

Staff training and development: examples for discussion

Spotlight can assist with staff development. The examples and suggestions below provide ideas for discussion during formal or informal supervision sessions, at staff appraisal or any other suitable time.

Assisting staff to progress through stage 1: familiarisation

This set of examples is for line managers working with relatively new and inexperienced staff, to assist them with the process of becoming familiar with the job. Once staff have reached the point where they can do a job without it being frequently necessary to stop, think, check and/or seek assistance or advice they will have reached stage 2, automatic fluency.

A1: Sensing contexts

Example: "You are still fairly new in the job. You are working with specialists, and there are many technical terms to learn so that you will develop the capacity to notice, interpret and understand the significance of wider job contexts or changed workplace situations. Also, clients and colleagues refer to people who are unfamiliar to you. Let's discuss the best way to help you build up a general understanding of the terminology, technology and specialists in your work area".

A2: Monitoring and guiding reactions

Example: "Let's discuss situations in which it has been important to set aside your own pre-judgements of other people. Perhaps you took an instant dislike to them or their ideas, or perhaps their behaviour seemed peculiar. What were some ways of managing your own reactions in dealing with such situations?"

A3: Judging impacts

Example: "Let's discuss a situation where you may find it hard to predict the consequences of your actions or reactions to people. By talking about examples, we can build on the experience you're gaining and work out a good set of approaches to these situations".

Skill set B: Interacting and relating

B1: Negotiating boundaries

Example: "Let's talk the about boundaries of your role, to help you judge when to step in, and ensure that you have the understanding and consent of relevant people. We can begin with issues that are clearly inside or outside the boundaries of your role and then focus on some areas that are not quite so clear".

B2: Communicating verbally and non-verbally

This is about listening carefully, responding to non-verbal cues and putting people at ease.

Example: "Let's discuss how you interpret the needs and intentions of people who have restricted verbal language and some good ways of putting people at ease".

B3: Connecting across cultures

Example: "Let's discuss activities to help you learn on the job:

- accurate pronunciation of names and greetings for the main language groups encountered in the workplace, and
- culturally appropriate concepts, values, processes and protocols relevant to the job.”

C1: Sequencing and combining activities

Example: “Let’s discuss how you have been learning to sort and streamline your own tasks. What shortcuts and reminders have you developed in order to help you streamline your work? How do you go about sorting your own work tasks in order of priority? Are there ways you can build on that?”

C2: Interweaving your activities with others’

At first it is hard for staff to know when it is OK to interrupt others when they need assistance or advice. They need to learn key elements of others’ jobs as well as their own, in order to work in efficiently with them and cover for them from time to time if necessary. This is a set of teamwork skills.

Example: A useful information-sharing session might be had on:

- What is a good way to interrupt colleagues, in terms of timing and approach?
- What is your system for ensuring that information is passed on accurately and promptly to other people?

What have you found to be a good way to keep track of loose ends that need to be followed up with other people?

C3: Maintaining and/or restoring the workflow

Example: “Let’s discuss how you are learning to cope with the upsets and disruptions that occur sometimes. Please share any strategies that you have developed for doing the following:

- Patching up minor misunderstandings before they escalate.
- Rebalancing your emotions and refocusing quickly after something goes wrong. Dealing calmly with a system breakdown or emergency.”

Assisting staff to build on automatic fluency: stage 2

At this stage staff will have become proficient in their own job. However, they will continue to develop their understanding of the wider job context and the responsibilities of other staff. They will be moving towards the next stage, of being problem-solvers.

A1: Sensing contexts

At this stage the job-holder will draw on wider experience of workplaces to fit in with the styles of different work groups.

Example: “In working with people from different parts of the organisation, what is a good approach to making sure you understand their expectations?”

A2: Monitoring and guiding reactions

Through practice, job-holders can now control their own reactions in very difficult situations, and may also cross-check how another team member is coping.

Example: "Let's discuss situations when it has been necessary to monitor your reactions and those of a team partner. This might have been a situation in which someone tried to threaten or provoke you or a colleague. In such situations, what are good techniques for keeping control of your own reactions and cross-checking how your colleague is coping?"

A3: Judging impacts

Job-holders will be able to sense the point at which others are beginning to be uncomfortable and automatically act to minimise their discomfort.

Example: "Discuss situations in which it is important to be alert to the sensitivities of others. How do you pick up on the discomfort or embarrassment of other people, and what are ways of minimising it?"

