation and evaluation of internship programs. Hoover, O’Shea, and Carroll (1988) echo Park’s assessment when they include lack of university support as one of the three factors that hinders effective supervision of interns. Powers and Klingel (1990) claim that “. . . the most critical aspect of success is the selection, charge, and support provided to a departmental director of internships” (p.85).

Support consists of the amount of “resources” available to the faculty coordinator. This dimension taps such issues as the amount of released time offered to the faculty coordinator, the number of established organizational sites, the number of potential organizations available for the internship program, as well as the number of students who qualify for the program. Some supervisors and programs are rich in resources: directors are given sufficient released time or monetary support, and their program is located in an area conducive to the

establishment of numerous internship sites. Other directors of internship programs, however, may not enjoy the same situation with respect to support and resources. Perhaps these programs are located in an area where there is a limited number of host organizations, organizational sites have not yet been established, or faculty coordinators, for whatever reason, are given a limited amount of released time and monetary support.

### A MODEL OF SUPERVISORY STYLES

The combination of the two dimensions results in four basic kinds of internship supervisory styles: managers, directors, coaches, and mentors. The manager style works best in programs low in resources and support and where the learning is viewed as the responsibility of the student. The internship supervisor who places the responsibility of learning on the student yet has many resources to work with is a “director.” “Coach” is our name for the supervisor who sees learning occurring through a dialogue between the student, internship supervisor, and site supervisor and one who has little departmental or university support. Finally, the “mentor” is the supervisor who views learning as a dialogic effort and has sufficient university support and resources.

We propose that these four styles will affect how internship coordinators spend their time and how they communicate and evaluate their interns.

**TABLE 1**  
**Supervision Model**

learning is a shared responsibility between student and internship director	coach	mentor
	manager	director
Role of the Internship Director in the Educational Process		
learning is the responsibility of the student	less	more
	Resources	

In proposing these classifications of internship supervisory styles, we want to avoid value judgments about the different strategies. We feel that the time and talents of the supervisor and the commitment on the part of the university will determine what a supervisor can reasonably accomplish with his/her internship program.

### *Manager*

The style of “manager” works well for programs low in resources and where a “learn-on-the-job” philosophy reflects the educational objective. The manager is probably in the least appealing environment in regard to the availability of host organizations or departmental/university support and/or released time. The lack of host organizations may be a result of the fact that the program is located in a nonmetropolitan area where the number and type of corporations is limited. Additionally, since many universities and/or departments are experiencing financial constraints, the internship director may not have the economic support for either site visitations or the recruitment of new organizations.

The educational philosophy of the department may reflect an applied as opposed to a more theoretical perspective. The acquisition of skills and the generation of a work portfolio is the primary objective of the internship experience in an environment such as this. The site supervisor’s role is to create an internship environment where the intern can achieve goals of developing specific skills and catalogue them in a portfolio. The role of the internship director is to manage the relationship between the site supervisor and the intern.

There are a number of ways that an internship director who finds him/herself in an environment such as this can work productively. First, the director should develop internship opportunities not only in organizations within the area, but also within the university. Phelps and Timmis (1984) found that internship directors often evaluated potential internship sites by the size and type of organization as opposed to the opportunities offered. They suggest that internship activities should be judged by their nature, scope, complexity, and effectiveness and offer that within various university departments, there may be possible internship opportunities (p. 74). Examples of university departments that have positions which emphasize communication skills such as public speaking, interpersonal, interviewing and organizational skills, include the Admission office, the Career Placement Office, Office of Student Life, and Personnel Office. By developing internship sites within the university, “managers” can increase the number of internship possibilities and reduce the cost of supporting the program since telephone and travel costs are minimal.

Establishing high standards for entrance into the internship class may be another way the manager can oversee his/her program. In a recent survey Hinck and Dailey (1992) found that internships were basically offered to upperclassmen. Only 8% of programs accepted freshmen and 22% allowed sophomores. Grade point average was also a common prerequisite, although internship directors differed on what the grade point average should be. Establishing entrance requirements helps ensure that the brightest and most responsible students will be a part of the program, thus reducing the number of problems associated with the internship experience.

