What makes supervision successful for young workers: Core skills and effective training for supervisors
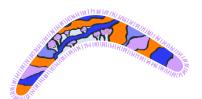
Acknowledgment of Country

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'After the Rains' by Richard Seden for Saltwater People 2024

A report by Jacqueline Mackaway and Debra Coulson for Social Ventures Australia

About the authors

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Executive Summary

Background

Employers report it can be a challenge to attract and retain young workers, and young workers state that one of the reasons they leave a job is their experiences with workplace supervisors. From the perspective of employers, this situation is particularly problematic given the tight labour market and skills shortages.

Supervisors require specific skills and knowledge to do their job and to work successfully with young employees. Supported with effective training and development, the capacity and performance of supervisors could be improved. And with better supervision, young workers will have more positive workplace experiences, which may improve the problem of attraction and retention.

This project explored relevant academic and non-academic materials to take a closer look at the core skills workplace supervisors require to perform their role, specifically as it relates to the supervision of young workers. It also explored relevant literature on supervisor training to understand what 'good' training looks like and how to evaluate training effectiveness. Findings will be useful to those involved in designing, sourcing or organising supervisor training.

Key findings

- Formal training is significantly more effective than thought at delivering benefits to organisations and individuals, with those with the least experience in supervising benefitting the most.

- Core skills supervisors need are self-management/managing self, achieving results/problem solving, leadership, communications, teamwork, planning and organising.

- Young workers prefer supervisors who have a positive attitude, actively listen, give and take constructive feedback, are fair and empathetic, train them and provide development opportunities.

- Human skills or 'non-technical'/ 'soft' skills are most important to effective supervision.

- 'Hard' skills (business/technical related skills) are easiest to train people in, but 'soft' skills training has the most impact on improving organisational and subordinate outcomes.

- There is no 'one-size fits all' training and 'contextual sensitivity' is required to meet needs and to change behaviours.

- Four key elements of training impact effectiveness: content, design, delivery and evaluation.

- Training effectiveness is measured using four criteria: reactions, learning, learning transfer, and results.

- Learning is most effective when training includes a needs analysis; uses multiple delivery methods (including practice-based) and contains hard skills in the content.

- Learning transfer (application to the job) is most effective when training includes a needs analysis; uses multiple delivery methods; provides feedback to trainee; is face-to-face; makes attendance compulsory; involves multiple/spaced sessions; contains both hard and soft skills.

- Results/outcomes for organisations and subordinates are best when training includes multiple delivery methods; held on site; requires mandatory attendance; provides as much training as possible; includes soft skills.

- Self-administered is less effective than training delivered by internal and external trainers.

- On-site training is most effective, and more research into on-line approaches is needed.

- Young workers are 'a learning worker' being socialised into the world of work and life, and therefore, additional care and patience is required by those supervising them.

Introduction

Front-line managers (FLMs[1]) make important contributions to the productivity and culture of a workplace (see, for example, Bajorek, 2020; Evans, 2017; Lacerenza, 2017; Townsend & Russell, 2013). They are the interface between management and workers, and in industries such as retail and hospitality, this 'intermediary' role extends to external customers/clients (Evans, 2017; Townsend & Russell, 2013). FLMs generally have operational accountabilities for targets to be met and standards to be maintained, along with responsibilities related to budgets, internal communication, operational and human resource management policies and practices (Evans, 2017; Hales, 2005; Maxwell & Watson, 2006; Townsend & Russell, 2013).

While there is some debate as to whether the role of FLMs has substantially changed over the past decades, it is understood that across a range of industries, they have experienced job enlargement and work intensification with increased responsibility for people management in areas such as recruitment, career development, performance measurement and welfare (Bajorek, 2020; Evans, 2017; Hales, 2005; Townsend & Russell, 2013). Due to their position in the organisational hierarchy and the range of their responsibilities, FLMs do affect how those who report to them experience work. Indeed, FLMs can make or break morale, trust, and job satisfaction amongst employees with implications for employee attendance, productivity, retention, and overall wellbeing.

When it comes to young workers, trade apprentices report that their relationship with their boss is the most important factor to job satisfaction and sticking with their studies (Skills SA – National VET Completion Report, 2023). While trans young workers describe the support received from their boss as an important protective factor for their self-care and mental health (Strauss et al., 2017). More generally, young workers want an empathetic boss who cares about their development and wellbeing as a worker and person (Bloomgarden, 2022; Fernandez et al., 2023; Herrygers & Wieland, 2017).

FLMs need skills and training to be effective in their role. It is with this in mind that this report considers what those core skills are and what 'good' formal training of FLMs looks like - information that will assist those involved in designing, sourcing and engaging with FLM training.

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[1] The term FLM is used in this report, as is done by others such as Townsend & Russell (2013), to describe those at the "'operating core' in relation to direct control over workers and tasks – they may have both control and accountability over/for people and tasks" (p.169) – job titles may include supervisor, team lead, first-line manager.

