

What are the main challenges that might be encountered by a newly promoted supervisor in managing a team, and what strategies might they adopt?

For those new to supervisor roles, often the hardest challenge is adapting current working styles to be more suitable for the additional new responsibilities management brings. Without the skills necessary for effective team leadership, new supervisors can lack confidence in their decision-making processes, overwork themselves, and struggle to establish boundaries with employees who may have previously been peers. To combat this, undertaking regular training courses focusing on leadership abilities and strategies is useful to develop and continuously improve essential people-management and organisation skills, promoting self-awareness of supervisors' own strengths and weaknesses. For instance, showcasing courses available to specific demographics often under-represented in supervisory roles, the Herschel Programme (ITSS, 2025) not only empowers women through skill-building workshops to improve as technical leaders, but also has an extensive alumni network offering further resources to facilitate continuing managerial development and skill retention.

An essential skill supervisors must strengthen is time management, as they are accountable for their team's responsibilities as well as their own, and will face consequences for missed deadlines and poor productivity. Simple digital calendar tools can be used to consolidate and track supervisees' duties and progress, whilst also allowing them to check their supervisor's availability for raising issues and questions they may have about individual tasks (Figure 1). Within Durham University's archaeological technical team, recent time mapping exercises (Appendix 1) enabled the manager to accurately measure how technicians' time is being spent for the first time, allowing identification of areas where demand for technical time exceeds team capacity, and prompting reviewal of academic staff's support requirements and whether timings were being accurately expressed when initially requested (Upex, 2025). If new supervisors implement similar techniques early in their role, effective time management strategies become integrated within teams' routines and are therefore easier to maintain.

Supervisor × → Supervisee A × → Supervisee B ×						
Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday		
20	21	22	23	24		
06:00						
07:00						
08:00	Supervisor: Client Meeting	Supervisor: H&S Review	Supervisor: Client Meeting			
09:00	Supervisee A: Lab Support		Supervisee B: Research	Supervisee B: Research	Supervisee A: Lab Support	
10:00						Supervisor: Departmental Support
11:00	Supervisee B: Admin					
12:00		Supervisor: Supervisee Meetings		Supervisee B: Teaching Support		
13:00	Supervisor: Training Admin	Supervisor: Organisational Meeting	Supervisor: Supervisee Meetings			
14:00	Supervisee B: Teaching Support	Supervisee A: Admin		Supervisee A: Project Deadline		
15:00		Supervisee A: H&S Checks	Supervisee B: Report Deadline	Supervisee A: Admin		
16:00						

Figure 1: This shared outlook calendar demonstrates how supervisors can keep track of their staff's responsibilities, tasks, and deadlines. Supervisees can equally see when the supervisor has scheduled dedicated time for progress meetings with supervisees, and when they may be free for more informal conversations (image created by author, 2025).

Similarly, managing different personalities within a team and the dynamics they produce can be a major challenge for new supervisors, potentially leading to conflict, communication breakdown, and low staff morale if not addressed promptly. Understanding a team as the individuals it comprises is essential to counter these issues, with team-building activity days offering opportunities to get to know team-members in a relaxed atmosphere, using tools such as personality quizzes (e.g., Myers Briggs and Big Five Personality Traits tests: Yadav, 2023; Rothman and Coetzer, 2003) and open communication to uncover influences underlying behaviour at work. This allows development of a personalised management approach that utilises personality diversity within a team, with tasks tailored to staff strengths as well as their aspirations, ensuring a mutually beneficial environment where supervisees feel motivated and valued in their team and in turn are more productive and receptive to feedback (Kikta, 2024). For new supervisors taking over management of an established team, this is a particularly effective strategy to manage reception to change, as by understanding where staff may both struggle and excel based on their personality and informal conversations, supervisors can ensure any necessary role changes are suited to individuals' particular skillsets but also offer opportunities to challenge and expand their existing capabilities.

Implementing strategies suggested here within an integrated approach alongside regular one-to-one meetings, inviting opportunities for management style feedback, and adopting a present, approachable, and practical attitude ultimately benefits both supervisor and supervisee by fostering a cohesive team environment that can successfully mitigate effects of many management challenges.

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Appendix

Appendix 1 is available as supporting documentation.