

# Situational Leadership

*How can do leaders adapt their styles to meet the needs of different situations?*

**Topic:** Situational leadership, supervisory skills

**Summary:** Many national service leaders find themselves supervising others, often without sufficient training in the skills needed to do the job well. This session provides a simple and effective framework for understanding the transformation that takes place as AmeriCorps members and volunteers go from the enthusiastic beginner to the peak performer stage. It also offers strategies for adapting leadership styles to meet changing needs in that process over time.

In their roles as national service, your participants may not wear the official “hat” of supervisor. However, learning effective and inclusive supervisory skills can enhance the success of your training participants in numerous ways.

The session also includes a “Match-Mismatch” activity. This is a role-playing exercise which helps individuals identify their most natural leadership style; common difficulties that result from mismatches of developmental needs and supervisory styles; and strategies for addressing them.

The model is not a way to label individuals overall, but rather is specific to skill development for specific tasks. Any individual will be at an advanced developmental stage for some tasks, but an earlier stage for other tasks.

## **Outcomes:**

By the end of this session, participants will:

Understand the situational leadership model, including the four stages of the skill development process and the supervision styles that best suit each stage.

Identify the supervisory styles that are most and least natural to them.

Experience using supervisory styles that do not match developmental needs, and practice adapting styles to facilitate better matches with needs.

**Duration:** 2-3 hours

## **Materials:**

Participant handouts

## **Procedure:**

*Warm-Up:*

Introduce the four developmental levels (Handout 1) and the four related supervisory styles (Handout 2). You may wish to outline the main points of these handouts on chart paper to help your audience follow as you walk through them. As much as possible, illustrate the two sets of stages with an example from your personal experience.

*The Match-Mismatch Activity:*

1. Form groups of eight, and assign each person a role. There are four team member roles (representing the developmental stages) and four team leader roles (representing the leadership styles).
2. Set eight chairs in a wagon wheel formation. The team leaders sit at the hub, with their backs facing each other's backs. The team members sit in chairs along the outer rim, facing the team leaders.
3. Team members will examine the scenario, filter it through the description of their character, and then pitch the idea one-on-one with a team leader. The team leaders will respond to the member based on their own character description. The pitch and conversation will last for three minutes.
4. Complete four rounds so each team member has a chance to meet with each team leader.

*Wrap Up:*

Once the activity is complete, debrief the activity in the large group. For team members, which of the team leader best met your needs and why? For team leaders, were you frustrated by team members in stages that didn't jibe with your supervisory approach? What can you take away from this activity?

**Extensions:**

Handout 4 includes reflection questions and tips that help participants become more self-aware of their assets and challenge areas in this sphere.

Handout 5 includes an action plan form for participants to plan out a strategy for applying what they have learned.

Handout 6 contains additional information on situational leadership.

# Handout 1: Developmental Aspects and Levels

## Key factors

According to the situational leadership model developed by Ken Blanchard, it is suggested that before you can choose the appropriate approach to supervising someone, you need to know where they are and what they need.

In other words, this handout revolves around identifying characteristics of the people with whom you work. It is not meant to create labels for people, but rather to identify developmental stages that people are passing through so you can best meet the needs of your working relationship.

The Blanchard model identifies two significant and variable factors that define the developmental process:

Commitment (confidence & motivation)

Competence (knowledge of the task at hand)

## Four developmental levels

The Blanchard model then combines the two key factors into four developmental levels. These are described as:

**D1: the “enthusiastic beginner” (low competence/high commitment):** Member A is new to national service and is excited about the opportunity to serve. At the same time, she doesn’t yet know the ropes. For example, maybe this member has been placed at a site, but she has never worked with youth or in education.

**D2: the “disillusioned learner” (low competence/low commitment):** Member A has now been on the service site for several weeks. She has gained some skills in tutoring students, but the reality has hit that she isn’t going to eradicate world illiteracy single-handedly and during her term of service. Her motivation and enthusiasm have dropped.

