TOOLKIT 14 – DEALING WITH SUPERVISORY SLIPPAGE

> ❖ **Set and maintain high standards.**
>
> ❖ **Help your managers and supervisors do their job effectively.**
>
> ❖ **Ensure tasks get completed.**

This is a short, simple but potentially a very powerful and important toolkit. Most businesses get things done through people. Supervising people and processes are key tasks in order to get the work of the business completed successfully.

However in some businesses you hear the following complaints:

- 'We start lots of initiatives but never seem to get many completed.'

- 'We seem to be always juggling lots of balls at once here.'

- 'We keep making the same mistakes.'

- 'We often produce results beneath rather than beyond expectations.'

- 'We seem to have problems in maintaining standards at the sharp end.'

- 'We have a plan but we can't make it work.'

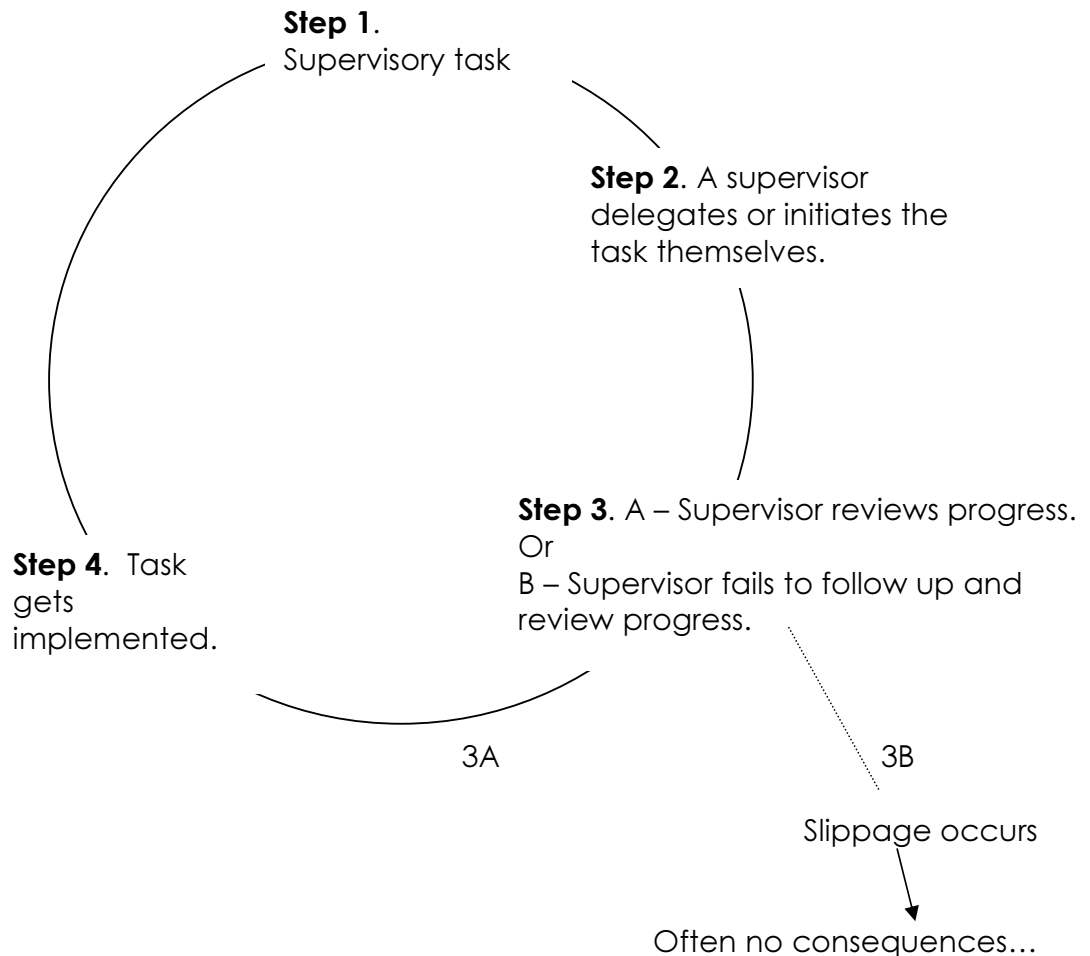These could be indicators of a common business problem – supervisory slippage.