B1: Negotiating boundaries

Job holders at stage 2 can set their own boundaries and respect those of others.

Example: "What are some smooth techniques for setting clear and consistent limits to the behaviour of others? What are good ways of providing necessary support for others unobtrusively, without undermining their independence?"

B2: Communicating verbally and non-verbally

This includes using tone of voice, body language and surroundings to communicate.

Example: "Let's discuss as many ways as possible for putting other people at ease, including those with communication difficulties".

B3: Connecting across cultures

At this stage the job-holder can see their own and their team's activities and behaviour from the perspective of another culture.

Examples of learning activities might include the identification of the correct community spokespeople to approach for specific purposes. It might also include analysis of the adequacy and appropriateness of service delivery for the various groups of users.

C1: Sequencing and combining activities

Job holders at stage 2 are able to link up tasks into a smooth and automatic sequence. Their next stage of development will be to solve new problems whilst doing this. It may be helpful to help them analyse how they sequence their work, so that they will be able to solve problems whilst minimising disruptions to the workflow.

Example: "People often say they are doing several things at once. Try to analyse what you are actually doing in such cases. Are you switching back and forth? Are you doing some things automatically? Try to provide examples. Try to think of concrete examples of how you handle interruptions and get back to the same point."

C2: Interweaving your activities with others'

Employees in the process of moving from stage 2 to 3 need to not only do their own work proficiently: they also need to be able to work flexibly with others. During supervision and training they can be encouraged to think this through.

Example: "When other people are involved, it is often very difficult to ensure that issues are followed through to completion. Do you have any suggestions for achieving this? How do you make sure that you are not duplicating the work of others?"

C3: Maintaining and/or restoring the workflow

A staff member at stage 2 automatically takes steps to keep systems running. In moving towards stage 3 they also need to know how to problem-solve and plan ahead. During supervision or at a staff appraisal you may wish to discuss with them the techniques they have developed for fixing things up and keeping the work area running.

Example: ask the staff member if they have developed ways of:

- dealing with things that have not been followed through (without undermining others but without letting them get away with it)
- developing safe knacks to keep fault-prone equipment running
- thinking ahead and planning to ensure that the needs of clients will be fully met
- any further examples of cross-checking, patching up or forward planning.

Developing proficient problem-solvers: stage 3

A1: Sensing contexts

By stage 3 an experienced staff member can solve a problem for a client or colleague by sifting key issues from masses of detail.

Example: "Have you had the experience that, when people are worried or upset, they seem to give you a whole lot of information, and it can be quite hard to sort out what the problem is and how to solve it? Let's discuss examples of such situations and good ways of handling them."

A2: Monitoring and guiding reactions

An employee at stage 3 can handle situations that sometimes arise, in which there may be competing pressures about the disclosure of information versus confidentiality.

Example: " Sometimes the key people you are working with or assisting have different ideas about how much information it is correct to disclose. Maybe, for example, a client does not want others to know the details of the matter under discussion. Let's discuss some of the ethical issues that may arise in such situations and also the practical details of how to handle them."

A3: Judging impacts

At this stage an experienced employee can combine a number of Spotlight skills whilst solving new problems. For example they can pick the right approach to a client or colleague, judge impacts, sift through a mass of information, use techniques for keeping clients relaxed – perhaps whilst also using technology.

Example: In supervision you might ask the staff member to: "Think of situations

in which you need to adjust your approach as you go, by monitoring its impact. You may need to keep people relaxed, whilst you are working with them”.

B1: Negotiating boundaries

A staff member at stage 3 uses tact, diplomacy and negotiation skills to pleasantly but directly problems and hold their ground.

Example: “Let’s discuss ways to do the following:

- Deflect pressures to over-commit yourself or the organisation whilst retaining goodwill
- Get people to face up to problems
- Find a pleasant way of saying ‘no’ or ‘not now’ to people with more authority
- Negotiate or advocate in a way that retains goodwill, without giving way on the bottom line.”

B2: Communicating verbally and non-verbally

At this stage a staff member develops proficiency at solving complex group communication problems.

Example: “Let’s discuss some ways of holding the attention of everyone in a group of people who have varying attention spans? This skill might be needed if you were giving a presentation to a group. How would you make sure that people with varying levels of language or different first languages understand each other?”