Skills FLMs need to be effective in their role

To be an effective FLM requires a range of skills, involving both informal and formal training to develop. Back in the 1950s, American Business School academic Robert L Katz (1955) identified these key skills to fall into three broad categories:

1. technical – an understanding of, and proficiency in, a specific kind of activity, particularly one involving methods, processes, procedures, or techniques (able to deal with things)

2. human – knowledge about and an ability to work effectively as a group member and to build cooperative effort within the team they lead (able to deal with people)

3. conceptual – an ability to see the enterprise as a whole; includes recognising how the various functions of the organisation depend on one another and how changes in any one part affect all the others; and it extends to visualising the relationship of the individual business to the industry, the community, and the political, social, and economic forces of the nation (able to work with ideas).

All three categories of skills remain relevant today but are often reduced to two categories of 'hard' and 'soft' skills – either way - these categories have been used by practitioners and researchers to develop skills frameworks that are applied to the development of training programs (see Hales, 2005; Lacerenza, 2017; Yeardley, 2017).

Over the past decades, the rise of business studies and development of human resource practices has expanded our understanding about the criticality of human/soft skills for effective supervision to support organisational and employee outcomes (Bajorek, 2020; Hales, 2005; Lacerenza, 2017; Yeardley, 2017). Human, or 'non-technical' skills as they are commonly referred to, are primarily focused on interpersonal, relational and communication skills and behaviours. Non-technical skills are critical for FLMs so they can: manage conflicts and solve problems; articulate clear goals, boundaries and expectations; coordinate teams and arrange work; provide feedback; and motivate workers (Beenan et al., 2021; Lancaster et al., 2013; Townsend et al., 2012; Yeardley, 2017).

Gabrielova and Buchko's (2021) research on the millennial supervisor-GenZ subordinate relationship, provides important insights into the sorts of non-technical skills FLMs need to effectively manage this group of employees. For example, young workers have been raised in an "instant reaction world" and want daily contact with their boss and regular constructive feedback that is actionable (Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021, p. 496). This helps meet several of their needs, e.g., desire to be successful at their job, reassurance that they have not done something wrong, along with their preference for meaningful social interactions (Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021). They also want to be autonomous, which means they want to be trained to do their job so they do not have to rely on others to get their work done (Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021). Importantly, young workers want a boss who is fair, empathic and supportive of their personal circumstances, again so they can develop and be successful but also to feel included and safe (Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021; McGaha, 2018;

Mackaway & Amigo, 2022; Strauss et al., 2017). This means those supervising young workers need to have high levels of emotional intelligence, be good listeners and able to communicate effectively, offer supported development opportunities and build a positive atmosphere where their staff feel motivated and valued.

The emphasis on human/non-technical skills does not mean that technical and conceptual skills are less important, as FLMs still need to be able to do things like understand organisational goals, as well as plan and perform related operational activities. However, research suggests that it is the non-technical skills, specifically those related to people management responsibilities, that can take a back seat when supervisors are time poor and feel under pressure to deliver operational goals (Bajorek, 2020; Evans, 2017). This may suggest several things: first, that FLMs feel less capable in terms of their human skills and therefore drop or defer tasks that involve the mobilisation of these skills when they are overloaded; second, that FLMs do not value the importance of these skills and associated responsibilities in the same way they regard their technical skills and operational responsibilities; and finally, that employers need to ensure FLMs receive formal training that meets their specific and changing needs[2] (Bajorek, 2020; Evans, 2017; Lacerenza et al., 2017; Yeardley, 2017). Indeed, research supports the importance of effective formal training for FLMs so they perform their roles and deliver benefits to their employer and staff (Evans, 2017; Lacerenza et al., 2017).

Six core skills for effective supervision/management have been identified by UK Business Management researcher Timothy Yeardley (2017). These skills are primarily non-technical in nature and are summarised in Table 1, which also includes examples of how they apply to the supervision of young workers. It goes without saying, that training needs to include content that focuses on these skills.

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[2] It is beyond the scope of this report to consider the range of contextual factors that also impact the ability of FLMs to effectively enact their people management responsibilities such as: management support, role clarity, organisational goals and priorities.

Table 1: Six core skills for effective supervision / management and relevance of the supervision of young workers

Core skills for FLMs	FLM skill as applied to supervision of young workers[3]
1. **Self-management/managing self**	Engaged, approachable and available to staff; positive and empathetic attitude toward work and staff; prioritise wellness and mental health of self and others to show care; role model.
2. **Achieving results/problem solving**	Recognise individual contributions; show and provide paths to job success and incentivise; actively listen; involve staff in diagnosis of problems, identification of solutions and decision making; invite feedback from staff; be approachable and fair.
3. **Leadership**	Coach and mentor approach to supervision; drive an inclusive culture where workplace bullying etc not tolerated; develop/train staff so they can work independently and be successful at their job; hold self and others accountable when standards not met; be approachable and fair.
4. **Communications**	Recognise individual contributions; show and provide paths to job success and incentivise; actively listen; involve staff in diagnosis of problems, identification of solutions and decision making; invite feedback from staff; be approachable and fair.
5. **Teamwork**	Promote meaningfulness – build an understanding that being part of a team involves something bigger than oneself. Deal effectively with underperforming team members.
6. **Planning and organising**	Arrange/schedule work in ways that are fair; seek input from staff in decision making; respect work/life balance of staff and self.

