

## MAKING SUPERVISION SUPER HELPFUL

A little structure in regular supervision meetings can have a big impact on helping team members perform at their best



### About the VALID Employment Project

VALID has been advocating for people with intellectual disability in Victoria since 1989.

In 2019, VALID started the Employment Project to understand what they can do to support employees with intellectual disability to do well in their roles, develop skills and progress their careers.

VALID also wanted to use what they learned to support other employers to do the same.

VALID developed and tested a range of tools, and ways of working to help employers hire people with intellectual disability, and support them to do well at work.



### The Challenge

To do well at work, it's very important to **know what is expected of us**, what we are doing well, and what we should do differently.

Sometimes it can be **hard to know** exactly what we need to do at work, and what our managers expect from us. And this can be even harder for people with intellectual disability or people who have less experience at work.

Managers might find it **difficult to clearly explain** what they expect. This can lead to **misunderstandings** and unpleasant surprises down the track.

Conversations about performance often tend to happen when problems come up, and focus on how to fix them.

Managers and employees may find supervision conversations uncomfortable, and avoid having them regularly.

This means that conversations about **other things** that are **just as important** to supporting people to do a good job **may not happen** as often as they could.

This includes conversations about **what is working**, and why, what new skills we want to **learn**, and what **support we need** to do our best as things change.

Without knowing this, we could be missing out on huge opportunities to **learn about each other, build trust, and help everyone do better at work**.



### What we did

We created a **supervision template** based on a template developed by Helen Sanderson – a **simple, accessible** template to **guide** regular supervision conversations.

The template helps supervision to be **about more than just performance**.

The structured approach helps people to keep having conversations about **support** they need and **skills** they want to learn, and **build trust** with their manager over time.

It gives both people an opportunity to **give and receive feedback** and to develop **clear expectations** about how to do the job well.

#### *About the supervision template:*

- 2-page plain English pictorial template
- Used as a conversation guide during supervision meetings – held weekly, fortnightly or monthly as agreed between the person and their manager
- Separate sections for the most important things to cover – including good things that happened, supports, learning, tasks and performance, and what we appreciate
- Filled in before and during the meeting by manager and employee, who identify the things they want to talk about in each section, and make notes about what is discussed in the meeting



## How it helps:

### EVERYONE

- ✓ Let's everyone **know** what will be discussed (no surprises!)
- ✓ **Prompts** people to **talk about important things** they may not have thought much about – like what new or different supports could help them in their work as their responsibilities change
- ✓ Structures conversations in a way that is **clear, easy to follow** and **transparent** – and keeps conversations on track
- ✓ **Helps everyone remember** what was discussed and agreed – helping everyone to be accountable
- ✓ Provides the chance to **share information**
- ✓ Clearly communicates **what needs to happen next** – things to keep doing, things to do differently
- ✓ **Clear expectations** about what doing a good job looks like
- ✓ Over time, makes it possible to **clearly show how people are improving!**

### EMPLOYEES

- ✓ Helps team members **feel confident and prepared** to have supervision conversations
- ✓ Makes it **easier to bring up uncomfortable topics** for both team members and managers – like things they find difficult, or making a complaint
- ✓ Helps people identify and be **consistently recognised** for the things they are good at
- ✓ Helps maintain **clarity** around role, tasks and responsibilities
- ✓ **Makes sure quality work** is being done
- ✓ Helps them to **grow and progress** their career!

### MANAGERS

- ✓ Systematically helps **build trust** and confidence, **identify ways to support** the employee to do well in their role, and **learn new things** and progress their career.



## The Results

After using the supervision template for 6 months in two teams...

% of VALID staff who used the supervision template...

**75%** thought practices were **useful**

**100%** wanted to **keep using** the practices

*“It made it easy to talk about potential workplace adjustments that could help me do a better job. And you want to give more when you feel supported.”*

*“I was 5’11 when I started, and now I feel like I’m 94 foot tall!”*

*“It’s great to know where you are and how you are going. Otherwise you just keep doing what you are doing, and that might not always be the right thing.”*

*“Raising concerns and issues is not the easiest thing to do. [The supervision template] helps to guide conversation.”*

**Employees** felt that using the template helped them:

- ✓ **build a trusting relationship** with their manager
- ✓ **talk about the supports** they need – many small improvements can add up to a big positive change!
- ✓ work with their manager to **adapt their roles** to **do more** of what they are **really good at and enjoy** doing
- ✓ **know** what they **needed to do in their jobs**
- ✓ feel **more comfortable** talking to their manager about difficult topics
- ✓ talk about **taking on new challenges** and **learning new skills**
- ✓ feel **much better** about themselves, **happier** at work, and more **confident** in their skills

**Managers** also felt that the template helped them:

- ✓ **cover the important topics** they needed to discuss **more efficiently** than without the template
- ✓ **prioritise** the tasks employees should focus on
- ✓ identify ways to **use the employee’s skills** to help them learn and grow
- ✓ **recognise their employees** for the great work they were doing
- ✓ understand **what support they need** to do their best



## The Impact

Feedback collected from employees who used the template clearly showed that **adding a little structure** to supervision conversations has made a **really big positive difference** for the employees who used it, but especially for people with disability and those who are new to the organisation.

## >> So what’s next?

VALID will continue to use the supervision template with staff who already use it, and trial it with other staff in the organisation. After the trial, VALID will check in with everyone again to understand the impact of using the template across the organisation.