B3: Connecting across cultures

At stage 3 an employee can develop the capacity to work with people from diverse backgrounds, to help overcome barriers.

Discussion activities could include the following.

- Exchange of ways of working effectively with people who have different approaches to time (including children and elderly people).
- By thinking within different cultural frames, examining solutions to problems caused by clashes of values or cultural misunderstandings.
- Discussion of ways of complying with relevant values, for example, protocols of engagement, of work setting, of organisation, and of community settings.

C1: Sequencing and combining activities

At stage 3 staff members are expanding their capacity to solve coordination problems.

Example: “Let’s talk about times when you have needed to assess the urgency and importance of simultaneous calls on your attention, preventing a crisis. How did you know which one to attend to first?”

Provide an example of how you reorganise your priorities for the day as new demands arise. How do you decide on your new priorities? How do you split your attention between the immediate task and ongoing tasks?

Provide examples of where you have needed to think quickly, for example, if

equipment malfunctions during a task.”

C2: Interweaving your activities with others’

In addition, staff at stage 3 are able to expand their ability to solve coordination problems in working with others.

Example: “Let’s discuss what challenges arise when working in a team in a rapidly changing situation? What techniques have you developed for dealing with these challenges?”

C3: Maintaining and/or restoring the workflow

Staff at stage 3 can be supported to expand their capability to rapidly develop techniques and solutions to prevent problems from arising.

Example: “Let’s discuss ways of making safe decisions in ambiguous or rapidly changing circumstances. Perhaps not all the necessary information is readily available. Are there ways of identifying minor issues that may grow into bigger problems and ways of acting to prevent this from happening? Have you developed a fail-safe tracking system?”

Developing creative solution-sharing: stage 4

An employee at stage 4 is developing their potential for leadership, by sharing their problem-solving abilities and solutions with others.

A1: Sensing contexts

By this stage an experienced staff member can solve a problem for a client or colleague by sifting key issues from masses of detail. The next stage will be for them to be able to create new systems, that make the work progress more smoothly and achieve better outcomes for staff and customers. A staff member at stage 4 is able to handle uncertainty and rapidly exchange situational updates with colleagues, using a range of modes of communication.

Example: “Let’s brainstorm situations where you need to work with teammates whilst things are rapidly changing around you. It is important that you all have the same understanding of what is going on, but there is no time for lengthy discussion. What is the best approach to operating in such a situation?”

A2: Monitoring and guiding reactions

The staff member at level 4 is increasingly able to pick up on the work-group’s emotional undercurrents, power relationships and current strengths and needs.

Example: “How do you key in to what is going on with other team members and also to the dynamics of how team members are impacting on each other? Let’s discuss ways of handling the undercurrents and power games that may arise in a team and ways of using strengths and addressing needs so that the team functions effectively.”

A3: Judging impacts

An employee working effectively at level 4 can help create a supportive context for challenging practices that are not currently having the most positive impact.

Example: "Let's discuss how you can go about challenging some of the practices that are having adverse impacts, without alienating the people you'll need to help bring about positive changes".

B1: Negotiating boundaries

An employee at stage 4 is learning to tactfully 'manage up' within the work unit.

Example: Let's discuss what are some approaches to doing the following in acceptable ways?

- Giving negative feedback to people in more senior positions.
- Quietly sharing your knowledge with more senior but less experienced colleagues.
- Gaining the cooperation of people who are resistant to change?"

B2: Communicating verbally and non-verbally

At stage 4 an employee is expanding their ability to use communication creatively.

Example: "Let's discuss creative ways of communicating in the workplace. For example, how would you get non-technical people to understand a technical issue and its solution?"

Can you suggest memorable catch-phrases or slogans to help colleagues remember rules or safe practice?"

How could the physical work space be made more attractive, stimulating or reassuring?"

B3: Connecting across cultures

At stage 4, staff are themselves well versed in the protocols of the various cultures and communities served by the organisation. They develop their capacity to foster these skills in other members of staff, in a variety of formal and informal ways.

Examples include: "Let's discuss the best ways of drawing on the skills of staff members with relevant language skills and cultural knowledge, to help serve our customer/ client base more effectively. How might other staff also be encouraged to learn to work in a way that is more supportive and inclusive to the various cultural and community groups?"

C1: Sequencing and combining activities

Staff at stage 4 increasingly develop ways to ensure that techniques they have learned to prevent or fix hold-ups and other problems, are passed on to others and recorded. It is useful to encourage this.