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[3] Examples here are a summary of many skills discussed throughout the report.

Formal training programs for FLMs

Formal training is where FLMs acquire knowledge and skills related to their work through formal, structured or guided means undertaken in-house or via an external course or program. A basic scan of the internet for FLM programs indicates that there are hundreds available, with many off-the-shelf programs dedicated specifically to the delivery of human skills. And while some organisations may question the return on investment in leadership and management training programs in general, a meta-analytic examination of the leadership and managerial training research literature from 1951 to 2014 found that formal training is significantly more effective than thought at delivering benefits at both organisational and individual levels (Lacerenza et al., 2017[4]). Unsurprisingly, this meta-review found that it is those with the least experience in supervising who benefit most from formal training (Lacerenza et al., 2017).

There are four key elements of training that influence effectiveness: content, design, delivery and evaluation. This report provides some high-level insights into each aspect, with particular emphasis given to factors relevant to the supervision of young workers. The information provided should assist those involved in designing, sourcing or engaging with training to recognise 'good content' specific to FLMs working with young workers.

Training content (attitudes; knowledge; behaviours)

In terms of program content, 'good' FLM training often focuses content on six core skills and associated attitudes, knowledge and behaviours (see Table 1 for more details on these skills):

1. Self-management/managing self

2. Achieving results/problem solving

3. Leadership

4. Communications

5. Teamwork

6. Planning and organising

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[4] The study by Lacerenza et al., 2017 is the most comprehensive review on the effectiveness of leadership and management training. The study has a broad definition of leadership and includes leaders to be situated from the front line through to the executive level. They also define management/managerial training as something designed to help people develop skills and knowledge to improve their effectiveness in their role, including that of leading and influencing others. 'Leadership' and 'Management' training are terms used interchangeably and are therefore both included in their study and this report.

Using these six core skills as a framework, UK Business Management researcher Timothy Yeardley (2017) conducted a best-practice benchmarking exercise that compared these skills to the content of 45 off-the-shelf programs offered in the UK from 2011-2015. In the absence of research specific to the Australian context and in-house training, Yeardley's work (2017) provides some insights into factors relevant to understanding requisite skills for supervisors and their inclusion in training. He found that the most taught skill in off-the-shelf courses was 'delegation', e.g., scheduling, assigning, and allocating work, which he criticised as a command/control approach to leading others and out of touch with contemporary styles of management, which he argues are more collaborative (Yeardley, 217). Further, Yeardley (2017) suggested delegation could be misused by less experienced FLMs and contribute to problems in the workplace, such as employee conflict and low motivation. In terms of young workers, research indicates that they do not respond well to an authoritarian style of command/control management and prefer supervisors who actively listen and involve them in decision making (see Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021). Indeed, Australian trade apprentices report that they do not respond well to a boss who has a hierarchical approach (Dickie et al., 2011), which may be common amongst FLMs who use command/control approaches to their supervision. The implication is that any training with a heavy emphasis on delegation is out of touch with contemporary approaches to and expectations of supervision/management.

Unsurprisingly, Yeardley (2017) found communication skills receive a lot of attention in training programs (80% of courses include), with topics covered varying amongst providers. For those FLMs with young workers reporting to them, research tells us that these employees consider supervisors who are good communicators to be those who can: clearly articulate goals and expectations, actively listen, give regular and constructive feedback, and are also open to receiving feedback and suggestions (Dickie et al., 2011; Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021; Herrygers & Wieland, 2017; McGaga, 2018). Training for FLMs supervising young people, therefore, needs to have these types of skills covered in course content.

One topic of communication not commonly covered in training content was cultural influences and related communication (Yeardley, 2017). A culturally diverse Australian workforce means FLMs need skills and knowledge related to cultural communication, particularly in industries that have high numbers of workers from migrant backgrounds, such as healthcare and social assistance (14.3%), administrative and support services (13.6%) and accommodation and food services (10.6%) (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2023). Further, the accommodation and food industry is both a culturally diverse workforce (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2023) with the youngest median age (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021), and research into the industry suggests both FLMs and workers are often inexperienced in and underprepared for culturally appropriate interpersonal communication/relations (Lolli, 2013). A lack of these skills could further complicate effective supervision and subordinate performance when work is designed around team-based activities (Weidmann & Deming, 2021). An absence of this skill in supervisor training could be because the topic is covered in diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) training - which is often mandatory. And while this may be the case, it should not be assumed that it will be included or tailored to the organisational context.

