

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

Supervisory roles involve tasks that go beyond technical, archaeological skills: assigning appropriate team resources (i.e. knowledge/skills) to tasks, encouraging desirable behaviour, facilitating staff development, and ensuring safety and wellbeing. These present three main challenges:

- effectively motivating staff
- assessing and addressing success/failure
- establishing clear team communication.

Motivation

An effective strategy for motivating staff is explicitly agreeing specific goals early on, clearly aligning the team to common objectives.

However, individuals vary in their capacity to contribute and the nature of their motivation, and the latter is best understood by asking the individual themselves about their ambitions, grand or humble. Mutually agreeing goals with individual staff, that address the specific needs of both company and worker, allows them to be challenged proportionately and contribute productively. For instance, a trainee may want the opportunity to develop their technical skills and earn promotion; meanwhile, an excavator of 20 years, with no desire for the supervisory responsibilities attached to promotion, may wish to be trusted with complex features and help train other staff.

Though archaeologists are arguably *inherently* motivated to do meaningful research, individuals may thrive with different levels of challenge, or wish to pursue diverse specialisms: a good supervisor asks, rather than presumes, to understand. Furthermore, agreeing explicit individual goals establishes the basis for mechanisms of fairness and accountability.

Measuring success

Goals are only meaningful if achievement is assessed fairly: specific criteria for success should be agreed simultaneously with each goal, to ensure coherency and clarity of purpose. However, when and how often you assess someone's performance against goals can decide whether the process is motivational and useful, or invasive and counter-productive.

The *One Minute Manager* (Blanchard and Johnson, 1982) method suggests proactively offering positive feedback on specific behaviours as early as possible, to build confidence and reinforce

trust that good work is noticed. Positive feedback should reflect the specific goals for the recipient; celebrating a straight section from experienced excavator might be patronising, whereas thanking them for the example their best work offers less experienced colleagues may be better received.

Negative feedback should be approached more cautiously, and unlike positive feedback, always privately: the aim is to correct an issue, not shame or blame a person. When an individual underperforms, the first approach should be to privately ask for more information, including how they perceive work is going (e.g. have they misunderstood expectations?), whether they have resources or support they need (e.g. adequate explanation/training?), or whether there are exceptional circumstances affecting their work (e.g. are they unwell?). The focus should be on identifying causes and potential solutions, so that the individual can redirect towards success: as well as committing to appropriate support, you may re-agree adjusted goals and metrics with the individual, and possibly a timeline for re-assessing if further support/redirection is required. Supervisors should leave the interaction on a positive, optimistic note, and should again look for the earliest sign of improvement as an opportunity to provide positive reinforcement.

Communication

Good communication underpins all team successes. A good supervisor must both understand and be understood, and furthermore must be approachable for staff to flag unanticipated issues or request support: this is especially important given supervisors' safety-critical responsibilities. Formal, authoritarian tones are unlikely to achieve this: rather, employing candour and empathy promotes understanding, trust and clarity. Moreover, overcommunication can be oppressive and counter-productive: concise interactions are clearer and more impactful (Blanchard and Johnson, 1982).

It is important, however, to be intentional about the nature of the emotionality and candour a supervisor displays: too much personal emotion might be unfairly manipulative, and over-sharing opinions, particularly regarding other staff, drastically undermines trust and fairness. In fact, the impact of a supervisor's emotional state is magnified by their position: for example, when working in adverse conditions or tight deadlines, supervisors can and should sympathise with staff, but should actively avoid pessimism, which will spread and destroys team motivation. A supervisor's attitude should set a tone of realistic optimism to encourage progress over despondency.

Ciar Boyle Gifford
Student No.: 2318131

Module HPAR7006: Assessment 3
Course: MA18-PTPA7MA-APR

Word count: 656
Date: 5 Jan 2025

Bibliography

Blanchard, K. and Johnson, S. 1982. *The One Minute Manager*. New York, William Morrow and Co.