

Managers as Developers of Others: Personal experiences of pleasure and pain

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Managers as Developers of Others: Personal experiences of pleasure and pain

This paper presents a small selection of a large volume of data collected in a study by IES. The study investigated the behaviour of managers who are good at developing other people in the workplace. It was conducted in four major UK organisations. Accounts of effective and ineffective development by managers were collected from 51 people – a mix of employees who received good development support at work (we call these ‘receivers’) and managers who had given good development support (we call these ‘givers’). These participants described 99 specific experiences of development in the workplace, both positive and negative. The ‘receivers’ were at very varied career stages and levels within the organisation, from junior office staff to senior managers. Some were on formal professional training schemes.

We defined *effective development support*, as experienced by the individual, to be:

... any discussions or activities that have been of significant value to you in developing your skills, experience, or career. The support could be from any manager (not necessarily your direct boss), but we are concentrating on managers in line roles, rather than training or HR professionals. The support may be formal or informal, and could be quite recent or some years ago.

To preserve confidentiality, individual and organisation names, and details of job content, have been removed. The initial R replaces the name of the ‘receiver’ of support, with G for the ‘giver’ of support. The title of each example shows whether it was reported by the ‘receiver’ (R) or ‘giver’ (G). The passages are extracts from longer accounts. The sections in italics are in the words of the interviewee. Paragraphs are marked to indicate a giver or receiver account, and of a positive or negative experience:

G+ **G–** **R+** **R–**

There are two companion papers, *Managers as Developers of Others: Main findings of an IES research study* presenting our main research findings, and *Managers as Developers of Others: A literature review*, for those wanting to examine a wider range of theoretical and practical material on this topic, are also available.

We hope that the illustrative material presented here may be a useful complement to the summary of research findings, especially in discussions or training sessions with managers and employees. The first set of accounts show the many ways in which good managers develop people. The second set show how not to do it.

Some positive examples of managers developing others

R+

P1. R looking back on one of her first line managers

G spotted R's potential and gave her increased responsibility through a temporary promotion. *'The development was all focused on getting the job done by means of either learning on the job or training in response to whatever issues arose. He had incredible faith in me and gave me the responsibility to match. I felt that I couldn't let him down and that I had to prove myself. When I went for promotion, G was very helpful and positive. We did mock interviews. The biggest impact was increased confidence and motivation. It proved to me I'm capable of working well in a busy environment.'*

R+

P2. R's account of her line manager over the past five years

G has consistently discussed development needs. *'When we discussed training opportunities, the focus would be on what would primarily benefit me, and not just what was beneficial to the organisation. My manager would look for tasks to stretch and challenge me, giving me the opportunity to work on a higher level than the grade I was actually working in at the time.'*

R feels motivated and secure in her job, in spite of some disappointment caused by lack of promotion opportunities. *'I have grown as a person, I have developed myself and increased my skills.'*

R+

P3. R's description of support from her boss's boss

R works closely with G, who is two levels above her as the manager of her own line manager. *'The majority of the support is informal, as I see and talk to her all the time, she knows where I am up to. A lot of the development initially starts through just talking in everyday conversations.'*

G has supported R in getting onto a management development scheme. G also gives advice and guidance in regards to applying for specific jobs. *'She helps me to get additional training, and puts me in touch with the right people to make career progress.'*

G helped her to identify which specific skills she needed and gave her opportunities to develop those skills, looking for tasks to stretch her, and allowing her opportunities to work on different projects to gain more experience. *'She gives instructions in terms of goals, but gives flexibility about how to get there. In previous jobs, instructions could be absolutely rigid. The workplace feels a safe environment where I can try new things, and make mistakes without strong repercussions. I have learned to think outside the box, to think creatively and to be open to new ideas.'*

R+

P4. R describing support from her line manager

After a failure to get promoted, G gave her a thorough debriefing session. *'I was surprised by the amount of time he was prepared to spend ... it took over an hour and he is a very busy man.'*

She felt she had identified areas for improvement for next time. G's interest encouraged R to. *'...read up on certain topics and to really put the effort in, seeing as G was putting in the time and effort to help. I was really surprised by the level of support I got.'*

G got her involved in other projects which had nothing to do with her job, but would provide her with the opportunity to be forward thinking and open-minded. *'He had a lot of faith in me, he'd say things like, "I'm here if you need me – you have the skills to do it." My confidence grew and grew.'*

The fact that G has put so much effort in, and is prepared to put in more effort in the future, makes R feel *'very special and valued'*. She originally left the same organisation 15 years ago because she got very frustrated about promotion and progression. *'But the organisation is a lot better now. The level of training is astonishing compared to 15 years ago.'*

R feels that it would be unrealistic to think that all employees get the same treatment and experience the same level of support as she has.

