

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

“Good supervisors bring out the best in their people” (Ash, 2012).

But what makes a ‘good’ supervisor? Discussions of team management methods abound in corporate self-help manuals and psychological literature (Fleming, 2008; Adair, 2022; Brent and Dent, 2017; Owen, 2018; Ash, 2013; 16Personalities, 2024a). The vital characteristics to meet ClfA’s and MoRPHE’s requirement of “qualified” and “effective” supervisory staff is a mixture of innate inclination and honed skill set (ClfA, 2022, p. 4; HE, 2015, p. 18; 16Personalities, 2024b; Adair, 2022, p. 29, fig. 3.4). To avoid confusion concerning job titles (Locock 2010, pp. 21-23), ‘supervisor’ will refer to all team- or line-management roles. This essay outlines fundamental management responsibilities and attributes, briefly examines prevalent challenges encountered by new supervisors, and propounds established strategies to overcome adversity.

Responsibilities

John Adair’s Venn diagram illustrates that ‘the essential role of a leader’ surpasses merely “Achieving the TASK”: “Developing the INDIVIDUAL” and “Building and maintaining the TEAM” are indispensable (2022, p. 29, fig. 3.3). The latter is reflected in the recruitment of archaeological supervisors (CFA, 2024), whilst Emre deliberates upon the managerial duty “to make every worker feel [...] needed” (2018, p. 124).

Characteristics

“Nobody’s perfect, but a team can be” (Belbin, 1993, cited Mullins, 2010, p. 343). Nevertheless, supervisors require proficiency in all Belbin Team Roles except arguably Resource Investigator (Belbin, 2024). Moreover, ‘role’ can be better defined as ‘expectations’ (Adair, 2022, p. 28). Personal skills prized by

archaeological employers – “enthusiastic, ethical, hard-working and flexible, [...] able to use initiative” (FA, 2024) – are analogous to Adair’s conception of leadership qualities (2022, pp. 8-9).

Of the survey responses from Cotswold Archaeology supervisors (Pearson, 2024a; Appendix A), ‘patience’, ‘adaptability’ and ‘kindness’ ranked highest (Appendix B). Within HPAR7006, ‘fair’ and ‘supportive’ were students’ most prevalent descriptors (Appendix C). Efficient communication, empathy and active listening are integral to an equitable work environment (HE, 2015, p. 18; Tyler, 2007, pp. 77-80).

Challenges

Confronted with a myriad of potential challenges, 50% of survey respondents specified ‘new responsibilities’ and ‘dealing with conflicts or poor performance’; ‘insufficient time’ was a notable obstacle (37%) (Appendix D). Customarily, newly promoted supervisors grapple with adequately balancing their responsibilities: the needs of the task, team and individual (Adair, 2022, p. 20, fig. 3.2). Studies have identified correlation between task- and employee-centred priorities and differing leadership styles (Smith *et al.*, 2012, pp. 98-99), further challenging supervisors’ adaptability.

Strategies

Fortunately, supervisors “can develop [their] leadership skills and potential” (Adair, 2022, p. 12). These goals benefit from a SMART approach (Adair, 2022, p. 34). Marked strategies expressed by survey respondents include acceptance (37%), decisiveness (20%), time management skills, requesting advice, prioritising learning, leading by example (Adair, 2022, pp. 60-61) and “trust[ing] the process” (Appendix A). Regarding conflict-resolution and addressing underperformance, Smith *et al.* (2012, p. 123, table 7.1), Bryant-Smith and Beard (2018) and Tyler (2007, p. 305, box 14.5) present comprehensive approaches. Imparting (and accepting) feedback is crucial, aided by a ‘framework for fairness’ (Ash, 2013; Tyler, 2007, pp. 84-86, p. 302, box 14.3). A predominantly effective

technique, over 80% of survey responses were in favour of ‘manging upwards’ (Appendix E); where there was uncertainty/indifference as the recipient, both respondents would manage upwards for *their* supervisor(s).