**D3: the “reluctant contributor” (high competence/low commitment):** Member A has now been on the site for several months, and tutoring has become old hat. Some days she sees the benefits of her service, while other days just seem like work.

**D4: the “peak performer” (high competence/high commitment):** Member A has been tutoring for a long time and now has the responsibility of teaching the ropes to the new tutors. She enjoys this task and is effective.

## Handout 2: The four leadership/ supervisory styles

### Key factors

When it comes to supervising others across the spectrum of developmental stages illustrated in the last handout, the Blanchard model identifies two key factors in terms of supervisory behaviors:

Directive

Supportive

The model then combines the two key factors into four leadership/supervisory styles. These are described as:

**S1 (high directive/low supportive):** You define the roles of those members and volunteers you supervise. You tell them what tasks to do and how, when, and where to do them. Problem-solving and decision-making are initiated by you. You closely supervise activities.

**S2: (high directive/high supportive):** You provide a great deal of direction and lead with your own ideas. You do listen to the members and volunteers you supervise and consider their feelings, ideas, and suggestions. Two-way communication and support is increased, but control over decision-making remains with you.

**S3 (low directive/high supportive):** The focus of day-to-day decision-making and problem solving shifts from leader to direct report. You provide recognition and actively listen and facilitate problem solving and decision-making. You are a “cheerleader.”

**S4: (low directive/low supportive):** You provide minimal direction and support. Decision-making is delegated totally to the members and volunteers. They run the show. Members and volunteers direct their own behavior and decide how tasks should be accomplished.

## Handout 3: Match-Mismatch

This is a role play that demonstrates the four stages of development, the four styles of leadership/supervision and what happens when the stages and styles come into play with one another. Keep in mind that the developmental stages are always transitional; however, when it comes to leadership styles, individuals usually develop a philosophy and stick with it.

### The scenario

**Project:** Imagine an AmeriCorps team of 40 members. The team splits its service between streambank restoration and environmental education and has four team leaders.

**The Team Member.** A school has approached you with an idea. They would like to plant trees along a stream that runs near the school. They want to bring together students, parents, and community volunteers. They have a small budget and they want your AmeriCorps team to organize the project.

**The Team Leader.** The team leaders schedule projects for their individual teams, and today members are coming to pitch a project idea.

### The eight roles

**Member 1:** You have just joined the team, and you aren't even sure that this is the kind of work your team does. At the same time, you love the idea and want to get it done no matter what it takes.

**Member 2:** You have been around for a while now, and you realize now that you won't be able to save the entire world during your year of service. This project sounds like a good idea, but you are not sure how to go about it.

**Member 3:** As your service year progresses, you are busier and busier, and to the degree you are not sure you want to be involved in this project although you think it sounds great.

**Member 4:** You're experienced enough to know that this type of project is right up your team's alley. With your expertise, you can implement the project efficiently and maximize the benefits. Plus, you think it's a great idea!

**Leader 1:** You've been a team leader for ages and experienced all the hard knocks. As long as people listen to you, they'll have a much easier time than you when you were new. When members approach you with a project idea, you outline the way you'd like to see it implemented. After that, they are on their own.

**Leader 2:** You believe strongly in providing structured expectations and directions and that the members and volunteers should follow your lead. You also view your own role as providing the support they need in order to perform at a high level and have an excellent experience.

**Leader 3:** You believe in empowering members and volunteers through a self-directed service experience. When members come to you with project ideas, you will find a way to make it work.

**Leader 4:** You believe that you are doing your job best when everything is running on all cylinders and you are hardly doing anything at all. In your eyes, the best management style is by managing least.