R+

P5. R in a new job, working closely with two managers

R worked closely with two managers, her boss and boss's boss. They both gave her quality work to do which really stretched her, and encouraged her to go for promotion by giving her coaching, setting up mock interviews *etc.* They both gave her regular feedback concerning her performance. *'I was genuinely shocked that my managers have such a positive attitude towards their work, to the department and to me. I just wasn't used to being encouraged so much. Most managers I'd had in the past never seemed to be as concerned. The support seemed to be tied into the day-to-day management of the team. The managers would never say that they were specifically going to focus on development. It was part of their job as they saw it to support and encourage their staff. What I really liked was that they would really listen to any ideas that anyone in the team had if it concerned their development. They would give me words of encouragement all the time like "you can do it." They had faith in me and gave me responsibilities. It made me a happier person.'*

R felt this support had an effect on how positively she thought about the organisation. *'Even though I am not currently a manager, the experience has also shaped my views of how to be an effective manager.'*

R+**P6. R's line manager supporting him in a new business venture**

The development support was both formal (training courses) and informal during a challenging project. *'We worked closely together, and I was always able to ask questions on an ad hoc basis. G outlined the sort of processes and procedures that needed to be followed and I had to report back to him at specific intervals, commenting on what stage I was up to, what progress I was making, and if there were any problems. When I'd say something, he'd rephrase it and put it back to me as a question. I thought it was really good that he helped me to find the answers to my own questions.'*

'One of the most important things about G was that he has a great sense of humour ... it was good fun working with each other, because although sometimes the work was serious, you knew that the people you were working with were light-hearted. G wasn't judgmental at all, so I would never hesitate to chat to G, and we would try and work round the problem. It was never the case that we had to be careful about what we said to each other [referring to all the team members], we could just be frank and honest, and enjoy working together. Because we were working closely on the project, it was easy for him to see where my strengths and weaknesses were. And it wasn't just that, he got me involved in a mixture of roles that made the best of the things I was good at and gave me experience of the things that I needed to work on. It made me feel great.'

'G really stuck up for me, he was on my side. I still look back on those five years as the most rewarding and satisfying of my career so far. I would pull out all the stops for him.'

G+**P7. G supporting an employee with emotional problems**

G came into a department and took over managing R who was already on secondment there. R had been in and out of work due to various emotional problems. *'R was said to be 'emotionally distressed' and this was significantly detracting from her job performance. It actually got so bad that sometimes she would run out of meetings because of severe emotional reactions to other people. I initiated discussions because of what I was seeing, and also because of what came out of the appraisal process in terms of her describing how she was feeling. I had every confidence in her that she was a good performer and could do her job well. She just didn't have the right tools in order to cope with some of the other employees in the department. My focus was on what we could actually do practically.'*

R had found out about a course on emotional intelligence, which she felt might help her. *'Before the course started we sat down and had discussions about what she wanted to get out of it. In addition, during and after the course, we had many informal discussions about what she was learning and how it was affecting her. I was genuinely interested in how she was getting on, and she told me that she felt that she could come and talk to me when it was convenient to do so. At the same time, she*

was respectful that I am very busy, and I never felt as though she was pestering me. Sometimes she'd even be in tears in my office, but I didn't feel awkward about it, it wasn't unpleasant. I knew she was good at her job and it was really important to me as her manager, and to the department that she was able to resolve the issues she was having and get back on her feet.'

In practical terms, G also realigned R's objectives so that she didn't have work piling up whilst she was going through this crisis. *'The emotional intelligence course was a life-changing experience for her. It resolved a lot of her problems and gave her many techniques to deal with her emotions and other people. She returned from her secondment to her original department at a higher job level.'*

G+ P8. G supporting R who lacked technical skills in a new work area

R was recruited into a post overseas and, being the *'best of a bad bunch'*, in terms of fitting the job spec, needed a lot of technical training over the first two to three years in this type of work. *'I had a lot of background knowledge and experience and knew all about R's role and exactly what sort of things she needed to know and do in order to do the role effectively. I assessed her development needs to find out exactly what it was she needed. I looked at the job requirements and compared them to a checklist of competencies.'*

G aimed to be approachable. *'You have to make yourself available so that they feel as though they can ask you anything. I know when I was in her shoes, sometimes I just wanted to ask my manager something just for some reassurance, and it was great when he responded positively adding on the end "...come back and ask me again if you get stuck."* I would never really criticise any mistakes that she made, and would just look upon them as a learning experience. *It just doesn't make sense to get angry and shout because it doesn't achieve anything. It makes it less likely that they will come and seek your help when they needed it, which slows things down. I remember when I was a junior, spending half a day trying to figure something out for myself just because I didn't want to ask my boss.*

'Over time, she demonstrated a visible gain in confidence. She is now in a pivotal role, where she is seen as an expert. She is very successful in her job.'

G+ P9. G supporting high potential graduate entrants

G is line manager to high potential graduate entrants. He sees his role as to *'show them the ropes'* and to give advice. At the very start of the process, G and R sit down and work out objectives, and do an extensive training needs analysis. *'I am not just interested in ticking a box about a specific competency. There is no point in saying – "oh okay we've covered that now, so just forget about it and we can move onto something else."* You have to be able to remember what they have learned and look for situations in which they can apply it.

'It is important to constantly see how things are going, to talk about if they are happy in their job, and ask them if there is anything they would like to do differently. It is quite common for them to need assistance in understanding how the organisation does business. It is important that R understands what they will contribute to the department as a whole. At the very start, it is important to extend their line of sight. This helps the development process enormously because they learn to think outside of the box.'

G sees it as important to set aside time to give development in specific tasks. *'For example, if an employee needs to be able to write important documents well, it is important to explain what is required and how to actually do it. Then you should give them an example to try and get them to do it on their own, then give feedback and talk about it. Then if they have proven that they are competent, just leave them to get on with it.'*

'Trust is also really important, if employees feel that you have confidence in them, then they themselves have more confidence.'