Here is how it happens in practice:

Step 1.
Supervisory task

Step 2. A supervisor delegates or initiates the task themselves.

Step 3. A – Supervisor reviews progress.
Or
B – Supervisor fails to follow up and review progress.

Step 4. Task gets implemented.

3A

3B

Slippage occurs

Often no consequences…

Here's how to avoid system slippage

STEP 1   Supervisory task agreed.

Tasks agreed with the supervisor. This can be to take a decision, solve a problem, initiate improvements or just ensure the job gets done to the agreed standards.

E.g.,
- Ensure all deliveries are dispatched on time.

Or
- Make sure the department responds to all customer queries the same day.

STEP 2   Supervisor delegates the task to individuals or a team. Explaining to them what's required by when and to what standard.

'We need to make sure all deliveries are dispatched on time and that we record the details accurately on the dispatch record. Any questions team?

I will check with you every two hours to see how you are doing.'

STEP 3   A – supervisor checks every 2 hours to ensure deliveries go on time.
Or
B – supervisor 'too busy' on other jobs and forgets to monitor the task. Consequently slippage may occur and the job does not get done.

- The crucial step is step 3 – the review of progress – how are we doing?

  If a supervisor is too busy to follow up and complete the review there is a chance that the task will slip (3B).

- The problem is that this also creates a culture that says to people 'Don't bother seeing things through, nobody really cares' or 'Here we go again, another initiative; if we keep our heads down it will go away.'

- A culture of complacency and not finishing things off is a dangerous one to encourage, even by default.

STORY – BRIAN CRAWSHAW, BRAMALL CONSTRUCTION

Brian Crawshaw the Production Director of Bramall Construction in South Yorkshire understands the problems system slippage can create.

'We run up to 20 construction sites across the North of England. We employ really good guys on site, but we can incur such high penalties for not completing projects on time, that ensuring slippages do not occur is a key part of my job.

'I agree actions with my supervisors and record them in a notebook. I am constantly going around asking 'How are we doing with so and so? Did we get that delivery as promised?' I follow everything up.

'I try to do it in a helpful encouraging way. I think we now have a culture where very little slippage occurs. The results are that we finish all our jobs within the agreed deadlines and our customers are delighted with us.'

This is hard graft day in day out. You don't need an MBA to do it, but Brian's work almost certainly provides Bramalls with its competitive edge, and that's the point.

Here are some actions to take to create a culture of positive supervision that produces results and gets the job done.

- Train your Supervisors in the: Plan – Do – Review cycle. Make it part of people's roles.

- Get into the habit of asking people at all levels: 'Update me on what's happening about 'x' task.' Be like Brian Crawshaw!

- Celebrate success irrespective of how small you perceive it to be. Remember you are celebrating your colleagues success. It is not the other way around!

  Be a role model for reviewing progress. Act like Fred Buijs in the Nestle story.

- Build review into your management meetings.

- Make it part of your culture.

- Hold people responsible for achieving agreed deadlines – whatever it takes.

TIP: Publish a list of initiatives/projects with names, objectives and outcomes to everybody in the business, e.g., one engineering company found it had over 500 different initiatives, many of them duplicating each other, which few people knew about. These projects were consuming over 30% of the management and supervisory time. Few were ever completed successfully.

- If a serious slippage does occur hold a full post mortem and build the lessons into your business process.

- Use the attached proforma in your weekly one to ones. It can be used as a record at the end of the year of what has been achieved by the individual and collectively by your team

Task and completion date agreed	Date Completed	Celebration Required?	Learning to be transferred to individual's development plan
(example) Deliver a presentation to me that outlines to our customer the advantages of using us as a preferred supplier. To be delivered to me by close of play 22/02	*20/2*	*Oh yes!*	*Look for opportunities to offer assistance in putting together PowerPoint presentations*