

Effective Staff Supervision

What is a supervisor?

Supervisors are also called first line managers or line managers. They direct and guide others in the performance of their tasks and ensure work carried out is in line with the organisation's aims, objectives and values. They do not normally perform the tasks themselves although they may have their own tasks to do.

Supervisors or line managers also provide motivation and support for staff they manage, helping them to solve problems and ensuring they receive the training they need to do the job. If things go wrong, line managers may be involved in dealing with staff grievances or taking disciplinary action.

We have used the term line manager throughout this fact sheet as this is most commonly used in the voluntary sector.

External supervisors

For a small number of jobs in the voluntary sector, external supervisors are used. These will usually be where the number of professional or technical staff is so small that an organisation doesn't have the resources to employ a supervisor/manager with skills in those areas or where the job specifically requires external support. Counselling is an example of such a job.

The role of an external supervisor is usually limited to specific professional support. The employee will still be accountable to a line manager within the organisation who will have authority over their work.

Supervision sessions

In small voluntary organisations, employees are typically few in numbers and wide ranging in activities. Line managers usually supervise staff by holding regular supervision sessions with them, which enable communication between employee and manager, allow managers to ensure work falls within the organisation's requirements and provide a forum for employee development and support. Supervision sessions are usually held every one or two months.

Supervision sessions are generally structured to cover the following areas:

- Review of action points from previous session
- Review of work programme
- Review of contracts/service agreements relating to role
- Matters arising from Management Committee or other internal meetings
- Changes to job description
- Training needed to progress action points or other work programme objectives
- Evaluation of recent training undertaken including informal learning activities
- Discussion and agreement of processes for monitoring, evaluating, recording, and reporting on work
- Review of timesheets and identification of any time management or work overload issues
- Discussion of other issues of concern to line manager or employee
- Discussion of issues relating to discrimination, harassment or other problems which impact on work

Good practice in Supervision Sessions

To be effective in planning and facilitating work and motivating employees, line managers should aim to get the most out of supervision sessions by following these good practice guidelines:

Prepare beforehand for the sessions

- Read through past supervision notes before the meeting, and list which issues you need to talk about.

Getting the information you need

- Ask open questions
- Listen carefully and follow up on any hints that there may be a problem
- Keep a constant overview of work of your staff
- Communicate clearly in plain English

Building a good relationship

- Ensure the setting is comfortable, with no distractions
- Thank staff for their work
- Give positive feedback

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- Know what motivates different members of staff

Gaining trust and confidence

- Follow through on what you say you will do
- Be clear with staff about any problems and be precise about your expectations
- Be proactive in building and maintaining relationships with staff
- Use your power appropriately
- Use non-judgemental language when making comments about other people
- Do not behave in a way that might undermine confidence in the organisation
- Ask for ideas about solving problems
- Promote a spirit of co-operation

Coaching and supporting

- Offer opinions/ideas/support/feedback
- Do not overload with work
- Help with prioritising
- Advise on organisational strategy and give guidance on whether ideas are in line with objectives
- Encourage reflection
- Promote continual learning and help to structure learning
- Agree appropriate timescales and targets

Records

Keeping a written record of the supervision session and copying this to employees ensures you are both clear about what has been discussed and agreed. If anything should go wrong with the employment relationship, these records may prove useful.

A sample supervision record sheet is available from High Peak CVS—call us on 01663 735 350 for a copy.

Responsibilities of line managers

In addition to conducting supervision sessions as above, line managers may have additional responsibilities:

- Recruitment, selection and induction of new staff
- Regular (usually annual) performance appraisal
- Being alert for any personal problems which may impact on work for which you can offer some support or flexibility in work arrangements
- Ensuring policies and procedures are carried out
- Maintaining confidential personnel files in line with Data Protection Act
- Ensuring timesheets are completed and reviewed regularly
- Keeping attendance records up to date and keeping track of annual leave and sickness
- Monitoring time off in lieu (if appropriate)

Developing Supervision Skills

Line managers should continue to develop their own skills in supervising and managing staff. You should aim for continuous improvement in your own practice in order to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of your organisation. You can do this in a variety of ways:

- Undertake management training
- Use supervision session with your own line manager to discuss any problems or training needs related to managing staff
- Identify people or organisations you can turn to for advice or support and use them.

This fact sheet is one of a series of fact sheets on the theme of staff issues. Others include:

- Recruitment and selection
- Lone working
- Managing Sickness and Absenteeism

They can be downloaded from our website

www.highpeakcvs.org.uk/how

To find out how we can help your group, please

*contact us on 01663 735 350 or email
hello@highpeakcvs.org.uk*