Conclusions

This essay has considered the prevailing challenging factors and posed conventionally approved management methods. Overall, the paramount hurdle is less about archaeological expertise than accommodating change: ‘adaptability’ outweighs ‘knowledge’ fivefold, and ‘new responsibilities’ trumps ‘skill gaps’ (Appendix B; Appendix D). New supervisors’ strategies centre on strengthening interpersonal traits, developing self-belief and realistic expectations, and actively demonstrating a principled leadership approach by “walk[ing] the talk” (Adair, 2022, pp. 60-61).

Word Count: 597 words

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APPENDIX A: SURVEY RESPONSES: CONSOLIDATION OF RESPONSES BY RESPONDENT

(adapted from Pearson, 2024b)

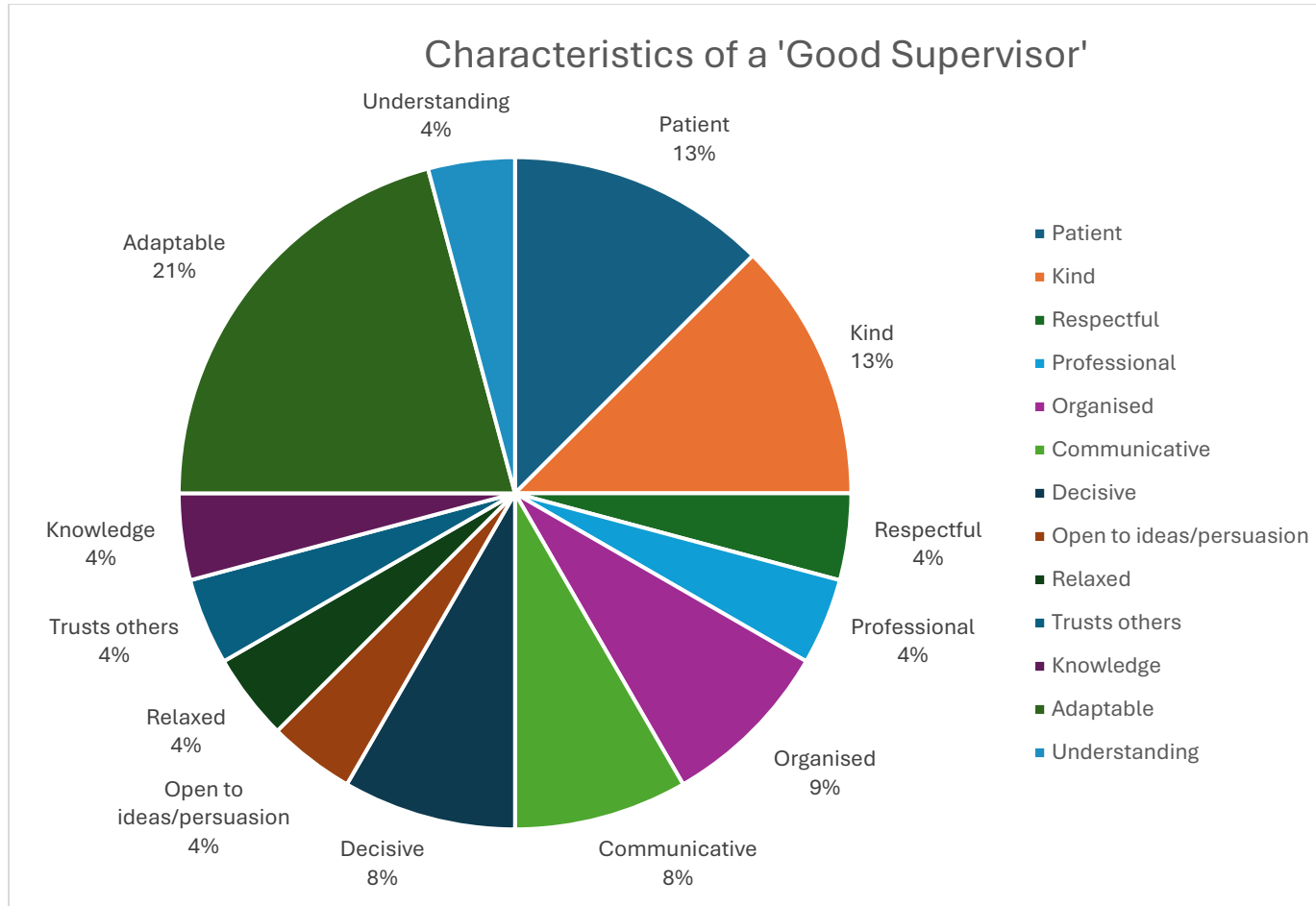
Respondent ID	Questions	Responses
1	Main Challenges as a new Supervisor	New responsibilities, e.g. H&S, HR or meetings
		Documentation/paperwork
		Insufficient time, resulting in having to adapt 'best practices
	Strategies adopted to overcome challenges	Learn to give time to complete paperwork and not worry if I had to take some time away from site to do so.
		Learn quickly and ask if unsure on anything.
		Learn to manage time effectively.
	Characteristics of a Good Supervisor	Organised
		Trusts others
		Respectful
	In favour of Managing upwards	As a Supervisor, from your Team: Yes
		As a Team member, to your Supervisor: Yes
2	Duration of supervisor role	1-2 years
	Primary location	Field
	Main Challenges as a new Supervisor	Lack of clarity of the chain of command
	Strategies adopted to overcome challenges	After not getting answers from a PM, I decided to contact the County for sign off myself, to keep the project moving.
	Characteristics of a Good Supervisor	Adaptable
		Decisive
		Supportive
	In favour of Managing upwards	As a Supervisor, from your Team: No
		As a Team member, to your Supervisor: No
3	Duration of supervisor role	1-2 years
	Primary location	Field
	Main Challenges as a new Supervisor	New responsibilities, e.g. H&S, HR or meetings
		Dealing with conflicts or poor performance
		Isolated team from the rest of the organisation, e.g. spatially or technologically, resulting in having to deal with issues 'on the ground' with little-to-no support
	Strategies adopted to overcome challenges	Im not sure I knowingly adopted a specific strategy. Tasks need to be done and you just have to get one and do them.
		For "resolving conflicts" it generally entailed reporting any incidents up the more senior managers.
		For "feeling isolated" I probably took the initiative and made some decisions that probably should have been made by someone else but in the end couldn't wait.
	Characteristics of a Good Supervisor	Patient
		Supportive