Although communication skills are common content in training (Lacerenza et al., 2017; Yeardley, 2017), the impact of technology on communication (and relationships) is also not well covered in off-the-shelf programs (Yeardley, 2017). This may not present a major problem for the digital skill development of FLMs who are comfortable using multiple modes of communication, including digital (e.g., those born after the 1980s), but it could be a skill deficit for older supervisors or those who have limited experience with technology (see Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021). Researchers also point out that it is important to understand the influence of technology on social interactions for younger workers,

and indeed younger supervisors, who are comfortable using technology for social purposes, however, this can present some challenges for those who supervise them or are supervised by them[5] (Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021; Lolli, 2013). Gabrielova & Buchko (2021, p.495) state that GenZs primary use of text messages has left out the development of vital rules of conversation such as: listening, asking questions, interjecting in a way that seems respectful to others, builds relationships, solve problems in real time and resolves conflicts. Further, "their effectiveness in delivering brief, informal communications decreases the opportunity for high-quality relationships and building mutual trust – consequently, they are sometimes seen as disrespectful" (Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021, p.495-6). There would appear to be a gap in training and skills around technology, communication and social interactions.

Another FLM skill that is somewhat neglected in off-the-shelf training programs involves planning and organising. Yeardley (2017) found that only 45% of courses reviewed covered these skills. This seems inadequate given FLMs often have considerable responsibility for both, and sometimes little prior experience with as they make the move from worker to front line supervisor. The neglect of planning and organising skills in formal training content could be because it is assumed these skills are learnt on the job, but it does present a gap in off-the-shelf courses.

The six core skills identified as essential to effective FLM involve skills that are also described as interpersonal and intrapersonal skills but can involve some nuances, such as self-awareness. Self-awareness is considered an essential skill to support collaborative and inclusive approaches to managing others (Eurich, 2018). Intrapersonal skills cover attitudes and behaviours related to a person's ability to understand and manage themselves – in terms of personal goals, time management, coping with stress, emotions and thoughts – and to develop these skills involves a person to possess skills in self-awareness and self-reflection. Adult education research argues that self-awareness and self-reflective skills are necessary for professional practice, learning and personal growth and can be taught (see, for example, Beenen et al., 2021; Boud, Keogh & Walker, 1985; Mezirow, 1991). Further, research suggests that training which includes intrapersonal skills content is more effective in delivering results, particularly in the application of learning to the job (see examples in Lacerenza et al., 2017).

For an FLM to support productive, inclusive and positive work environments they need the ability to communicate, interact and connect with others – namely, good interpersonal skills. Some organisational psychology literature suggests FLM training avoid generic training on interpersonal skills and instead focus on a narrow set of skills specific to the FLM role e.g., active listening skills to foster supportive relationships amongst staff; communicating clear goals and expectations to motivate workers; and, diagnosing sources of conflict and articulating solutions with effective problem solving to manage conflicts (see Beenen et al., 2021; Lancaster et al., 2013).

FLMs interpersonal skills are particularly important to the mobilisation of strategies specific to engaging young workers, such as a supervisor's ability to: share information to alleviate fears of uncertainty; provide constructive feedback to show an investment in the success of their staff; and clear communication on how individual contributions matter (Fernandez et al., 2023). Further, research into the effective supervision of young workers indicates that they prefer bosses who actively listen and demonstrate understanding and empathy to support their learning and development (Dickie et al., 2011; Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021; McGaga, 2018). Young workers also favour a boss who has a positive attitude and can foster a competitive but friendly work atmosphere (McGaha, 2018), with some research suggesting that they also respond well to supervisors who hold

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[5] Lolli (2013) reminds us that some industries have high proportion of supervisors who are young themselves and may not have the interpersonal communication skills necessary for effectively supervising others.

them accountable – in a supportive way – when they have not met expectations or standards (see Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021; Herrygers & Wieland, 2017). Notably, many FLMs also provide informal training to those who report to them, and strong interpersonal skills not only assist with this task but also influence how successfully their employee goes on to apply their learning (Lancaster et al., 2013).

Young workers are 'a learning worker', meaning that they are being socialised into the world of work and life, and therefore additional care and patience by FLMs is required when supervising them (Dickie et al., 2011; Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021; Herrygers & Wieland, 2017; Strauss et al., 2017). Indeed, some apprentices even report that a "good boss is a mixture between employer and parent" (Dickie et al., 2011, p.30). It is, therefore, important that those who have direct supervisory responsibility for young workers possess the sorts of intrapersonal and interpersonal skills necessary to cultivate individuals who learn to be good workers as well as successful members of society (Herrygers & Wieland, 2017). Training programs that include affective content, such as topics related to emotions and emotional intelligence when leading others, may, therefore, be useful for those working with young workers.

