A Model of Targeted Supervisor Support

Supportive supervisors are often seen as the answer to any difficulty experienced by workers. Yet it is not always clear what organizations and supervisors can do specifically to help workers to change their perceptions or behavior. The following is a description of a model for assisting supervisors to provided targeted support to their workers in a specific aspect of their work. This model is based on the work of Hammer, Kossek, Anger, Bodner & Zimmerman (2011). The intervention designed by Hammer and colleagues regarding work-family conflict will be used below as an example to illustrate the model. This framework would work for addressing most areas of concern or challenges for workers.

Ideally, this model would be implemented in the context of an evaluation to determine if the intervention is successful. That involves randomly assigning teams or offices to one of two groups (intervention and non-intervention) and pre-post testing of results.

1. Identify specific area of concern.
   Example: Work-family conflict – the organization noted high work-family conflict among its employees.

2. Define specific supervisor actions
   Initiate focused conversation and provide targeted guidance/support.
   Example: Supervisors will (a) speak with members of the team; (b) ask something about a team member’s family; (c) say something about their (supervisor’s) family; (d) give positive feedback about work performance; (e) suggest a constructive improvement in a worker’s performance (f) initiate a question about, or offer a way to improve worker’s schedule.

3. Train supervisors in intervention model
   Training is brief (approx 2 hours) and includes:
   a. Background on benefits of change in area of concern
   b. Organization’s motivation in initiating change
   c. Current organizational policies/practices related to area of concern
   d. Dimensions of supportive supervisor behaviors (emotional support, instrumental support, role modeling, creative management)
   e. Data on perceptions gap between workers and organization
   f. Description of self monitoring checklist- 3x5 card

4. Conduct behavioral self-monitoring for reinforcement
   Example: Supervisors complete daily checklist of the 6 desired behaviors

For more information or consultation in implementing this model, please contact the Kansas Workforce Initiative at mlevy@ku.edu.