		Communicative
	In favour of Managing upwards	As a Supervisor, from your Team: Yes
		As a Team member, to your Supervisor: Yes
	Duration of supervisor role	1-2 years
	Primary location	Office
4	Main Challenges as a new Supervisor	Dealing with conflicts or poor performance
		Poor working conditions, e.g. weather, lack of suitable equipment or breaks
		Insufficient time, resulting in having to adapt 'best practices
	Strategies adopted to overcome challenges	Having to learn as I go.
		[A]sking for advice from project managers or more experienced supervisors and POs.
	Characteristics of a Good Supervisor	Decisive
		Communicative
		Adaptable
	In favour of Managing upwards	As a Supervisor, from your Team: Yes
		As a Team member, to your Supervisor: Yes
	Duration of supervisor role	1-2 years
	Primary location	Field
5	Main Challenges as a new Supervisor	Contingency planning
		Delegation and/or managing by exception
		Insufficient time, resulting in having to adapt 'best practices
	Strategies adopted to overcome challenges	Contingency planning - Had to learn how to chase up people/jobs and get creative in down time work to keep people busy/motivated.
		Delegation - Found it hard not to want to do everything myself so had to learn that even if you know you can do it better/quicker people wont learn if you dont give them chance to try.
		Insufficient time - There is never, nor will there ever be enough time to complete what needs doing to the standard you would like it in the time given. Accepting that and learning from the off that what can be achieved to the highest level you can within the time you have and aiming to hit that, is the best outcome.
	Characteristics of a Good Supervisor	Understanding
		Adaptable
		Patient
	In favour of Managing upwards	As a Supervisor, from your Team: Unsure / Indifferent
		As a Team member, to your Supervisor: Yes
	Duration of supervisor role	5-9 years
	Primary location	Office
6	Main Challenges as a new Supervisor	New responsibilities, e.g. H&S, HR or meetings
		Reporting up and down
		Confidence