Choosing appropriate assessment methods (papers, journals, site visits) is important to the manager since s/he has a limited amount of time to devote to the internship program. S/he should be careful not to select assessment methods that require large expenditures of time. Perhaps an evaluation from the supervisor on the job coupled with the grading of the intern’s work portfolio is all that may be expected from this supervisor. Lengthy analysis papers, meetings, and journals may be too time consuming given the internship director’s responsibilities.

### *Director*

The “director” thrives in an environment rich in resources. The director may find that s/he has a wealth of host organizations where student internship programs are available as well as the time and money to visit the organization site.

An internship director who finds her/himself in an environment rich in internship site possibilities may want to channel his/her energy and time into promoting the internship

program. By identifying the value of speech communication interns to organizations, not only will this attract other organizations, but it will promote a positive image of the department within the university setting as well. An internship director might want to sponsor programs highlighting the types of internships available to speech communication students, regularly conduct site visits, and/or create promotional materials such as brochures focusing on the benefits of the program.

The educational approach of the "director" is similar to that of the "manager." Internships are seen as an important component of a student's educational program with emphasis on the application of classroom concepts to the work situation. The intern has the responsibility of drawing upon communication skills that cut across academic classes. This may be accomplished through the assignment of journals and/or papers which emphasize how communication functions in the work environment.

Interns may also be required to offer evidence of acquired work skills by creating a work portfolio. Meetings with the site supervisor in order to discuss the intern's progress with his/her portfolio would also be a possibility for a "director" since s/he has both the time and financial support necessary for such detailed evaluations.

### *Coach*

"Coach" is our name for the supervisor who sees learning occurring through a dialogue between the student, internship director, and site supervisor and one who has little departmental or university support.

The coach may find that s/he has a wealth of possible host organizations where student internship programs are available, however s/he has limited time in which to invest in the internship program. As Hanson (1984) notes, "While the large institutions committed to an internship program usually have the funding available to hire someone who is responsible for the internship program, most liberal arts schools do not have this luxury" (p.56). Often in situations such as the latter, the supervision of the internship program falls to one faculty member who may or may not receive sufficient release time; such is the case of the coach. The educational environment is one that stresses the importance of dialogue. The internship director's role is seen as a facilitator who must process the experience for students. Helping students discover the role that communication theories and concepts play in their internships is of utmost importance.

Since the coach has a limited amount of time with which to carry out an internship program, choices must be made as to how s/he will spend her/his time most efficiently. Establishing contact with organizations through formal methods instead of through more time consuming interpersonal communication channels would be necessary. Examples would include: (1) developing a form letter to send to all possible host organizations inquiring about the establishment of an internship program; (2) creating internship information brochures about the internship program; and (3) sending evaluation forms to the site supervisor rather than visiting the internship site.

Since dialogue plays an important role in the educational philosophy of this environment, group internship meetings should be the channels utilized most often by the director. Group meetings, as opposed to individual conferences, allow the internship director to help interns understand their internship experience while allowing the internship supervisor to make effective use of his/her time. Papers and journals could also be used to reinforce the discussions between the internship director and the interns.

### *Mentor*

The style of "mentor" works well for programs high in resources and where the department views learning as a dialogic effort between the internship supervisor and the

interns. The mentor may find that s/he has an appropriate number of organizational sites, sufficient released time, and substantial monetary support for the size of the internship program s/he oversees.

The educational objectives for the internship program are many. Not only are students to acquire specific work skills through their internship experience, but the department sees the mentor as the critical link between communication theory and the application of theory to the intern situation. The educational environment suggests that a trusting, supportive relationship between the intern and the faculty coordinator is necessary since the "ultimate goal of the mentor is improving the intern's ability to make responsible decisions, to develop communication skills and insight throughout the experience and to transfer book knowledge to the experience" (Ross, 1987, p. 5).