Example: "How do you and colleagues informally share tricks of the trade or exchange short-cuts that you have developed?"

Please share any techniques you have developed for recording key details of events and interactions as they happen, to allow effective follow-up."

C2: Interweaving your activities with others'

Staff at stage develop ways to improve team communication, and this can be encouraged and reinforced during supervision and staff appraisals.

Example: "Let's brainstorm methods that you might use to ensure that team members are in good communication with each other when it matters, for example:

- use of communication shortcuts such as mental maps, flowcharts, coding systems, templates
- setting up communication lines to mobilise well-targeted response services or support networks
- ways of planning long-term work cycles so team members are available to each other at peak times or when challenging work is being undertaken".

C3: Maintaining and/or restoring the workflow

By stage 4, experienced staff tend to have established shared ways of working around problems.

Example: "Have you and colleagues worked out shortcuts, ways of fine-tuning systems or ways of working around bottlenecks? They may include:

- cultivating contacts inside or outside the organisation who will help with fast-tracking
- legally and ethically fine-tuning or tweaking the timing of outlays, so that you make optimal use of budgets
- developing shared approaches to use in high pressure or emergency

Developing expert system-shaping: level 5

Employees at level 5 are in formal or informal leadership positions, where they have responsibility for staff, the quality of service to the users, and for representing the organisation externally.

A1: Sensing contexts

Senior staff and informal leaders use understanding of the organisation's priorities to influence systems and policies. At their staff appraisal it may be asked:

Example: "What are good ways of keeping up to date with developments inside and outside the organisation so that you are in the best position to influence policies or priorities?"

A2: Monitoring and guiding reactions

At expert system-shaping leaders anticipate negative responses and have insight into their own impacts on the situation.

Example: "Let's discuss ways of foreseeing and addressing resistance to your pet proposal. How do you know when to persevere and when to let go?"

A3: Judging impacts

Leaders learn how to assess flow-on impacts of decisions to other parts of the organisation or to the longer-term impacts.

Example: "Think of some decisions or actions that have had unintended flow-on consequences, either for other areas of the organisation or for longer term

outcomes. Brainstorm ways in which such consequences might be foreseen and minimised.”

B1: Negotiating boundaries

Effective leaders learn to build support for their proposals.

Example: “What are good ways of gaining initial support for a change proposal? How can you build that support, and keep the initiative going?”

B2: Communicating verbally and non-verbally

Effective leadership includes using communication systems influentially.

Example: “Think of a message that you wish to get across clearly and persuasively and identify a way of doing so, by:

- identifying the audience and using apt or memorable language or images that crystallise their aspirations
- defining aesthetic and ethical values
- suggesting political and communications strategies.”

B3: Connecting across cultures

Most level 5 Spotlight skills are acquired through long practice. One of these skills is to work across cultures at the level of systems or immersion. Level 5 practitioners may themselves be fluent in a language spoken by local indigenous people, other languages spoken locally, sign language or Braille and/or work to promote supportive relationships with cultural and community groups of users/clients/customers.

Example: “Let’s discuss how, in consultation with appropriate spokespeople, you can work at a systems level to implement obligations of partnership, participation and protection of interests of indigenous people and help build culturally appropriate programmes”.

C1: Sequencing and combining activities

One of the ‘expert system-shaping’ skills is to embed coordination ideas in work systems. With a variety of projects under way, all at various stages, the skill is to find ways to successfully manage short-term projects whilst continuing to pursue long-term goals.

Example: “An information-sharing session could discuss the following topics:

- Have you found a way of pursuing long-term goals? How do you manage to do so?
- Do you have a range of initiatives at various stages of completion, and if so, how do you manage them?”

C2: Interweaving your activities with others’

At level 5 it is crucial to develop systems for embedding innovative solutions, so that these are retained and used.

Example: “Let’s consider ways in which new solutions can be retained and put into circulation. This might be an information network for accessing, tracking,

sharing and building on solutions. It might be a way of maintaining key records and setting them in a long-term perspective so that people have a sense of direction and don't keep reinventing the wheel.

C3: Maintaining and/or restoring the workflow

At level 5, staff anticipate system failures by ensuring back-ups are in place, and dealing with crises if they occur.

Example: "Could you please share techniques you have developed for safeguarding against the effects of bottlenecks and breakdowns?"

How would you restore relationships or morale after a crisis?"