	Strategies adopted to overcome challenges	None
	Characteristics of a Good Supervisor	Open to ideas/persuasion
		Knowledge
		Adaptable
	Managing upwards	As a Supervisor, from your Team: Yes
		As a Team member, to your Supervisor: Yes
	Duration of supervisor role	10-14 years
	Primary location	Field
7	Main Challenges as a new Supervisor	New responsibilities, e.g. H&S, HR or meetings
		Dealing with conflicts or poor performance
		Isolated team from the rest of the organisation, e.g. spatially or technologically, resulting in having to deal with issues 'on the ground' with little-to-no support
	Strategies adopted to overcome challenges	Acceptance of the situation.
		Lead by example.
		Less is more.
	Characteristics of a Good Supervisor	Organised
		Adaptable
		Relaxed
	In favour of Managing upwards	As a Supervisor, from your Team: Yes
		As a Team member, to your Supervisor: Yes
	Duration of supervisor role	5-9 years
	Primary location	Field
8	Main Challenges as a new Supervisor	Delegation and/or managing by exception
		Dealing with conflicts or poor performance
		Confidence
	Strategies adopted to overcome challenges	Trust in the process.
		[A]llow time to pass and grow in confidence by doing the job.
		Experience by doing essentially.
	Characteristics of a Good Supervisor	Professional
		Supportive
		Patient
	In favour of Managing upwards	As a Supervisor, from your Team: Unsure / Indifferent
		As a Team member, to your Supervisor: Yes
	Duration of supervisor role	10-14 years
	Primary location	Office

APPENDIX B: SURVEY RESPONSES:

‘WHAT DO YOU CONSIDER TO BE THE THREE MOST IMPORTANT CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD SUPERVISOR?’



(adapted from Pearson, 2024b)

N.B. Characteristics not selected by respondents: 'Consistent', 'Trustworthy', 'Clear', 'Mentor', 'Responsible', 'Reliable' or 'Other'.

APPENDIX C: HPAR7006 'SUPERVISORY TECHNIQUES' CLASS DISCUSSION:

'IDENTIFY 3-5 WORDS TO DESCRIBE A GOOD EXAMPLE OF A SUPERVISOR YOU HAVE WORKED FOR'.

Characteristics	Number of selections*
Adaptable	1
Approachable	1
Calm	1
Clear [instructions]	2
Compassionate	1
Considerate	1
Consistent	1
Engaged	1
Enthusiastic	1
Experienced	1
Fair	4
Flexible	1
Interested	1
Patient	1
Positive mood	1
Practical	1
Present	1
Problem solver	1
Reliable	3
Supportive	4
Thinks ahead	1
Understanding	2

* Darker fill gradient to reflex increased frequency of responses

(adapted from Locock *et al.*, 2024)

HPAR7006 Supervisory techniques

PROMPT:

- Think about a supervisor you have worked for that you consider to be a good example
- On the whiteboard, identify 3-5 words that would describe them?