G+

P10. G supporting R through a promotion process

The issue of promotion came up in a one-to-one meeting between R and G. The first thing that G did was to get R to prepare a summary of the projects she had worked on, and the various skills which she had learned, in order to assess if there were any development gaps that existed. G then involved R briefly with a project to give her a wider appreciation of the work. *'I thought it would make her position stronger if she had some experience of the types of issues that we deal with in the field. Before she went out on this visit, we had a chat about her involvement and what she could expect to come away with.'*

Meetings with R were mostly fixed on an *ad hoc* basis. G recognised R was highly motivated and tried to keep the relationship *'very positive and light hearted'*.

Ultimately, R gained her promotion. *'Giving employees adequate development support for promotion really helps to build their confidence, which in turn, comes across at interview.'*

G+

P11. G tackling a member of staff who was annoying other team members

R was ambitious about development, so much so that other staff felt he was treading on their toes. *'He was almost aggressive in searching out development opportunities for himself. It was difficult because I had to be careful that other people didn't get pushed out of the way.'*

G raised this issue with R after a few months in one of their one-to-one meetings. *'As I saw it, it just wasn't fair on the other employees, and I told him that he needed to back down a bit as he wasn't doing*

himself any favours in the long run. Although R wasn't particularly happy with the situation, he agreed that there were other people who wanted the same opportunities that he did, and that it would start to cause problems with his colleagues if he kept on acting the way he did.'

R+

P12. R with a line manager who raised her confidence

R was a team leader. *'G used 360 feedback and asked me what I thought my strengths and development areas were. I came up with about 20 development areas but couldn't think of any strengths. She said I needed to raise my confidence. She kept pushing me outside of my comfort zone. She would ask open questions, she would listen and picked up any confidence issues. I would go to team leaders' meetings and I would be happy when they were my own group, but when in a new group I would be intimidated and I would barely speak. G observed that I wasn't the only one struggling, and she would work with us and get us to work with each other.*

'She would talk me through things. I got a massive amount of feedback. We would talk about something before I did it and then after. She would tell me what went well and what I could have done better. She would encourage me to do things in the team leader meeting – she would tell me that I had done really well, she would point out what wasn't clear. She developed an open relationship and built up the trust – she is a good judge of character. She asks people to be open and set expectations that she would be open and challenging.

'I was only with her for four months, and got more development than any other time in my career. She made me think about how I treat other people ... I now think about people's potential. This was the first time I had experienced that kind of management style. It was a complete turning point for me. Other managers had offered responsibility and then set parameters, whereas she was allowing much more freedom. I think I helped by being honest with myself, once I could see the development experiences I would run with them.'

R+

P13. R reporting on support in the run up to a job move

R was supported by G over two years, but especially in the month preceding a job move. This involved a lot of largely informal discussions in addition to the regular formal one-to-one meetings, which he had always received. *'G asked me a lot of questions about my future and where I thought I should be setting my sights. G was impartial and honest. As G was able to observe me in the workplace, he was able to identify my strengths and weaknesses. This meant that he could keep an eye out for opportunities. If it hadn't been for G then, I wouldn't have heard about the job. He had his ear to the ground, he found the opportunity and thought of me. He was just really altruistic, he didn't have to spend as much time with me as he did.'*

R+**P14. R receiving encouragement from a senior manager**

'I didn't report to G but worked in her department (G was several levels above R). I would see her around. I noticed that she had photos of her doing a degree sponsored by the organisation and I had been thinking about doing something similar.'

G arranged for the organisation to sponsor R on some external studies. *'She asked me how I was getting on and was willing to sign me off on study leave. It was only a small thing, but she was very encouraging and she would talk to me about it.'*

Later R noticed a very costly business problem, which she worked on intensively with G to resolve. *'She took me to all of the meetings, she would come and sit in the main office rather than in her own office. She took time out to talk to me, she was very trusting and we worked closely together for a couple of weeks. She would convey every confidence in me.'*

'A year ago I was thinking about carrying out my ambition to do a degree and I sent G an email to ask her advice – at that time I hadn't worked with her for over two years. She sent me a really long email saying how well she thought I had done, and that I should think carefully about the time that I would need to give to the degree. I was impressed that she had taken time out to do that – I thought it was brilliant.'

R+**P15. R helped by his manager to address his own management skills**

'When I entered the role I was the referral point for a number of [call centre] staff which I found hard. I got a lot of questions. When I had been in the job for about a month and some staff had their reviews, they said I wasn't approachable and I didn't have time for them.'

'My manager G was sensitive, ever so nice. She kept the feedback very light, said she was pleased with my work, that she knew I was busy, that she had some feedback that she wanted to discuss and she wanted to see how she could help me more. She said it was just an issue of people management skills. She put me on a time management course and said we needed to find out why people were referring so much to me. She reviewed the whole situation with me and helped improve my staff management. She told me that I would change my posture when people approached me to put them off. I didn't realise that I did that and became more self-aware. We also laid on some staff training.'

'G just being there was a support. She would take on some of the workload and would give me one-to-one time each day. We would talk about the problems I was having and would help overcome them. She was supportive without taking over the work I was doing.'

'Once my management skills got better the stress came off, my attitude changed and how I came across changed too. She also gave me coaching on the job role – how to work inside the system and how to use it.'