Finally, strong intra and interpersonal skills are particularly important to building healthy psychosocial work environments where risks and potential harm to staff mental health and wellbeing are eliminated, minimised and/or effectively supported (Dalgaard et al., 2023; Lacerenza et al., 2017). Recent changes to Australia's Work Health and Safety legislation now require employers, for the first time, to have a duty to identify and manage risks to workers' psychological health and safety (see *Work Health and Safety Amendment Bill 2023*). FLMs with good mental health literacy and related inter and intra -personal skills may assist them to design, adjust and modify work, tasks and conditions in ways that help avoid, reduce and manage mental health and wellbeing challenges for workers (see Blake et al., 2022; Dalgaard et al., 2023). It may also help them address issues of workplace bullying, which young workers report contributes to decisions to leave their trade and/or employer (Mackaway & Amigo, 2022; Dickie et al., 2011). Research indicates that when stigma about mental health is reduced, and supervisors feel confident about the topic, they are also more likely to reach out to a subordinate who they suspect is living with a mental health issue (Bryan et al., 2018). Given the prevalence of mental health, loneliness and wellbeing issues amongst the general population and with the highest rates amongst young people (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2021; Huber Social, 2021; Lim et al., 2023; Tiller et al., 2021), FLMs need training that specifically develops relevant knowledge, attitudes and behaviours so they feel ready and able to address issues with those who report to them (Bryan et al., 2018). Importantly, the healthcare training literature suggests that increased knowledge and self-awareness on the topic can help FLMs reduce their own stress and anxiety, thereby potentially assisting them to be more effective in their role (Blake et al., 2022; Dalgaard et al., 2023). Training on this topic is thought to be most effective when the content is targeted to meet the specific context and needs of the workplace, trainee and employees more generally (Blake et al., 2022; Bryan et al., 2018; Dalgaard et al., 2023).

On the issue of technical and non-technical skills, it is worth noting that Lacerenza and colleagues' (2017) meta-analytic examination of the leadership and management training effectiveness research literature from 1951-2014 found that while business/technical-related skills may be easiest to train people in, it was the non-technical skills training that had the most impact on improving organisational and subordinate outcomes. This means training for FLMs must include content focused on the development of human/non-technical skills.

HR departments or those organising training for FLMs need to understand:

- skills required for a FLM to be effective in their role

- specific training requirements of their FLMs and the organisation so training is 'fit for purpose'

- be aware of the potential gaps and inconsistencies in off-the-shelf training content which could see learning needs go unmet

- recognise that many providers teach from a perspective e.g., 'command and control', which may not align with their organisation's culture or workforce expectations

- non-technical or human skills may be harder to train for but will deliver the best outcomes for FLMs, subordinates and organisational goals.

Training design

The design of training plays an important role in its effectiveness and involves several key elements. This report focuses on needs analysis, attendance requirements, spacing of training and instructors with the characteristics and relevance of each discussed[6].

Needs analysis –involves a systematic process for evaluating the skills 'gap' of FLMs to identify training needs. Ideally, requisite skills for optimising FLM job performance are considered alongside organisational goals and priorities. Research into training effectiveness maintains the importance of conducting a needs analysis when designing or sourcing relevant training since training is not a 'one size fits' proposition (Hayes et al. ,2020; Dalgaard et al., 2023; Lacerenza et al. 2017). Research indicates that the absence of a needs analysis can lead to generic training that does not meet the needs of an organisation in terms of culture or strategy or benefit the attendee's learning and transfer of that learning to the workplace (Dalgaard et al., 2023; Hales, 2005; Lacerenza et al., 2017). Further, if employees feel that the training offered is not relevant to their job, there can be implications for their performance and motivation (Jones, 2016; Lacerenza et al., 2017).

Training attendance policy – involves whether training is voluntary or mandated by an organisation. While there are arguments for both, there is limited research into the effects of attendance when it comes specifically to FLM training. General training literature does suggest that mandatory attendance is thought to signal to an employee that the training is important and valued by the organisation (Salas et al., 2012), with some evidence to indicate that compulsory training supports transfer of learning to the workplace (Gegenfurtner et al., 2016). In contrast, self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000; 2012) proposes that voluntary attendance is better as it enhances attendee perceived value in the training, motivation to master performance goals and application of learning to the workplace because the employee's need for autonomy or independence is met (Blume et al., 2010; Gegenfurtner et al., 2016). Lacerenza and colleagues (2017) large review of leadership/managerial training effectiveness literature, found however, that while voluntary attendance can increase the trainee's application of that learning to their job, it is mandatory training that has a bigger impact on organisational results (e.g., effect on achieving organisational goals or

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[6] Lacerenza et al., 2017 provides more information on these fours factors as well as others that influence and moderate the effectiveness of training.

subordinate outcomes). The recommendation is for organisations to find ways to make any voluntary training more appealing to employees to increase participation rates (Lacerenza, 2017).

Spacing of training and duration – involves training designed to be delivered in a single session or spaced over multiple sessions (i.e., daily vs weekly). Research into how people learn indicates that people have a limit on the amount of information they can process at any given time and, when this is met, they are unable to process or store any more – a process that is called Cognitive Load Theory (CLT) (see, for example, de Jong, 2009). One implication of CLT is that if learners are 'overloaded' in a course, then they will have trouble recalling and applying content down the track. Learning designers therefore consider how much information can be meaningfully covered in a session, with the generic and leadership training literature suggesting spaced over intervals benefits cognitive retention of information, learning transfer/application of learning and organisational results (see, for examples and more discussion, Lacerenza et al., 2017). A review of supervisory/management training literature confirms that organisational results are better when training is spaced weekly versus daily; however, learning/knowledge acquisition and the transfer of that learning to the workplace occurs regardless of the spacing or timing of training (i.e., single or spaced sessions, offered daily or weekly). Further, a link has been found between the length of a program and the impact on effectiveness – namely, the "longer a program runs, the better results are for organisational goals and subordinate outcomes" (Lacerenza et al., 2017, p.1703). The opportunity to practice skills when training is spaced over multiple sessions may help explain these benefits, and making attendance mandatory could ensure consistent attendance over the sessions. Further, training effects falloff if the job does not allow the trainee a chance to practice skills (Arthur et al., 2003; Salas et al., 2012).

