Managing people: getting the most out of your team

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Essential skills: Managing a research laboratory. 8th April 2019
Recruitment – students

• Such an important aspect of building a team and for downstream ‘managing!’
  • Appropriate recruitment training
  • Unconscious bias

• U/G-MSc students
  • Email inquires – ‘shortlist’
  • Ask team if anyone keen for a student to develop specific project, and/or for building their CV
  • Set up Skype and then decide if good fit to project and team

• PhD students
  • Always try and respond with further written details
  • Try and set up Skype for ‘informal’ chat prior to any formal interviews
    • Discuss project, what do they find interesting, highlight scope for them to develop project as PhD progresses – ‘enthusiasm’ and ‘fit to team’
  • Interviews: independent panel (only 1 candidate) vs. traditional studentship interview
Recruitment – staff

• Ad hoc emails

• Technicians/project scientists
  • Shortlisting
  • Interview – no presentation
  • ‘Tour’ of lab and meeting the team
    • feedback

• Postdocs
  • Shortlisting
  • Interview – 10 min presentation
    • ‘My most exciting/interesting research and how my background/skills makes me suitable for this post’
  • ‘Tour’ of lab and meeting the team
    • feedback
Initial meeting: setting expectations

• **Students**
  • Analysis of training needs
    • Internal vs external courses
  • Lab contacts
  • Detailed short-term goals

• **Staff**
  • 6 month probation period
  • Clear aims and objectives (2/4/6 months)
  • Scope for interesting side projects

My management approach/style ‘Expectations’
Ongoing management (individual)

- **Students**
  - Monday email highlighting plans for the week
  - Either weekly 30 min meetings or fortnightly 1 hour meetings
    - Student choice
  - Formal supervisory team meetings every 3 months, plus report
  - 9 month ‘probation’
  - Yearly annual extended report and formal meeting

- **Staff**
  - Fortnightly 1 hour meetings
  - Yearly appraisals
  - Fellowship plans/support

Lots of informal face-to-face and email contact
Ongoing management

- Risk management
- Openness
- Focus
- Motivation
- Support
- Representation
- Encouragement
- Freedom
- Communication
- Flexibility
- Opportunities
- Recognition
- Feedback
- Mentoring
- Politics
Team management

Lab meeting
• Weekly
• Informal
  • bespoke form + agenda
  • 2 min updates
  • Lab issues
  • AOB
• Formal
  • presentation + feedback

Team emails
• Communication
  • Core and ‘wider’ team
• Updates
  • ‘Lab’, departmental, institute, wider
• Relevant papers

Project meetings
• Planning
  • Paper plans
  • Setting objectives/tasks
• Ongoing studies
  • Updates
  • Feedback
• Papers
  • Drafts (google docs)
  • Revisions

Lab calendar
• My schedule
  • If out the office
• Annual leave
• Conferences
• Courses
• Sick days
• Lab activities
• Etc.

Team building!
Structured team building: Why?

- Decided to do ‘structured’ team building end of 2016 as team had grown so considerably
  - Lots of different personality types, cultures, scientific/skills backgrounds
  - Facilitated by head of NBI training
    - 1:1 with trainer prior to session to discuss scope and focus
      - based on how lab was working, and also some potential issues that might arise
    - Day long session followed by team dinner and drinks

- Pre-work included a MBTI (Myers Briggs Type Indicator) Questionnaire
  - Why was this used?
  - Asked trainer to work with the team to explore and understand the most effective ways to communicate and work together
    - MBTI well-documented way of considering personal preferences, understanding individual differences especially in relation to communications, and working with others
What’s Your Personality Type?

Use the questions on the outside of the chart to determine the four letters of your Myers-Briggs type. For each pair of letters, choose the side that seems most natural to you, even if you don’t agree with every description.

1. Are you outwardly or inwardly focused? If you:
   - Could be described as talkative, outgoing
   - Like to be in a fast-paced environment
   - Tend to work out ideas with others, think out loud
   - Enjoy being at the center of attention
   then you prefer E Extraversion
   - Could be described as reserved, private
   - Prefer a slower pace with time for contemplation
   - Tend to think things through inside your head
   - Would rather observe than be the center of attention
   then you prefer I Introversion
   - ISTJ
     Responsible, sincere, analytical, reserved, realistic, systematic. Hardworking and trustworthy with sound practical judgment.
   - ISFJ
     Warm, considerate, gentle, responsible, pragmatic, thorough. Devoted caretakers who enjoy being helpful to others.
   - INFJ
     Idealistic, organized, insightful, dependable, compassionate, gentle. Seek harmony and cooperation, enjoy intellectual stimulation.
   - INTJ
     Innovative, independent, strategic, logical, reserved, insightful. Driven by their own original ideas to achieve improvements.