R+

P16. R being supported on moving from temp to permanent employee

R knew G before she moved from a temp role to permanent employment with the organisation. At this time R felt quite inadequate compared to the rest of the people in the department. G, as her manager, initiated the period of support as part of the formal induction process. *'G went over and above the formal process in making sure I received the right training and development for my new role. G always knew where I was up to and what I was doing. I could chat to him or go to him with any difficulties I was having. If I went on any external training courses, then we would always sit down in our one-to-ones and discuss what I wanted to get out of the training and the points which I should pay most attention to. In addition, after the training, we would chat about what it was like, and review what I had learned and how I might go about applying such things in the workplace.'*

After she had been there for three months, R had her first three-month review. *'Other people in the organisation had spoken about the three-month review as some big thing, but because there had been a constant dialogue, the meeting was very relaxed, and we were able to reflect effectively on the previous three months. G was in a position to give some really strong, constructive feedback and encouragement.'*

R saw this support as helping her to settle in quickly and establish a good relationship with her manager. As time went on R felt that she was able to pull her weight, and because of this she felt less anxiety about the job. R felt she achieved performance improvements faster because of the good support she was receiving.

R+

P17. R receiving support in developing team leader skills

G supported R in a secondment to develop her skills as a team leader. They also discussed particular work issues, eg how to handle conflict in the team. *'It wasn't just that she was approachable, she'd always set time aside and she'd stick to it too. With some managers I'd had in the past, they say come and see me at such and such a time, and then when the time came you could tell they just wanted to get it over with so they could get on with their work. They didn't see it as part of their job, it was like extra hassle.'*

'I think that if you want your manager to support you, then you need to be in close contact with them, that they need to know your situation.'

'Even though I now work in a different department from G, we still keep in touch and let each other know how we're doing. It was comforting to have a manager who was genuinely interested in my development.' The secondment widened R's work experience and organisational understanding.

R+**P18. G supporting someone new to a role in her team**

R had recently been promoted to G's team, and was finding it really difficult to adjust to the new role. *'When someone starts a new role, it is always stressful, there's always loads to learn and loads to do.'*

G sat down with R early on and looked through what sort of training courses R could go on. Next, G made sure that R was able to get involved with other projects that were currently running, so that R could observe first hand other people doing the same job.

'I think to develop someone quickly you do have to throw them in at the deep end, which is always going to be stressful. But you also have to provide a high level of support for them too. You have to make it explicit why you are doing what you are doing and what they are going to learn from it.'

'I use weekly one-to-ones to keep up-to-date with how everyone is doing. I feel that I don't have to make time, because it is already booked into my schedule. The regular one-to-ones also give me a chance to get to know the employees I work with a bit more. Because they are every week, after a while, people really start to open up. You get to talk about things that you wouldn't really talk about in every day work.'

R was able to grow into her role without too much difficulty. R is now fully competent in the role and less stressed than she was when she started the job.

R+**P19. R working with a senior manager, an internal customer**

R was about to present a proposal to a meeting of the leadership team, including G, a senior sponsor of her work. There was no line reporting relationship between R and G.

'Ahead of the meeting I went to see G to seek his advice. I knew him pretty well at this time. He had been hard to get to know, but I had spent time building up credibility with him. I felt I had a relationship with him that was unlike any other I had in the organisation. I used the meeting with him to discuss how to get a win-win situation for both of us out of the [leadership team] meeting. After this initial conversation, we had several follow-ups – emails, telephone conversations, and quick chats over the three to four weeks before the main meeting.'

R knew how she wanted to present her proposal, but was unsure that the leadership team was ready for this approach. *'G helped and supported me in the meeting and gave valuable feedback on how I was perceived. His support was critical to the success of presentation, both because he made time and was open to my suggested approach, but also was never patronising. He never just provided the answer. He advised me to remove jargon, put in money values and benchmarking data, but not to get bogged down in figures.'*

R had considered carefully who to approach for advice on this issue. She had chosen G because he had been supportive previously, but also because she saw him as willing to take risks. The success of this presentation felt good and also led to further opportunities in this area of work and increased pay.

'It gave me increased confidence in presenting to senior management. I continue to have a relationship with this manager, and talk to him about career and work issues.'

R+

P20. R in his first job outside his main discipline

R worked as an assistant to G, a general manager. *'One day during my first two to three weeks in the job, G said to me, "You don't need to ask me. Take responsibility to sign off and do things." This made me think "Really it is up to me after all!" All this took place in a routine meeting that only lasted 10 minutes – something he will forget and I will remember forever.*

'G enabled me to push boundaries for myself, get comfortable in taking decisions, and network with colleagues. G had a strong reputation for the way he worked with his staff. He wanted them to test boundaries for themselves. This was something that was less usual for people in technical roles (R's early career had been technical).

'He totally changed the context of the role for me – changed the goalposts entirely. He saw huge creative possibilities in the role. I was empowered to act on his behalf. He trusted me.'

R sees G as seeking to role model the organisation's desired leadership style. *'He was almost too open, too space giving – and was frustrated with people not taking the space. But he drew on his experience, personal style, and natural instincts. In the end I could have done with more boundaries sometimes. Sometimes I needed time with him when he was not available.*

'G had a big impact on the way I subsequently managed people. R now reflects that although this empowering style suited that role, it was not a recipe for success in all situations. There is no one size fits all – I tried to apply it [G's style] to another team and it didn't work. I feel that I have often been supported, but in many different ways. Currently, eg I am getting more structured coaching from my line manager.'

G+

P21. G coaxing R to develop her potential

R had been a secretary for many years. G felt R was capable of moving on to a more demanding role.

