

## Info Sheet No. 6 – 3

# Performance management and staff development

---

### Staff supervision

Part of the basic accountability within an organisation is ensuring that staff are supported and are accountable for the performance of their duties.

The board of management is responsible for ensuring that all staff have effective supervision and management support, that staff are assisted to identify any problems in the performance of their duties, and that any problems are dealt with in a fair and supportive manner.

The purpose of performance management and development, is to:

- ensure adequate performance of duties is occurring
- improve job performance
- improve job satisfaction
- develop employees' capabilities

To achieve these outcomes, the process of supervision and management support should aim to achieve the following:

**1. Accountability:** It is the role of a supervisor or manager to ensure that staff work according to the practices and procedures of the organisation, and fulfil the terms of their job description.

**2. Personal support:** Through the formal relationship established in supervision, the supervisor or manager can provide support to staff dealing with complex and demanding issues and assist in reducing work related stress.

**3. Skill development:** Supervision and management support facilitates learning and professional development if the process enables the staff member to reflect on a situation or problem, encourages analysis and problem solving, and leads to the development of strategies and skills.

**4. Opportunities for staff to take on greater responsibilities:** Through acting arrangements in higher graded positions, staff may be provided with opportunities to expand their work experiences, to develop potential career paths and to experience the challenge of increased responsibilities.

## Principles of performance management and development

Effective practice in the supervision, support and appraisal of staff is based on the following principles:

- **Regularity:** each staff member should receive regular supervision and an annual performance appraisal and development session
- **Balance between accountability, support and skill development:** supervision and appraisal should be a developmental process for staff with a balance of these three components
- **Cooperation:** the process should be based on mutual agreement and an agreed design of the process, with input by the staff member and the supervising staff person
- **Clarity of purpose and parameters:** there must be clear agreements about performance expectations and known criteria for assessment
- **Supportive and constructive process:** it is important that the process is as stress free as possible, and works to enhance staff morale and sense of confidence
- **Forward looking:** issues arising from performance assessment should be used as the basis for future planning.

## Performance appraisal and development methods

*(the following section has been adapted from VCOSS: Community Employment Handbook)*

There are a variety of different ways to initiate and conduct a performance appraisal and development session. Several options are listed below, with some of the reasons they may be appropriate or inappropriate. The most appropriate method for your organisation will depend on:

- the organisation's 'style' and culture
- the staffing structure and number of employees

Using a range of methods that together meet the principles of performance appraisal and staff development will generally be the best approach.

### 1. Appraisal undertaken by a supervisor or manager

**Appropriate:** the supervisor/manager can be expected to have knowledge of the job, the skills needed to undertake the appraisal and assess the development requirements, and the power to implement recommendations

(training, changes to work plan etc). When handled well the process can strengthen the employer/employee relationship.

**Inappropriate:** the supervisor/manager may not have the skills to conduct an appraisal properly or may not fully understand the nature of the employee's job. When handled badly the process can be punitive and place stress on the employer/employee relationship.

## 2. Self appraisal by the employee

**Appropriate:** self appraisal ensures employee involvement in the process of assessing their own job performance. This can be productive if the employee has insight into those areas where they perform well and those where they experience difficulty.

**Inappropriate:** the employee may lack the analytical skills to undertake self appraisal, be too close to their work to be objective about it, be defensive or feel exposed by the process, or be overly critical of themselves. If not combined with other performance appraisal and staff development methods, these issues could be major drawbacks.

## 3. Peer review by co-workers

**Appropriate:** Involving co-workers (or peers) gathers information about the employees' performance from people who interact with them closely and have observed them in various settings (with clients, with peers, with external agencies). This allows for a range of feedback.

**Inappropriate:** Employees may be reluctant to evaluate each other for reasons of confidentiality or privacy, or because the process can be stressful and can impact negatively on harmonious staff relationships. They may consider appraisal to be the responsibility of management and too time consuming for the team to take on. This method may also create complications in terms of the responsibilities of the board of management as an employer.

## 4. Subordinate appraisal of supervisors/managers

**Appropriate:** allows staff the opportunity to give feedback to their supervisor/manager on their management performance, and to comment on how their own needs as employees, and the needs of the organisation, could be better met.

**Inappropriate:** the success is very dependent on the people involved and their trust in the process: staff may be inhibited, fearing reprisals for negative appraisals; the supervisor may be inhibited in their role, fearing a negative appraisal by staff.

## Providing effective performance management

### **1. Supervision, performance appraisals and skill development planning should be conducted according to a set framework that incorporates the following:**

- An opportunity for the staff person and their supervisor or manager to review their expectations of the process
- An opportunity for the staff person to provide a self assessment covering positive elements of their work, elements that they are not satisfied with, and any factors that are impeding their work
- An opportunity for the supervisor or manager to provide any observation or feedback on the performance of the worker
- An opportunity for the staff person to discuss their goals for the coming period
- A discussion of any changes, supports or training that may be required
- For annual performance appraisals, a skill development plan for the coming year
- Documentation of any agreement, and in the case of the annual performance appraisal, a documented summary of the main points covered (a copy of this should then be sealed in an envelope, and kept confidential in the personnel files)

### **2. Staff who work directly with clients with complex needs should be provided with both clinical (practice) supervision and performance management:**

- 'Clinical' or 'practice' supervision involves guidance, advice and debriefing to a worker only in relation to their work with clients. This type of supervision aims to ensure clients continue to receive a quality service and the staff member is assisted to maintain their professional boundaries and perspectives.
- Performance management is the monitoring and support of the worker in all aspects of their work, but not necessarily involving case work details. This type of supervision is a management tool, providing a line of communication and mechanisms for constructive support between staff and management at an individual level.

### **3. An effective supervision, support and management support system will include:**

- Staff feedback, problem solving and support to one another within team meetings

- Regular monitoring of individual and team work plans through reports to senior staff or the board of management
- Each staff member having a regular 'supervision' meeting with either a senior staff person or a board of management representative
- An annual performance appraisal and skill development session for each member of staff

To review and plan for performance management, see **Tool: Performance management planner.**

*(available to mso subscribers: [www.managementsupportonline.com.au](http://www.managementsupportonline.com.au))*