# “Do as I say, not as I do”

# A reflection on the challenges and strategies of supervision

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[1] Panda Commercial Memes Facebook Page. 2022. A graphic highlighting a well-known joke amongst commercial archaeologists of ‘Cake Friday’ being used as both a morale booster and supervisory technique during fieldwork.

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Figure 1: a graphic highlighting the individuals involved within an archaeological project (Nixon et.al, 2021, p.15)

# Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the following people for the time and insights into supervising field archaeologists within the commercial sector: Harvey Furniss, Ben Holloway, Nigel Rayner, Sarah Veasey and Chris Lister.

# Appendices

- An email thread between Project Officer Sarah Veasey and myself about the challenges of supervision.
- Interview notes from interviews conducted with Project Officers Nigel Rayner, Ben Holloway, Harvey Furniss and contracts director Chris Lister.
- A blank example of an appraisal form currently used by CAT for quarterly appraisals between staff and their line manager (copyright property of CAT).

# Introduction

Workplace supervision requires time, knowledge and training. Within commercial archaeology it is a well-known trope that archaeologists do not make good managers and vice-versa. These sentiments and repercussions are reflected in literature such as Locock (2012). These management challenges and their corresponding strategies are examined below.

# Challenges

Health and safety is the supervisor's principal challenge (FAME, 2024, Aitchison and MacQueen, 2024). It is highlighted in literature that due to archaeological methodology the range of hazards can be unique. From discussions with current supervisors (see quote below) the lack of 'common sense' is cited as the cause of H&S standards growing lax. This can include failing to notice open trenches or moving plant and a casual approach to heavy tools.

"People aren't aware of their surroundings, like the machines and trenches."

Quote from anonymous supervisor

Logistics is another supervision challenge, and one that takes up a significant amount of time. Since the introduction of PPG16, archaeological works are by their very nature 'investigative' with heightened logistics alongside public attention (CIfA, 2023). This spotlight of media and public attention coincides with logistics involving arrangement of access, welfare facilities, and constant communication between site personnel and clients (see figure 1).

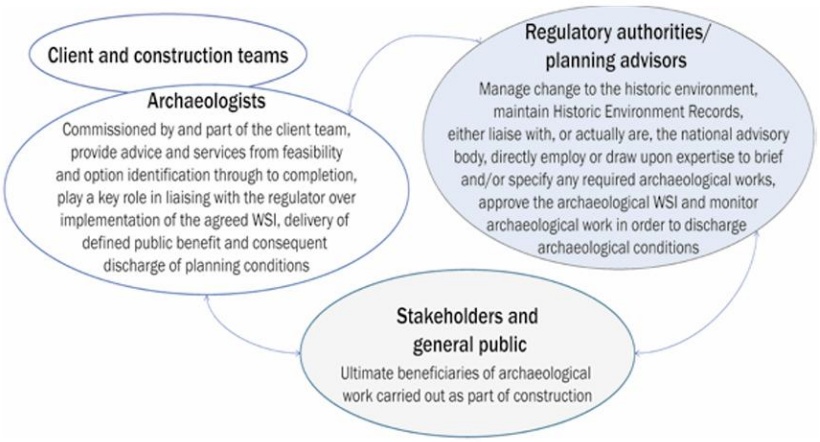


Figure 1: a graphic highlighting the individuals involved within an archaeological project (Nixon et.al, 2021, p.15)

Staff interpersonal relationships can sometimes be as stressful as the supervision of H&S and logistics. The mental wellbeing of archaeological workforces has been highlighted as in crisis in recent years (BAJR, 2022). The wellbeing crisis of other construction workers, the lack of adjustment for those with neurodiversity and the presence of sexism has forced supervisors into approaching interpersonal challenges with more time and resources than budgets and timescales may currently allow (APM, 2024, Mates In Mind, 2023).

## Strategies

One strategy is training but what training is key. It is a fact that the construction industry has made archaeological sites more dangerous and less feasible for change. Nonetheless, training in archaeological management needs to focus on multi-tasking and inclusive people skills. There are a lot of people with neurodiversity who are either diagnosed or undiagnosed, who are working in an industry which has not adjusted quickly enough with accessible adaptations. Online and in-person training can come from a range of providers. A holistic approach may be more appropriate considering the personality types that archaeology attracts, which focuses on leadership pathways, conflict resolution and communication barriers.

Locock (2012, 37) writes that “the real trick to effective communication is checking for feedback”. Well-constructed feedback is crucial to a person’s consistent development, whether it is positive and negative. Skills like efficiency are often valued highest amongst supervision skills but can lead to the overlooking of ‘soft skills’. These traits and skills can help foster more of a meaningful and community atmosphere (Kyriakidis, 2019). I believe it is important to recognise feedback as part of training and should not be seen as an add on. Quarterly appraisals with the up-to-date forms to complete could be one action of this.

## Conclusion

I believe that archaeological supervision has too often relied on replication of observed behaviour versus an understanding of people and dynamics. People remember bad supervisors and either avoid this behaviour or try replicate this behaviour after observing its effectiveness (such as a bossy supervisor asking all the trench sheets are completed quickly to find all the trench sheets are begrudgingly completed by overworked and stressed employees).

# Abbreviations

CAT – Colchester Archaeological Trust

FAME – Federation of Archaeological Management and Employers

H&S - Health and safety

APM - Association for Project Management

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