'R was terrific in her present role, but she had lacked the confidence to move into a new role outside her comfort zone. I initiated a discussion with R about her future. She was not keen to move on. She liked her present job and it fitted with her personal situation, as a mother of young children. I decided nevertheless to give R more accountability and to

involve her more in activities associated with my work. I invited R to attend a leadership team meeting to get a business perspective and to help her understand how decisions were made. I made a point of asking R for her views in the meeting.

'In a subsequent meeting that discussed possible future roles, I got R interested in [a particular area of work in a different team], and then got her involved in organising a conference with that team. I also got her the opportunity to job shadow in that team. R described it as interesting but still felt she could not do the job, primarily because of wanting to work limited hours while she had young children. So she decided not to take the job opportunity that was available at that time.'

Some time later R felt she was ready for a move, and another opportunity came up in the work area she had looked at before. By now R had the confidence to go for it and moved. The whole process took about 18 months.

'I saw the challenge as R having to build a different view of herself and then being confident enough to take a step towards it. I needed to show empathy and understanding of what was getting in the way of R progressing. I gave constructive feedback to reinforce and build confidence in her own abilities. This included giving immediate feedback on her work and encouraging her to seek advice from me and others. R is now working in her new role as though she was always able to do it. She is very comfortable with her new role, has much increased confidence, and is taking developmental opportunities proactively.'

R+

P22. R reporting on active career support from a senior manager

G was in R's reporting line but three levels above him. This period of support was 15 years ago and lasted two to three years. *'Because it was a small office (about 35 people), G knew all the people quite well. He came out of his office and learned about people. He recognised my potential. The relationship started informally. He said he was pleased with my work – he didn't have to. He talked to me, but he did this with everyone.'*

G used the annual reporting cycle to get R's potential recognised in the organisation. *'He had a game plan for making me look good – this consisted of using the annual reporting cycle to build up from good to very good to excellent. It was unusual for someone to get that involved.'* R assumes his career was discussed by G and his line manager. *'G had an idea of the grade I could reach over a five-year period. The common thread in the relationship was G saying "that was well done" and talking about my ability to move on. He made it clear that he appreciated what you did.'*

'G gave me access to the right experiences – sideways moves within the office and management responsibility – this was very important. My immediate boss was more involved in day-to-day development, but G did help identify my development needs.'

'He made me feel valued, that I had something to contribute – not just coming into work and turning over correspondence. I would have carried on moving more quickly if I had been tactically astute and hadn't then come across the manager who was a horror story. Other managers were quite good if they liked you. It was important that we worked together for long enough for him to make a real input. Continuity is important in development. He was also 'planful' in how he went about my career support.'

R+

P23. R on effective development support during a difficult time

G was R's line manager during an intensive period of professional training. She described him as a *'cross between a manager and a mentor.'*

'It was easy to talk to him. Any weaknesses were not used against me. I didn't feel nervous or worried going to see him – I went to see him whenever I needed to. He never seemed too busy and you did not feel you were wasting his time. If he was busy, he looked at his diary and fixed a time.'

'His approach seemed quite intuitive – a natural style. He let you get on with the work and treated you as quite senior. He did not over-supervise me. This suited me as I don't like a hands-on manager.'

'Although his approach appeared informal, he did keep careful information on my progress. He let you know where you were in terms of the standards you have to meet. Too often people don't know this. We regularly discussed specific cases. We discussed his ideas and my ideas. He gave me feedback after meetings. He was open – had no reticence. He never made negative comments. He provided confidence and constructive feedback – he picked out the positive. Failure was not turned into an excuse to run you down or have a go at you.'

'I had a period of ill health during this training and was off work for two months. It put my training at risk. G kept in close contact by phone. When I came back he agreed I could work part-time without loss of pay. I didn't know how well I would manage while I was still unwell. G encouraged me not to give up.'

'He focused me on my training priorities and lightened up office casework. He provided options. We took it one step at a time and did not prejudge the future. He put a lot of trust in me – that I wasn't messing around or taking advantage. If I was having a bad day, I could just go home. He dealt with all this locally – involving his senior manager and the medical officer – he got the right people involved but did not follow the rules inflexibly.'

R completed the training successfully. *'This was a make or break time for me. The outcome was successful for me and for the organisation. They have kept an able and willing person. I have a huge respect for G as a person and as a manager.'*

R+**P24. R supported by a junior manager**

R's first line manager, many years ago, supported her for the first 18 months while he was her line manager, but then carried on informally for about four years.

'The support was mostly informal. He set time aside to talk to me about my work – he did this with others also. He identified things I could cope with and things I would find stretching. He got me to think about work. For example, he would give me a piece of correspondence and say "find out what you can about this".' R would look up technical issues to do with this and then come back. 'He had a very practical outlook. Encouraging and appreciative – positive about what I was saying. Even though he was somewhat limited technically himself, he never dismissed technical stuff.

'As people we were very different, although somewhat similar in terms of background. He was quite wily and political. G was not very senior but took pleasure in seeing others progress. He had a good understanding of what makes people tick. He helped me understand people better as well as the work – some of this was political. He was very good with the public and with external clients. He allowed me to answer the phone when the senior person who usually did this was not there.

'G had a clear basic model for development – giving people manageable work, reviewing it with them, reflecting on what had happened and then moving forward. G called his team the 'bees knees' when talking to others. If there was negative stuff, he handled it within the team.

'It made you feel nice. I felt I was really learning, even though there was a lot to know. The people skills were especially helpful later on when I became a manager. Some other people might be surprised to know how good he was – he was not necessarily widely recognised in the organisation as a highly successful manager.'