## Handout 4: Reflection Questions

**Q: What's your "default" style, and what are some of the pros & cons of that style?**

**Q: Why would you ever want to decrease guidance (i.e. decrease Directing Behavior)?**

Example: So you don't look like you're micromanaging; so staff can develop their own decision-making and problem-solving skills

**Q: Why would you ever want to decrease Supportive Behaviors?**

### **TIPS:**

If you focus on developing the skills of:

- 1) Assessment: ability to assess an individual's needs for direction and support;
- 2) Intentionality: Being deliberate in choosing style, rather than going to "default-mode"
- 3) Adaptability: your ability to use a variety of supervision styles comfortably; and
- 4) Partnering for Performance: the ability to reach agreement on what you and your direct report need from each other as you work together.

Then you are well on your way to being an effective leader!

## **Handout 5: Situational Leadership Action Plan**

Now that you've become familiar with the components of situational leadership through the handouts and activity, put together a plan to put into action in the near future. Consider one thing regarding supervision that you are going to:

**Start**

**Stop**

**Continue**

## Handout 6: More on supervisory styles

Leaders tend to have a preferred “default” Blanchard style. Research shows that 54 percent of leaders tend to use only one style, 35 percent tend to use only two styles, and a mere one percent use four styles.

### Q. Which style do you prefer?

It has been observed that in the national service sphere, the most common styles are S2 or S3. An advantage to this leadership style is that the members and volunteers like you, and it builds a positive team environment. On the downside, sometimes the lack of clear expectations and direction can lead to fewer achievements.

### Q: What kind of training have you had to learn to be an effective supervisor?

Most supervisors are NOT given much training, preparation, or continued support. Most folks do a good job as front line staff and then get promoted. However, supervision requires a different skill set than what you might have been using in the field. Example: a good social worker or budget analyst needs very different skills to supervise other social workers or budget analysts – skills not necessarily needed to actually do their job. Too often we just throw in supervisory responsibilities, and then let folks sink or swim.

### Supervision is a ‘Performance Art’

As supervisor, you’re always being judged; and yet there are no easy answers – no step-by-step model to follow.

### Intent vs. Impact

Have you ever intended on one thing and it came across another way? (*Get example from group; give your own*).

*For example, I do not intend to micro-manage, I just care about quality. My intention is to be helpful, the impact is that I look like I won’t let you do it your own way and that I’m checking up on you.*

Making your intentions come across clearly and having them interpreted how you intended is tricky. Bottom line, what’s more important: What you intended or how you actually affect others (i.e. your impact) – you should be most concerned with your impact?

(Do any of you know someone who has “good intentions” but comes across awfully/abrupt/rudely, etc.? Most of us do. Usually, direct reports don’t give supervisors the leeway to have only “good intentions” they want good intentions plus an impact that feels good/objective/reasonable).

*Example: I think I am an empathetic, people-oriented manager; but others think I am hard-nosed and too task-oriented. Whose perception of reality will they act on? (Theirs, of course)*

Making intent match impact takes self-awareness in how you come across. You need to communicate clearly and in a manner that can be received by your direct reports. (i.e. Yelling is not effective for most. No matter if you’re giving the most valuable information, if you’re yelling you’re probably being tuned out. So your information is missed and you’ve ticked off your folks)

## **No one right way**

Modern management theory, and our own experiences, definitely shows that a flexible supervisory style is imperative for long-term success. If you believe it’s “my way or the high way,” you’re probably struggling and/or have discounted staff input and/or staff keep leaving. You are also missing the opportunity to enjoy diverse approaches and learn some new tricks.

## **Different strokes for the same folks**

We often talk about ‘different strokes for different folks’ (and you may know that to be true when finding that some folks you supervise respond well to one approach, but others seem to need another). Along with no “one right way” to manage your whole team, we’re going to look at a model that is based in the need for single individuals to be supervised in different ways based on different situations they may be in. We’ll go into more depth in a minute....

## **Goal: Be more intentional and deliberate**

Successful, effective supervisors are very conscious of how they are interacting, the words they choose, their timing, and the approach they take given the individual and the situation.

Because supervision is just one of your many roles as a national service leader, you might not always take the time to pause and ask yourself

“What am I doing?”

“What does this person need from me regarding direction or correction?”

Too often, we are reactive supervisors – and this does not usually represent our best form.