Training instructor – involves training designed to be facilitated by an internal or external instructor or to be self-administered (i.e., the employee is required to complete the training on their own). The trainer's background signals to the employee the extent to which the organisation values and supports training with implications for trainee motivation, learning and results. For example, an external trainer may indicate to a trainee that the organisation values training because it is prepared to pay for an expert external trainer, while a self-administered program may suggest weaker organisational commitment (for other examples, see Lacerenza et al., 2017).

Research indicates the instructor can have significant effects on the outcomes of training in two ways. First, a trainee's learning or acquisition of skills/knowledge is significantly better when training is delivered by an internal instructor (i.e., staff member whose job is dedicated to employee training) versus when a trainee completes training on their own (i.e., self-administered), however, there is no significant difference to learning/acquisition of skills/knowledge between programs delivered by internal or external trainers (Lacerenza et al., 2017). Second, learning transfer or the application of newly acquired skills/knowledge is significantly more effective when training is delivered by an external instructor as opposed to training being self-administered but there is no significant difference in learning transfer/application between programs delivered by internal or external instructor (Lacerenza et al., 2017). It is also useful to note that research to date suggests that when it comes to training effectiveness in terms of organisational or subordinate outcomes, there are no significant differences between self-administered programs and those delivered by internal and external trainers (Lacerenza et al., 2017). What is clear is that self-administered programs are less effective than programs delivered by internal and external trainers, and those responsible for the design or sourcing of training for others should be aware of this weakness.

Delivery

Delivery method – involves training designed to be:

- practice-based – designed to offer practice opportunities, using role-play, simulations, interactions with others, guided practice as teaching techniques

- information-based – designed to deliver information using lectures, presentations and text-based training materials for teaching

- demonstration based – designed to demonstrate skills and abilities being training, using things like negative and positive scenarios/examples/case studies of the trained competency through in-person demonstrations/ modelling, audio, video or other simulations such as the use of avatars.

The purpose of the training should inform the choice of delivery method, and it is common for delivery methods to be combined. Practice-based learning has a well-established body of research to support its importance and effectiveness as it provides an authentic way to construct, practice and assess knowledge and skills (Durrah, 1996; Kolb, 1984; Lave, 1993; Lave & Wenger, 1991). Research into supervisory/management training effectiveness confirms that practice-based methods are more effective than other methods for learning transfer/application, organisational and subordinate outcomes, however, when combined with another delivery method, the results are even better – particularly for learning transfer (Lacerenza et al., 2017). Those involved in training research recommend that all training design incorporate more than one method of delivery (Lacerenza et al., 2017).

Alternate models of training delivery exist, such as mentoring and coaching, and further investigation into these might be useful in the identification of effective delivery methods specific to FLMs. FLMs involved in this approach themselves may, through exposure, learn how to apply mentoring and coaching techniques to their own supervision and training of young workers. Based on research into young workers, we know that they prefer and respond well to these types of approaches to supervision and support (Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, 2022; Government of South Australia, 2023; Herrygers & Wieland, 2017; McGaha, 2018). And there could be important implications for things like retention of apprentices (Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, 2022; Dickie et al., 2011; Government of South Australia, 2023).

Training location – involves the site of training delivery, e.g., designed to be delivered onsite or offsite. There is a large body of learning theory research that argues that learning/knowledge acquisition and learning transfer/workplace application are more effective when the location of the training program closely resembles or simulates the trainees' work environment in terms of the physical (e.g., site, equipment, technology, tasks etc.), psychological (e.g., decision making, problem solving, complexity etc.) and social dimensions (e.g., interactions, teamwork, collaboration etc.) (see, for examples, Lacerenza et al., 2017). It is presumably easier for onsite training to mirror a trainee's worksite and support more authentic learning because it is held at the actual site of work, which should provide ease of access to organisational equipment, technology, tasks etc. Research into supervisory/ management training does indicate that learning and learning transfer are more effective when the training is onsite (Lacerenza et al., 2017). Further, onsite supervisory/management training benefits the organisation because the location can mean it is cheaper to run, employee attendance is possibly more reliable, the training addresses specific organisational context and needs (Lacerenza et al., 2017) with resulting benefits for productivity (Knox, 2000). A note of caution for onsite training,

however, is that attendees may be called out from it if there is an emergency, and therefore, measures need to be in place to minimise this possibility (Lacerenza et al., 2017). Conversely, external training programs are not as well placed to simulate the trainee's workplace and are often generic in their content and design – adopting a one-size-fits-all approach - which may not meet the specific needs of the trainee or organisation. This explains why offsite programs have been found to be less effective in learning transfer and organisational results (see Lacerenza et al., 2017).