Clear instructions
Calm
Supportive
Adaptable

Understanding,
compassionate,
experienced

- practical
- flexible
- understanding
- supportive
- fair

Engaged, enthusiastic,
interested

Fair
Reliable
Consistent

Patient, reliable, fair,
clear, supportive,
positive mood

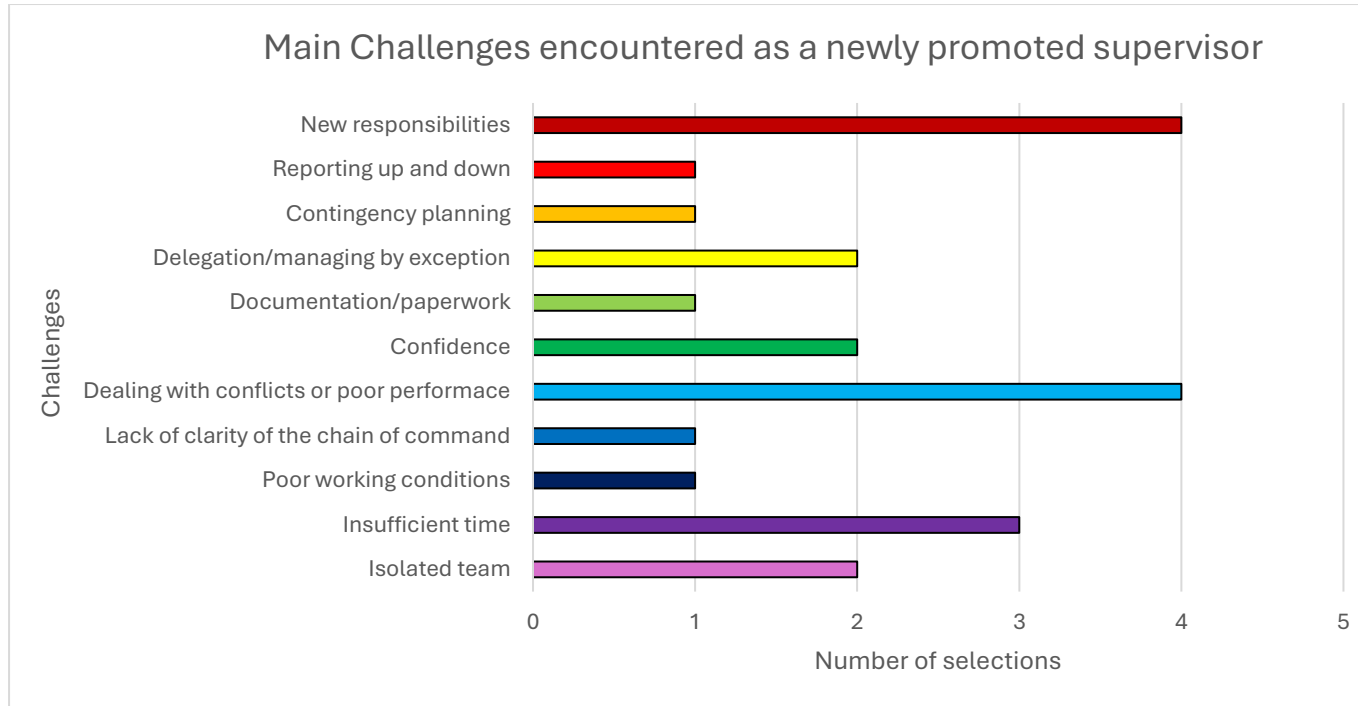
- Reliable
- Fair
- Considerate
- Supportive
- Approachable

Zoom in (Alt+Plus sign)

52%

APPENDIX D: SURVEY RESPONSES:

‘WHAT WERE THE MAIN CHALLENGES THAT YOU ENCOUNTERED AS A NEWLY PROMOTED SUPERVISOR [...]?’



(adapted from Pearson, 2024b)

N.B. Challenges not selected by respondents: ‘Skill gaps’, ‘Decision making’, ‘Planning ahead’, ‘Monitoring team members’ progress’, ‘Being patient/fair/understanding’, ‘Stress’, ‘Overly independent team member’, ‘Representing the organisation’, ‘None of the above’ or ‘Other’.

APPENDIX E: SURVEY RESPONSES:

‘ARE YOU IN FAVOUR OF "MANAGING UPWARDS"?’

Respondent ID	As a Supervisor	As a Team member
Respondent 1	Yes	Yes
Respondent 2	No	No
Respondent 3	Yes	Yes
Respondent 4	Yes	Yes
Respondent 5	Unsure/Indifferent	Yes
Respondent 6	Yes	Yes
Respondent 7	Yes	Yes
Respondent 8	Unsure/Indifferent	Yes

(adapted from Pearson, 2024b)