Much later, when she had overtaken him in promotion terms, their relationship adjusted, but they continued to support each other. *'He never resented it when I had overtaken him in career terms.'*

R+**P25. R on a line manager who helped him work more effectively**

G made it clear to R that he needed to give his professional exams a high priority. R often struggled with the combination of high workload and study.

'G noticed that I was working very long hours and suggested there were ways of dealing with the job which were more efficient. At one point when I was struggling with workload, G told me to give it three months as the jobs I was working on would settle down and I needed those jobs to give me the right range of experience. He saw the danger of not achieving targets. He had a good understanding of what I needed to do and good judgement. His advice was very honest and thoughtful, but not always

the easy answer. I could approach G anytime – he was quite open – this was part of his approach.

'G sometimes sought advice from me too – he respected your knowledge in an equivalent way – it was reciprocal. G gave me a small group of clients 'to play with'. We talked about these clients, and used them as real examples to talk through technical issues.

'He would not let you loose if you were not up to the job – but would let you loose when you were up to it. G selected work suitable for trainees – other managers let trainees choose their own work or gave them too much rubbish or routine work. G protected trainees from poor quality work. G's style adapted to different trainees.

'G had quite old-fashioned values – he kept his private life quite private, kept work and life quite separate.

'I felt more secure with G than I do now – I felt secure in my work, I could discuss my mistakes, I was protected from the pressure of targets. My priorities were kept firm, there were no swirling distractions. I could discuss my work problems and enjoyed talking to him. ... G changed how I managed myself. He had a genuine interest in his staff. He spent time and took the issue seriously. His values included caring for staff. He didn't have favourites – all staff were cared for. He died last year – I really want to talk to him, but he's not here.'

R+

P26. R on a manager who balances monitoring with space

'G has a mentoring day with each trainee every nine weeks. He goes through all your work and offers in-depth advice. This meeting is a focal point – you work towards it. It is a kind of mini review – G puts things on the agenda but you can too. In between these meetings G has an open door policy – you can go to him at any time. G takes quite an equal tone – friend to friend – not heavy handed, very equitable. He suggests other ways of tackling things.

'Over time, G has now stepped back more and given me more room to manoeuvre. He likes to know what you are doing (eg sees correspondence) but rarely intervenes. If there are issues he will pick them up at the mentoring day. He watches you but does not intrude. He provides a safety net – saves you from shooting yourself in the foot. This builds confidence – I know he would nip a mistake in the bud.

'G has had a deep impact on me. I feel more secure than otherwise. Trainees in other offices feel vulnerable. I feel I have had the best preparation of anyone I know. I feel I can rely on him as a manager.'

R+

P27. R on a senior manager widening his skills and understanding

G was R's manager's manager.

'I worked for very closely with G on a big change project in the office, for four to five months, meeting every Friday and with daily contact. I didn't know G well at the start. He worked through the project brief carefully at the beginning. As I took more responsibility, G got summaries of progress and I went to see G when needed. G gave me lots of headroom, although he was always involved in final decisions. Had his hand on the tiller less and less. Went to meetings together. When I needed specific training (eg in IT) G got me on a course very quickly – this is unusual in the organisation. He often used journey time to talk about dealing with people, especially senior people – helping me to see a higher level/more strategic picture (how would senior people be looking at this?), understanding organisational politics.

'He developed my broader skills as well as my technical skills. He discussed my future career and fed back strengths and weaknesses. He improved my communication skills upwards and downwards. He gave me a wider perspective on what the organisation is all about – not just the local office but also wider politics. G was not especially well liked within the organisation. Working with him made me respect G more and be less judgmental – I realised what he had to deal with.'

R+

P28. R developed systematically

G was R's line manager for about a year, about seven years ago.

'G was good at using the organisation processes (eg for performance and promotion), as he had worked in HR for a while. He used team meetings to discuss work examples. He was approachable, knowledgeable, and competent – so I respected him, and listened to him. He gave objective advice, even if it was not what you wanted to hear. He was straight but encouraging, bringing his own experience and consideration. He looked widely at the development needs of the organisation – not just the immediate need of the office or even of individuals, but longer term.

'We had a monthly one-to-one to go through my work – he would nudge me in the right direction. G kept records on my progress to shape his management report. He was very steady – good at dealing with stress – just calm. He would sit and listen when I was stressed. I still talk to him, seven years later.'

G+

P29. G working with two trainees who were struggling

G was the line manager of two professional trainees.

R1, the first trainee, had failed two important exams and was in danger of being taken off the training scheme. *'I used a mentoring session to try and reassure him that he should continue. R1 wondered if it was worth it – was it all too much? I emphasised the positive, showed him his own strength of character and ability. I told R1 I could see how much he had developed over the period. If he maintained his current level of work, he would produce what was required by the end of programme. R1 was concerned he did not have strong enough evidence of practical work – I stressed that it was the quality of the work that counted not*

just quantity. I said he could get just as good results in a shorter time with fewer work examples – the key issue was to demonstrate the skills required. We worked together over a number of sessions, for about six months'. R did keep going and became more confident.