2. How do you prefer to take in information? If you:
   - Focus on the reality of how things are
   - Pay attention to concrete facts and details
   - Prefer ideas that have practical applications
   - Like to describe things in a specific, literal way
   then you prefer S Sensing
   - Imagine the possibilities of how things could be
   - Notice the big picture, see how everything connects
   - Enjoy ideas and concepts for their own sake
   - Like to describe things in a figurative, poetic way
   then you prefer N Intuition
   - ESTJ
     Outgoing, realistic, action-oriented, curious, versatile, spontaneous. Pragmatic problem solvers and skillful negotiators.
   - ESFP
     Playful, enthusiastic, friendly, spontaneous, tactful, flexible. Have strong common sense, enjoy helping people in tangible ways.
   - ENFJ
     Enthusiastic, creative, spontaneous, optimistic, supportive, playful. Value inspiration, enjoy starting new projects, see potential in others.
   - ENTP
     Inventive, enthusiastic, strategic, enterprising, inquisitive, versatile. Value challenges, like change and innovation.

3. How do you prefer to make decisions? If you:
   - Base your decisions on personal values and how your actions affect others
   - Value harmony, forgiveness
   - Like to please others and point out the best in people
   - Could be described as warm, empathetic
   then you prefer T Thinking
   - ISTP
     Action-oriented, logical, analytical, spontaneous, reserved, independent. Enjoy adventure, skilled at understanding how mechanical things work.
   - ISFP
     Gentle, sensitive, nurturing, helpful, flexible, realistic. Seek to create a personal environment that is both beautiful and practical.
   - INFP
     Sensitive, creative, idealistic, perceptive, caring, loyal. Value inner harmony and personal growth, focus on dreams and possibilities.
   - INTP
     Intellectual, logical, precise, reserved, flexible, imaginative. Original thinkers who enjoy speculation and creative problem solving.

4. How do you prefer to live your outer life? If you:
   - Prefer to have matters settled
   - Think rules and deadlines should be respected
   - Prefer to have detailed, step-by-step instructions
   - Make plans, want to know what you’re getting into
   then you prefer J Judging
   - ESTJ
     Efficient, outgoing, analytical, systematic, dependable, realistic. Like to run the show and get things done in an orderly fashion.
   - ENFJ
     Caring, enthusiastic, idealistic, organized, diplomatic, responsible. Skilled communications who value connection with people.
   - ENTP
     Strategic, logical, efficient, outgoing, ambitious, independent. Effective organizers of people and long-range planners.
   - ENTJ
     Innovative, enthusiastic, strategic, enterprising, inquisitive, versatile. Value challenges, like change and innovation.
Structured team building: Outputs

What I learnt
• VERY diverse team!
• Needed to change informal lab meeting format to include ‘introverted’ personality types
• Most of the team likes detail – so changed* meeting formats to improve this
• By in large team was happy – but things for improvement

What team learnt
• VERY diverse team!
• May need to change communication styles for certain members to create positive engagement/motivation

Overall Benefits

Better relationships

Improved productivity

Great ideas put into practice

Enhanced motivation

Problem solving and creativity
Activity: learning styles

Thanks to: Vanda Morgan – head of NBI training
STEP 1: ASSEMBLE PART A TO PART B.

STEP 2: GLUE THESE PIECES SECURELY.

STEP 3: FIND PART C AND CONNECT TO PART D...
Concrete Experience (feeling) 

Testing in New Situations (applying) 

Observation & Reflection (watching) 

Forming Abstract Concepts (thinking) 

Kolb’s ‘Learning Styles’ from Kolb & Fry (1975)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Style Preference</th>
<th>Thumb nail descriptors of how they prefer to learn</th>
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| **Activist**              | Hands on; experiential  
Can I have a go at doing this now?  
Trial and error |
| **Reflector**             | Tell me; prepared and pre-thought  
Can I have a think about that?  
Briefed before proceeding |
| **Theorist**              | Convince me; pre-read  
Why / how does it work that way?  
Clarity; does this make sense? |
| **Pragmatist**            | Show me; practical application  
How will this work in the real world?  
Likes an expert to demonstrate |
What is your strongest preference?

A. Activist
B. Reflector
C. Theorist
D. Pragmatist
The CPD cycle

Planning (PDP)

Reflection

Learning (CPD)
Fun team building!