Training setting – involves training that is delivered face-to-face or virtually via computer. Online training may be facilitated by an instructor or not, and if it is facilitated, it is more likely to occur in an asynchronous way (i.e., not in real-time and potentially moderated by AI). Virtual or online learning has grown in popularity for workplace training as it offers benefits to both trainee and organisation (Jones, 2016). For trainees, benefits include greater flexibility and convenience (i.e., self-paced and no travel) and reduced personal risks (i.e., fear of failure in front of others) (Blake et al., 2022). For organisations, the benefits can mean greater capacity to provide training to staff as it can be cheaper and easier to deliver, although this can be dependent on the organisational needs (David et al., 2012; Jones, 2016). There are disadvantages to virtual training, however, which can impact effectiveness and include things like reduced capacity to simulate the authenticity of the work environment and associated tasks, lack of immediate and tailored ability for content to be adjusted to suit trainees needs, anxiety and frustration if trainees are not familiar with technology (Magerko et al., 2005). Online learning can also present difficulties for people with specific cognitive conditions like ADHD (Bell et al., 2021). Learning designers advocate that virtual or online training can overcome some of the challenges associated with 'non-authentic content' through the adoption of collaborative participatory design principles where line managers provide input into content such as scenarios, tasks and skills to be used (Blake et al., 2022). Until the review by Lacerenza and colleagues (2017) into supervisory/ management training effectiveness, there has been little research which compares the effectiveness of face-to-face training with online programs for this group of workers. And while their meta-analysis included a low number of primary studies involving virtual training, their research did show that face-to-face training is significantly more effective for learning transfer than online, with no significant difference for learning acquisition (Lacerenza et al., 2017). A key takeaway is that more research is required to better understand the effectiveness of online training for FLMs.

Feedback – involves the provision of feedback to trainees before, during and after training and may come from internal sources (i.e., their manager, subordinates) or external sources (i.e., customers, clients). Two main types of feedback are *constructive outcomes* feedback (success or failure information) and *process-focused* feedback (specific information about how to adjust behaviour to improve results). Process feedback can be more useful to an employee because it can help them understand their current ability, where their strengths lay, and areas for improvement (Kinicki & Fugate, 2012; Medvedeff et al., 2008). Research suggests that "feedback significantly improves the onset of learning transfer and should therefore be included in all training programs" (Lacerenza et al., 2017, p. 1702). However, the design, delivery and source of feedback in training affect how the trainee reacts to the feedback and uses it to learn, with implications for overall organisational results (Kinicki & Fugate, 2012; Lacerenza et al., 2017). It is therefore important to consider the type and sources of feedback, including commonly used approaches such as 360-degree reviews (Lacerenza et al., 2017).

There are additional moderating factors that can influence training effectiveness, including the work environment itself, social support and organisational facilitation of training (Botke et al., 2018).

Measuring or evaluating training

While it is essential for FLMs to receive formal training in relevant skills, it is equally important to understand whether the training is effective in meeting the desired goals.

One of the most used frameworks to evaluate training is based on a model developed by Dr Don Kirkpatrick in the late 1950s (Kirkpatrick, 1994). Over the decades, the framework has been refined, applied and validated, and provides four criteria to guide the evaluation of training effectiveness (Alliger et al., 1997; Kirkpatrick, 1996; Lacerenza et al., 2017 and others). The four areas are listed below and are designed as a sequence of levels to measure.

1. Reactions – measure if the learners found the training to be relevant to their role, engaging, useful and if they generally liked it.

2. Learning – measure whether the learner has acquired the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and commitment that the training program is focused on.

3. Behaviour (learning transfer or application) – measure behavioural changes after learning and see if the learner is applying what they learnt in training to their job.

4. Results – measure the effect or impact of the training on the business resulting from the improved performance of the learner (i.e., turnover, absenteeism, return on investment, profit) or subordinates (i.e., subordinate job satisfaction, performance ratings of the leader's subordinates)

All four criteria need to be included in training evaluations to gain a holistic picture of effectiveness however, it is common for trainers to only focus on 1 and 2 because they are often easier to measure with their reliance on the trainees self-reporting on their perception of effectiveness (Botke et al., 2018; Lacerenza et al., 2017). Self-reporting/self-ratings is problematic because it may be affected by factors like social desirability, cognitive dissonance, and memory (see, for examples, Botke et al., 2018). Similarly, the effectiveness of training to learning transfer can be equally difficult to determine if it only relies on a trainee's self-reporting, as trainees can often be overly optimistic about results (Taylor et al., 2009). Furthermore, this potential bias in trainee reporting is particularly the case for human/non-technical skills because it is argued that the performance norms are often more subjective (Botke et al., 2018). To effectively measure learning transfer, it is recommended that "multiple measures in time, multiple data sources and multiple outcomes" be involved (Botke et al., 2018, p. 144) – indeed, this approach applies to measuring all four criteria.

