

Supportive Supervision



Joining Support with Supervision

“Supervision” describes how institutions support and oversee the performance of staff. *Supportive* supervisors support performance and quality of care by meeting the needs of service providers which enables them to perform well and meet the needs of their clients. Supportive supervisors need to make sure that the health care staff have the following:

- Clear performance expectations
- Immediate performance feedback
- Adequate physical environment and tools
- Motivation and incentives
- Appropriate skills and knowledge
- Organizational support

Facilitating Organizational Support

Many factors combine to create organizational support for good performance and quality. Effective management, good coordination, and inspiring leadership determine the extent to which factors that influence performance are in place at all levels in an organization.

Direct supervisors - facility-based or visiting - are a critical link between a service delivery site and the rest of the organization. They ensure that the organization’s resources effectively reach the facility to meet providers’ needs; they also translate visions and overall goals. The Performance Improvement (PI) approach and its focus on factors that influence performance helps guide supervisors in facilitating organizational support.

Supportive supervision framework



Supportive Supervision Framework

Direct supervisors must adopt effective approaches that facilitate support for providers and create a nurturing work environment for good work performance and quality. They must focus on the many factors that influence performance.



Creating a Nurturing Work Environment

Certain elements that are within the control of supervisors help create a nurturing environment for good performance and quality of care. In their efforts to put the key factors into place, supervisors need to do the following:

- Establish an environment based on trust where staff can safely bring up problems without fear of negative consequences
- Create transparency - make sure staff know what to expect
- Promote equitable and gender sensitive policies for employees and clients and implement them in a transparent manner
- Actively involve staff in problem solving and decision making
- Encourage teamwork
- Provide tools that help staff assess their performance and the services they provide
- Provide tools that help staff seek clients' views of the services and actively involve them in improving the services.



Alternative Supervision Strategies

For many reasons, some service providers do not receive frequent support from supervisors. In these situations, it may be useful to explore other ways to strengthen supervision; for example, by establishing peer support networks in which peers provide support to each other.

How to put the framework into action

Supervisor's responsibilities in facilitating good performance:

Clear job expectations

- Provide clear verbal work expectations
- Develop work goals with individuals and teams
- Ensure staff have job descriptions, standards, policies, etc.
- Ensure staff know the organization's vision and mission and understand their role

Immediate performance feedback

- Regularly let employees and teams know how they are doing
- Conduct regular performance reviews
- Establish feedback systems: introduce tools for staff to receive regular feedback (from clients and community, higher organizational levels, peers, MIS data, etc.)
- Encourage self-assessment and individual responsibility for improving performance and quality

Adequate physical environment and tools

- Ensure staff have the infrastructure, equipment and tools they need; link with the higher levels or other departments in the organization and other external resources
- Train staff in using and maintaining equipment and managing supplies

Motivation and incentives

- Recognize good performance (verbally or through other non-monetary ways; material recognition if possible)
- Explore what motivates employees and try to meet the different needs of individual staff members (public recognition, learning opportunities, etc.)
- Create performance-based, equitable policies; ensure transparency in the HR system (hiring, promotion, etc.)

Appropriate skills and knowledge

- Ensure that all levels/types of staff have the knowledge and skills they need to carry out their work
- Ensure that there are continuous learning opportunities for staff for personal and professional competence
- Support staff to use and maintain their skills
- Ensure staff know standards, policies, etc.



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