'R2, another trainee, was in a similar problematic situation. I spent a whole session with R2 looking at his strengths and weaknesses – no punches pulled. The session was carefully thought out and planned. I aimed to make clear how far short of the required standard R2 was – an enormous movement was required – but at the same time not destroying him. I tried also to bring out positive points, what he had built on to get where he was. We also discussed what commitment we could give, resources available, who else could give help. Initially R2 felt he wanted to continue with the professional training, but at the end of the session decided it was not for him. When push came to shove, R2 could not cope with the pressure, and I realised that did not have the capacity to cope with it. R reverted to his previous role and is now doing a different kind of job very well. He was a square peg in a round hole. The situation was very personal but I tried not to demoralise him. It was difficult but satisfying. I feel sure R2 would now say it was the right outcome.'

G+

P30. G, a mentor, setting an open, approachable tone

G is a mentor for technical specialists. 'Individuals can run things past me. I take an interest and give help especially in technical skills. When I start mentoring someone, I review the work they are doing – I find this a good place to start. I need to adjust the amount of my input to the needs of the individual. I have to be careful at the start, eg I avoid sarcasm. I try to be approachable and friendly – they should not ever feel they are being a nuisance. I should respond when needed. The relationship is informal and fluid. Once I literally took the screws of a self-shutting door to keep it open.'

G+

P31. G encouraging someone to see her own potential

G was the manager's manager of a long serving woman from an ethnic minority (she was Asian). R first came to see G with a technical problem, which her own manager was not able to resolve. G had an open door policy.

'R talked to me about the issue. I was impressed by her knowledge of her staff and her attitude, approach and grip on the work. I felt she had potential for professional level work. I raised the issue of professional training with her. She was surprised and quite resistant – her previous boss had not encouraged her to think about promotion. I helped her fill in the forms for internal application to training – and showed her the need to praise herself, which she found difficult. She took the course and got the highest exam score that year in London. After that she was fully qualified. Now her children are older, she has carried on with study at university – she is an excellent professional.'

G+**P32. G chooses other people with care to help with developing his staff**

'I am not so much involved with technical work myself now, managing a large team. When trainees are working for me I try to stress the importance of them taking time for their studies. I allow them to work at home or in a local library – I need to trust them to do the work. It is important to select the right work for them at the right time. I put them working with experienced people – to go out on visits and to gradually play a larger part. I keep informed about their work and go on some visits myself to see them in action. I make sure the experienced advisers I put them with are also good trainers – I pick these people carefully.'

Some negative examples

R- N1. R describing an over-controlling manager

R started working for a new manager, who was quite senior. *'She was a very aggressive woman, a micro-manager. She wanted to know the finest detail about every aspect of my work, and did not give me any freedom. She wanted things done in a specific way, and would constantly be looking over her shoulder all the time. Working for her was a complete nightmare. She was very negative and never gave any positive feedback, only criticism and put-downs.'* After a while, R confronted G and they formed a personal agreement whereby R would be left to her own devices a bit more. *'G actually thanked me for it, and it cleared the air a little.'*

'The manager was actually good in terms of formal training. She was good at identifying needs, it was just that she was a really poor communicator, and that she didn't trust the staff to do the job on their own. She said I was 'obstructive' because I had different views about how things should be done. The amount of formal development reduced because the relationship deteriorated. It boils down to how much you respect each other, how well you get on with them, and how much faith they have in you.'

When the project came to an end and R moved on, she was very relieved. *'The experience made me feel dreadful, both about work and about myself. I lost faith in the department and strongly intended to leave the organisation. I was less productive and less proactive. I felt that the whole time I was there, I didn't develop at all, although I learned the lesson of how not to do it.'*

R- N2. R describing a lack of feedback

R was working on a major intensive project with a team under her. *'It was a very complicated and huge task and everyone needed to work overtime to make sure the job was done correctly. My team managed to do the job well over a four-day period. The manager came in afterwards, checked the system, and left. He gave no praise whatsoever. In general, he gave no feedback, no direction, no praise. Together this resulted in my total demotivation. It created a most unpleasant working environment.'*

R- N3. R describing a lack of development from a manager

'I never got any positive feedback from this manager, was sent on no courses, and had no line management support. Another thing the manager did, was to point out all my weaknesses during appraisal and then provide no development support afterwards in order to address some of the issues.'

R-**N4. R describing two years with a blocking manager**

After a relatively short amount of time in the job, R realised that G *'... wanted to control everything, even the thoughts of everyone she was managing. I had absolutely no freedom and no responsibility.'* G's idea of development was typically to send someone on a training course. *'But it was all too formal, there was never any follow-up to the training I received. I would just get back from the training and do exactly the same thing as I had been doing before. There was no way of capitalising on any of the training that I had received.'*

G prevented R from going for a promotion, by giving R a low score for the criteria 'supports line manager', which effectively blocked her getting promoted. *'What sort of support did G expect when she, in turn, gave no support to any of her staff?'*

R left the department after four months. *'It was hideous, I didn't want to be there. It was like work was a necessary evil, there was no pleasure and no joy. I became disillusioned with the organisation as a whole, especially as during this time the organisation was awarded Investors in People accreditation. I thought this was a joke.'*

G-**N5. G reporting on the difficulty of being physically remote**

G described an example of managing someone who was in a different office on a different floor. He was happy to be available to her whenever he could, but the physical separation made it really difficult. *'Because I didn't see her every day, I didn't get to know her that well. It was hard for me to see how she was doing and what support she needed. I think she felt like she was pestering me whenever she had any questions. The fact that she was on another floor meant that she couldn't just quickly ask me a simple question if she had one, and would sometimes struggle on her own.'*

R-**N6. R reporting on conflicting feedback**

'I was in my previous company for seven years and the experience of development was unhelpful. I had a monthly review and kept getting conflicting messages. I was told I wasn't gelling with the other staff and the following month I was told I had gelled too much. The next month I was told that my customer service was too good. My manager was always looking for the negative and it was always presented as fact and not up for discussion. I left the company, I found it really difficult. I thought it was partly personality at the time and believed some of it, but when it flipped round and I hadn't done anything different, I asked myself "what am I doing wrong?"'