There are a number of ways that an internship director who finds him/herself in an environment such as this can work productively. First, it is the mentor's responsibility to monitor the size of the program and the resources available in order to keep all congruent. If the program begins to grow or become smaller, the mentor should bring this to the attention of the department. If the number of interested students diminishes, additional information about the program is needed; if the number of host organizations begins to shrink, the recruitment of new organizations is needed; if the program begins to grow, additional resources in the way of released time or budgetary support may be needed. A mentor's duties might encompass regular meetings with the interns in which discussion concerning the intern's communication skills and practices are considered. Internship journals and papers that focus on the identification of communication theories and concepts and the application of the theories and concepts may also be required of interns. A work portfolio illustrating the types of skills acquired and work samples completed by the intern would also be appropriate.

Arranging site visits to the host organization in order to talk about the intern's progress might also be a duty of the mentor. By including the site supervisor in the learning process, the mentor will have a better ability to lead discussions focusing on appropriate decision making in communication practices.

## SUMMARY

In this essay, we have argued that internship directors must first examine the constraints and the objectives of their program in order to select an appropriate supervisory style. The rationale for aligning supervisory style with program objectives and constraints can be found in the need to maximize departmental resources. Expecting an internship director to serve as a mentor without corresponding departmental support makes as little sense as expending huge sums for a program lacking clear pedagogical objectives. Clearly, resources and objectives must be matched with supervisory style if internship directors are to be effective. We offered a four part model that departments and internship coordinators can use to align the expectations of the internship program and the ways in which an internship coordinator can satisfy these expectations through programmatic activity.

While the model identified two variables that play a significant role in the supervisory process, we feel that there may be additional variables affecting internship programs. Further research is needed to explore the ways in which internship programs are constrained by larger organizational demands, expectations, and structures, as well as the impact that these larger organizational forces have on the decisions internship coordinators must make to administer their programs.

## REFERENCES AND NOTES

- Shelly Schaefer Hineck** (Ph.D., University of Kansas, 1988) is Assistant Professor in the Speech Communication and Dramatic Arts Department at Central Michigan University, Mt. Pleasant, MI 48859.
- William O. Dailey** (Ph.D., Northwestern University, 1987) is Assistant Professor in the Speech Communication and Dramatic Arts Department at Central Michigan University, Mt. Pleasant, MI 48859.
- Bialac, D., and Wallington, C. (1985, May). From backpack to briefcase. *Training and Development Journal*, 39, 66-68.
- Breslin, R. D. (1980). An internship program in the liberal arts. *Improving College and University Teaching*, 28, 171-176.
- Downs, C. W. Harper, P., and Hunt, G. (1976). Internships in speech communication. *Communication Education*, 25, 276-282.
- Hanson, J. (1984). Internships and the individual: suggestions for implementing (or improving) an internship program. *Communication Education*, 33, 53-61.
- Hellweg, S. A., and Falcione, R. L. (1985). *Internships in the communication arts and sciences*. Scottsdale: Gorsuch Scarisbrick Publishers.
- Hineck, S., and Dailey, W. O. (1992). *Internship supervision: A model*. Paper presented at the Speech Communication Association Convention, Chicago, IL.
- Hoover N. L., O'Shea, L. J., and Carroll, R.G. (1988). The supervisor-intern relationship and effective interpersonal communication skills. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 39, 22-29.
- Huseman, R C. (1975, April). Work experience programs for speech communication students: Time for increased emphasis. *Association for Communication Administration Bulletin*, 12, 21-22.
- Hyre, J. M. and Owens, A.W. (1984). Interns: The ivory tower at work. *Communication Education*, 33, 371-376.
- McClam, T., and Kessler, M. H. (1982). Human services internships. *Journal of College Placement*, 42, 45-47.
- McNutt, D. E. (1989). Faculty in cooperative education = excellence in cooperative education. *Journal of Cooperative Education*, 24, 28.
- Mason, G. (1985). *A national survey of internship programs*. Paper presented to the Central States Speech Communication Convention, Indianapolis, IN.