- Planned dinner/drinks or ‘event’ every 3 months
- Informal drinks last Friday every month
- Half or day long team building activity every ~6 months
  - Paid for by ‘media’ fees

PE & Team Building
‘Guardians of the Gut’
Leadership training: Why, and what have I done?

• Scientists are not normally trained in ‘leadership’ or managing teams
  • Needed some diverse training in different approaches/tools to improve management skills

• EMBO lab management course
• Media/PE training
• Managing change
• Effective appraisals
• 360° feedback
• PhD supervisor training
• Mentoring/Coaching
• Leadership programme
  • Reflecting on interactions
  • Difficult conversations
• Mental health training
Difficult conversations

• Difficult conversations are part of managing a team
  • really important to have these effectively for productive outcomes for all parties
  • BUT I find these really difficult(!), as do many others

Think of a difficult interaction between you and a colleague – representative of the kinds of situations you want to handle more effectively
Difficult conversations

- Briefly describe the context of the situation
  - who was involved, what were you trying to accomplish?
- Describe the actual conversation

| My unspoken thoughts and feelings | What we actually said and did |

- Reflections and questions
  - From your point of view what were the most problematic results of the conversation (i.e. what do you wish has turned out differently?)
  - What questions do you have about the incident or how you handled it?
  - What would you hope to learn, or what did you learn from the incident?

Desired results
Strategy for getting results
What would you say differently... dialogue
Framing the conversation

What are the reasons for this conversation?

Why do I need to have this conversation now?

What factors have contributed to this?

What do I want to happen?
Practicalities: when and where?

• Arrange the meeting sooner rather than later
  • If there is a problem, it is better to deal with it quickly and efficiently
  • Try to arrange the meeting in a place that is private and where you and your colleague won’t be interrupted

• Book a meeting room if possible as it’s neutral – or take a walk!

• Avoid sitting behind a desk and creating an automatic barrier
  • Immediate sense of hierarchy

• Arrange the meeting at the end of the day so your colleague can leave meeting and reflect on conversation

• Let your colleague know what the meeting is about beforehand so that they don’t arrive ‘cold’
How to open the conversation

Can use KISS technique to open meeting
• Important your colleague understands reason for meeting
• Keep introduction short (e.g. 2/3 minutes)
• Thank your colleague for meeting with you
  • essential to show respect and remain professional at all times
• Briefly explain
  • why you are meeting now
  • what has led to the current situation
  • the impact of the situation
• Use clear and straightforward language so that there is no ambiguity
  • e.g. ‘We are here to discuss the quality of your presentations’
Tips to prepare for a difficult conversation

Check your assumptions (and avoid pitfalls)

- *I’m certain I’m right*
  - *Try:* I have a point of view, and might be missing something important
- *This is their fault*
  - *Try:* Both of us may have contributed in ways we can’t fully see
- *I must avoid saying anything to upset them*
  - *Try:* Upsetting in not fun, but may be necessary for learning
- *Help them see it my way OR defer to them*
  - *Try:* Help us both learn and create shared understanding

Plan your actions

- *Create a mutual agenda*
  - *Tell my purposes, and ask for theirs*
- *Advocate fully*
  - *State conclusion, explain reasoning, and illustrate with examples*
- *Inquire*
  - *For reactions to my views*
  - *For their views, reasoning and examples*
  - *To fill my blind spots*
    - *my contributions, my impact, their intentions, what they’re up against*
    - *Paraphrase and check my understanding*
- *Conclude concretely*
  - *Ask for and/or offer help*
  - *Raise and ask for any lingering concerns*
  - *Agree on next steps for each to take*

Assume good intentions
Dealing with difficulty?

- Be professional
- Avoid over-explaining
- Be comfortable with silence
- Stop the conversation

Solutions
Managing up

• Most people don’t quit jobs they quit bosses
• Job satisfaction not normally workload, salary etc., actually relationship with ‘boss’
• People promoted for technical/outputs, rather than ‘people’ skills
  • Also limited training often given – or some cases offered, but not taken...

Observe behavioural and communication styles

Think about the “what’s in it for them?” each time you approach them

Be a proactive communicator: keep them updated

Keep a good/positive attitude

Help support their weaknesses

Stand firm

Try and keep doing a good job
Ongoing challenges

- Short-term contracts
- Mental health
- Managing expectations
- Focus
- Grant income
- Team dynamics
- H&S
- Outputs
- Engaging
- Managing exits
- Rejection
- People taking advantage
- Data integrity
- Difficult conversations
- Institute changes
- Saying no
- Achieving the ‘vision’
- Time management
- Being an effective team leader!