



Potential Solutions

Problematic Practice

Job applicants and new hires learn so little about the organization, the issues, the community and the job responsibilities that they are not well-equipped to do their job well in their first months.

Initial job descriptions become outdated as campaigns progress and priorities change but the changes aren't documented.

Some organizers report having no job description at all.

Reviews of staff performance happen seldom or never; or are used punitively.

Terminations come out of the blue and/or are perceived as unfair.

Sustainable Practice

On-boarding should have two components: a standardized orientation to the organization and its work, where someone is in charge of orienting all new staff and contractors, with written materials; and also sessions with the supervisor or team leader about the specifics of the job and its context.

In an employee's first 6 months, supervisors should schedule extra regular check-ins.

Every staff member needs a current written job description, updated with change in responsibilities, and taking staff interests and skills into account. One good practice is to have staff update their own job descriptions and review changes during their annual review.

Similarly, contractors' Scopes of Services need to be revised as needed.

If job descriptions are updated in the performance evaluation process, make sure the individual's pay reflects any new duties.

Reviews are done at least annually, with two-way dialogue, and include few surprises, thanks to regular communication with supervisors and colleagues. After feedback, employees have opportunities to self-correct. One tool for self-reflection and feedback is the [Johari Window Exercise](#).

Supervisors regularly affirm positive accomplishments and have a future growth orientation, so that when performance problems are discussed, they are put in the context of strengths as well.

Terminations for cause should happen only after multiple warnings (except in cases of extreme behavior, such as violence) and opportunities for improvement. The personnel policy should lay out clear criteria and a clear [progressive discipline](#) process for termination.

Aspirational Practice

Larger nonprofits with HR managers should design an onboarding process and ensure that supervisors and managers actually carry it out.

Connect updated job descriptions to compensation ladder and skills development goals.

Consider instituting [360 evaluations](#) of all staff, including top management, with input from all stakeholders.

More [frequent feedback meetings](#) are more effective than annual, if capacity allows.

Staff evaluations can include performance improvement goals which are linked to a professional development plan for each employee.

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Potential Solutions

Problematic Practice

Reorganizations and management turnover lead to staff disorientation from frequent changes in supervisors.

Sustainable Practice

Changes in supervisor / supervisee relationships should be made only when necessary. Continuity of productive relationships is prioritized.

Every employee and contractor should know who has the power to define their jobs and assess their performance. Be explicit about who will have decision-making authority over or input into which aspects of the work, using a tool such as [DARCCl](#).

Aspirational Practice

Supervision is done by overburdened staff whose other responsibilities over-fill their work hours, often people with no management training or prior experience.

Well-meaning supervisors leave their supervisees on the back burner, only communicating with staff when there's a crisis or change of strategy.

Supervisors need to understand what is expected of them, and be well-trained and supported. Building a culture of mutual respect and trust between supervisors and staff is seen as an organizational priority for increasing staff engagement and reducing turnover.

Limit the responsibilities for those with supervision in their job descriptions to allow time for regular one-on-one meetings with supervisees, ideally no more than 3 to 5 direct reports, as well as team meetings.

Supervisors can act as sounding boards for employee venting, as well as conduits for communication between their supervisees and top decision-makers.

Supervisors of organizers understand their role includes listening and learning from fieldwork updates.

Expand staff size to take other duties off supervisors' shoulders.

Staff well-being and satisfaction are on the back burner, ignored until a crisis occurs.

Supervisors and top managers need regular times to think about improvements affecting staff, such as in-service training, discussions of staff surveys results, participation in events such as [Alliance for Nonprofit Management](#) conferences, and review of resources, e.g., [Society for Human Resource Management](#) reports.

Give first-time supervisors training and how-to materials before they start. Offer regular supervisor support circles to problem solve and reflect together.

Proactively ask staff how they like to be recognized or rewarded for special accomplishments (e.g. time off, a gift card, public recognition, or a personal note of appreciation).