Summary of 'best practice' features for FLM training

FLM training effectiveness is influenced by content, design, delivery and evaluation with specific factors more influential than others. Table 2 provides a summary of these factors, with findings by Lacerenza and colleagues (2017, p. 1704) indicated in italics and other significant points from the literature relevant to the supervision of young workers listed.

Table 2: Good practice for FML training effectiveness

Learning	Learning Transfer	Results
• *Conduct a needs analysis*	• *Conduct a needs analysis*	• *Use multiple delivery methods*
• *Use multiple delivery methods*	• *Use multiple delivery methods*	• *Hold onsite*
• *Include hard skills*	• *Provide feedback*	• *Require mandatory attendance*
• Include six core skills tailored to supervision of young workers	• *Use face to face*	• *Have multiple session*
• Emphasis on affective skills	• *Make attendance compulsory*	• *Provide as much training as possible (longer programs are more effective)*
• Include content on mental health and wellbeing, cultural communication	• *Have multiple/spaced session*	• *Include soft skills*
• Include feedback from multiple sources	• Include hard and soft skills	• Include feedback from multiple sources
• Evaluate from multiple measures in time, multiple data sources and multiple outcomes	• Include 6 core skills tailored to supervision of young workers	• Evaluate from multiple measures in time, multiple data sources and multiple outcomes
	• Include activities on affective skills; cultural communication; mental health and wellbeing	
	• Include feedback from multiple sources	
	• Evaluate from multiple measures in time, multiple data sources and multiple outcomes	

Table adapted from Lacerenza et al. 2017 with additions from literature included in the report

Methods/Background to this report

This report details findings from a scoping literature review which sought to understand the following key questions:

- What core skills do supervisors need – particularly those working with young workers – to be effective in their role (age 17-25)?

- What does 'good' training look like for a workplace supervisor/front line manager – in general terms but also specific to meeting the needs of young workers?

- What is the impact of formal training and development activities in improving supervisor effectiveness?

- How do we evaluate formal training programs to understand effectiveness?

The broad scope of the project meant it was more useful to undertake a scoping review to scan what was available and understood about the topic. The following steps were taken:

- Scan of both academic (i.e., journal articles) and non-academic literature (i.e., materials such as reports, reviews and government documents).

- Multi search techniques used to locate relevant peer reviewed academic literature through Macquarie University library. Databases included EBSCOhost EJS, Scopus and others. All disciplines were covered with highest results coming from subjects such as Management, Training, Business, Employment, Work/Workers, Education, Psychology, Social Science. Web searches were undertaken using Google and Google scholar.

- Key words for search (combination of these used in Boolean searches of databases):

  - Supervisor/supervision

  - Manager/managing

  - Leading/leadership

  - Front line manager/managing

  - Mentor/mentoring/mentee

  - Supervisor/front line manager skills

  - Best practice/effective approaches (add 'employer of choice')

  - Young workers/young people/youth (added Gen Z and millennials)

  - Employment/work/jobs

  - Training/training evaluation/measuring training effectiveness

- Snowballing or chain-referral techniques helped to identify additional literature that was relevant to the topic. The initial scan identified over 25,000 items with cycles of refinement to identify more relevant materials. 60 of the most relevant are included in the report.

Some key features of the literature are summarised below:

- Front-line Managers (FLMs) or supervisors are only emerging as a distinct category of management. There is limited literature specific to them with a few exceptions including work by Evans (2017) and Townsend and colleagues (2012 and 2013). The literature is focused on leadership, management and supervision more generally and at the mid and executive levels.

- Disciplines/fields which dominate the literature are Work, Health and Safety; Healthcare; Organisational/Industrial Psychology and Behaviour; Business and Human Resource Management; Workplace training/coaching/mentoring.

- The field of Youth Studies was only briefly covered but it may provide another useful field to explore to better understand the target group of young workers.

- Literature came primarily from the USA, Australia, UK, with some from India and Denmark. The meta-analyses included in the report of leadership and management training design, delivery, and implementation did cover international studies.

- Empirical studies feature along with several 'desktop' meta-analyses focused on research on evaluation of training programs.

- Self-reporting on effectiveness of training does feature, but there are studies where other metrics are used (guided by modern interpretation of Kirkpatrick's (1959) 4 levels of training evaluation (Reaction; Learning; Behaviour; Results)

- In addition to research on young workers there is also a large amount of 'opinion' type information available on the web about this group with some of it specific to practical advice and strategies on attracting, training, managing and working with young workers.

- Some the theories that appear in the literature relevant to this topic include: 'generational cohort theory'; leader-member ex-change (LMX) theory; work values framework; learning transfer (linked to intrinsic/extrinsic motivation); social cognitive theory; Cognitive Load Theory (CDL) and other learning related theories.

- A consistent message throughout much of the learning/training effectiveness literature is the need for: need analyses to be conducted; there is no 'one-size fits all' training; 'contextual sensitivity' is required to understand needs and change behaviours (see Evans, 2017, Townsend & Russell, 2013 and others).

Contact the authors for further information about the literature review.

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