

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

Although not a formal part of my job I am often responsible for the supervision of a range of people in my work, from site workers being deployed in the post-ex lab to interns, students, and volunteers. It is a fairly recent responsibility that has taken some adapting to, and as I've yet to receive any form of formal supervisory training it has not been without issue. In many respects the main difficulties I've encountered with taking on such duties is a failure to take into account that I'm not simply dealing with the supervision of clones of myself, but instead a variety of people with a range of skills, knowledge, and mentalities. Learning to work with these rather than butting up against them has been key to adjusting my approach to get the best out of people.

The most notable issue encountered whilst supervising in my current role occurred very early into being given the responsibility, and centred around older colleagues who were resistant to taking instruction from me. The dynamics of these interactions were partially underpinned by the traditional understanding of an older supervisor-younger supervisee order of working (Yang & Matz-Costa, 2018), and the detrimental effects on the performance of the supervisee the reversal of this is known to cause (Tsui *et al.*, 2002). From a personal perspective this certainly appeared to be the case in this scenario as I had far fewer issues encouraging younger colleagues to follow standards for the same work. In part the difficulties were also related to the way these older colleagues are used to working, which was with large amounts of autonomy. Research has shown that the feeling of having autonomy limited or of being monitored by a supervisor has a significant impact on the mood of people used to an absence of it, something that in this case will have only been exacerbated by my age and inexperience (George & Zhou, 2001; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

One of my main failings when dealing with these issues was not considering the most important traits a supervisor needs to have such as interpersonal skills, resilience, an awareness of social dynamics, and a positive attitude (Carozza, 2010; Harris, 2020). The circumstances of the previous scenario led me to lose patience, openly air frustrations, and opt to just fix problems myself after people had left. None of these choices were helpful but they made evident the need to re-evaluate my approach going forward. One key aspect I've looked to focus on since is a greater regulation of my emotions. Negativity from a supervisor can have a significant impact on supervisees (Bono *et al.*, 2007), and I have made purposeful attempts to adopt a lighter-hearted, less rigid approach to seeking changes in working

practices or effort levels, along with taking cues from fellow lab staff in being a little freer with praise and encouragement than I might normally be, to further encourage a positive environment. Perhaps most importantly though I've also benefited from simply gaining more experience in my lab role and as a result am now able to provide clearer instruction, backed by greater knowledge and confidence, which is something that has a significant effect on the willingness and ability of supervisees to follow guidance given to them.

Bibliography

Bono, J.E., Foldes, H.J., Vinson, G. and Muros, J.P. (2007) 'Workplace emotions: the role of supervision and leadership'. *Journal of applied Psychology*, 92(5). pp. 1357-1367.

Carozza, L. S. (2010) *Science of Successful Supervision and Mentorship: Engagement and Participation*. San Diego: Plural Publishing Incorporated.

George, J. M. and Zhou, J. (2001) When Openness to Experience and Conscientiousness are related to creative behavior: An interactional approach. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 86. pp. 513–524.

Harris, T. (2020) *Successful Supervision and Leadership: Ensuring High-Performance Outcomes Using the PASE(tm) Model*. Oxford: Productivity Press.

Ryan, R. M. and Deci, E. L. (2000) Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist*, 55. pp. 68 –78.

Tsui A. S., Porter L. W. and Egan T. D. (2002) When both similarities and dissimilarities matter: Extending the concept of relational demography. *Human Relations*, 55(8). pp. 899–929.

Yang, J. and Matz-Costa, C. (2018) Age diversity in the workplace: The effect of relational age within supervisor–employee dyads on employees' work engagement. *The International Journal of Aging and Human Development*, 87(2). pp. 156-183.