R-**N7. R on lack of focus in discussions with a manager**

'G had a lot of faith in me and praised me a lot but didn't stretch me. We would have weekly one-to-ones and a monthly official one-to-one with

quarterly appraisals. They were casual chats and not about me, although they were meant to be explicitly about me and my development. G did not manage me in depth, but I got on with him great.

'G now works for a developmental manager and the difference in him is massive. He understands the principles of looking at what someone can do and what they are avoiding or not tackling.'

R- N8. R getting very little development support as a temp

R had previously worked as a temp in the organisation where she is now permanently employed. *'During the few months I was temping, I got virtually no support whatsoever. It was just a case of being taught on the first day to do a relatively simple task and then being left to it. My manager during this time was more of a controller, he just wanted the work to get done, and wasn't interested in even really talking to the temps.'*

'I can understand that temps come and go, but he really wasn't interested in being friendly or anything. When I asked him about trying to get a permanent job he just told me to keep an eye on the intranet as jobs are coming up all the time, but you could tell that he wasn't bothered. He didn't even ask me what sort of thing I was looking for.'

When R applied for the job she now does, G helped her to some extent, which she was thankful for, but she feels that he could have done more to help her. G was not forthcoming with advice or help. *'I think if he'd shown more interest it would have made me feel better in myself, that they thought I was good and that they wanted me to stay.'*

G- N9. G describing a failed attempt to turn round a poor performer

'I had a young lad on the team whose performance was not very good. He wasn't meeting objectives. I used the appraisal process to set targets and review them and although he would have short bursts, he would never perform at the right level in a sustained way. I discussed with him how he felt he was doing. It's easy if people know they are not working well, but more difficult if they do not know. I went through the targets with him and said we would give it a month and monitor it. The next month there would be more excuses. I offered to help, and made suggestions for improvement. He was a lovely lad and got on with him well. I didn't look forward to these meetings in the end – I felt apprehensive. I felt he didn't really want to be working here.'

G was asked if she would do anything differently if this situation occurred again. *'I would have showed more empathy. I was fed up myself at the end and switched off. It is really down to listening. The relationship wasn't positive, but it wasn't because we didn't talk.'*

R-**N10. R being set up to fail**

R went to a new job, which he expected to be exciting. He found himself in the middle of managing a major redundancy and restructuring exercise. *'This was something I was not aware of until I arrived. The plan was to create a new unified team. The plan was strongly opposed by the employees. The plan was clearly ludicrous, but G, my boss, would not hear it – he just wanted to get people onto lower pay and conditions. I was put in a sink or swim role with G not supporting me. Ultimately G was replaced by a manager who was much better – more supportive.'*

The impact of G on R was very profound. *'It was very undermining. I lost faith in the organisation's leadership – lost my compass. It was very debilitating. I felt I was the fall guy – being set up to fail. It knocked my confidence, and it made me think about taking on an operational or commercial job again.'*

'If I was in that situation again I would do things differently – keep my boss better informed, recognise earlier that all was not well, make my boss more aware of on-going issues, get help from peers and other senior managers. But G might still not have listened.'

R-**N11. R still remembers a discouraging senior manager**

R reported a negative experience from his boss's boss 14 years ago. *'G never came out of his room to trouble himself that anyone needed help or support. He liked to delegate but never explained what was expected. My immediate boss seemed satisfied with me, but I never knew how G saw me as performing. After 8 months in the job, I raised the issue of my career with G – I felt there was a glass ceiling on me in this office. G asked a completely irrelevant question and told me I didn't have the quality to progress.'*

'About this time I was offered a job elsewhere. My response was "get me out of here".' This move slowed R's career as it was into another area of work, which made it harder to get where he wanted later on.

'I felt very negative for a long time. I felt my work was not appreciated. I also felt that because I didn't have a university degree I was worth less. G had no idea how to encourage people. I only think about this bad guy once a day now.'

'Development is about hanging about with the right sorts of people and doing the right things – the right sort of work. It is about helping people find their interest and challenge. Good developers watch how people cope and trust you to get on with it. It's like learning to ride a bicycle. You should feel that you can ride the bicycle, it's OK to fall off, they will help you repair your punctures.'



N12. R on a manager who was rude

This was a recent line manager. 'I liked him as a person but G was completely useless as a manager. He didn't champion his team with others. G gave way to other teams and volunteered his people to do more work. He was also quite derogatory – calling his team the 'riff raff' in front of other staff. He never said 'well done'. He was quite rude to individual members of staff when talking to them in our open plan office. I tried explaining this problem to G's boss but he didn't seem to understand. You don't appreciate having a good manager until you don't have it.'

Further information

The research team at IES (www.employment-studies.co.uk) comprised Wendy Hirsh, Michael Silverman, Penny Tamkin and Charles Jackson. They would like to thank their contacts in each of the participating organisations, and the time, interest and frankness of all those who volunteered to be interviewed. For more information contact: Wendy Hirsh 01273 813752 or wendy.hirsh@employment-studies.co.uk or Penny Tamkin 01273 873675 or penny.tamkin@employment-studies.co.uk