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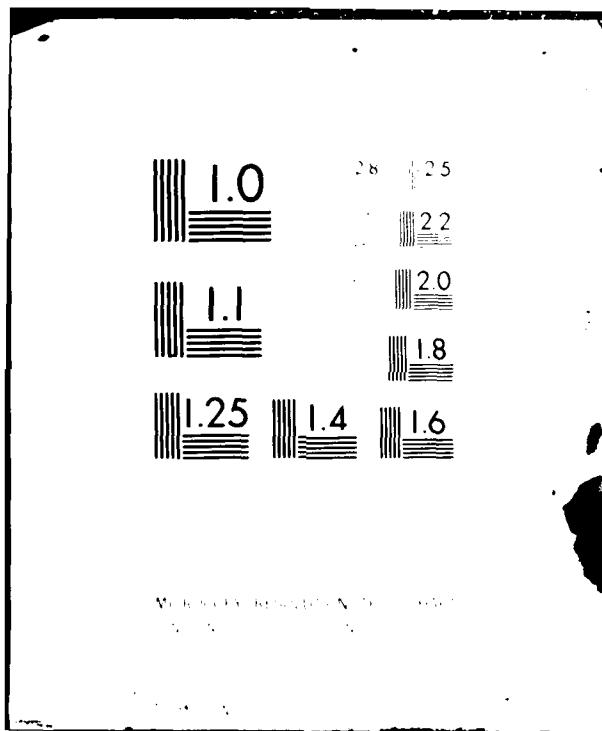
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WHEN REWARD IS PUNISHMENT: HOW HEALTH CARE SUPPORT PERSONNEL VIEW SUPERVISOR ACTIONS

A. P. JONES
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When Reward is Punishment: How Health Care
Support Personnel View Supervisor Actions

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Summary

The present effort investigated the reward or punishment value that Navy enlisted health care support personnel placed upon a number of supervisor behaviors. Behaviors viewed as either most rewarding or most punishing seemed to possess the following characteristics: (a) public display, (b) visible implications about the individual's worth to the organization, and (c) visible implication about the person's commitment to the organization. Some behaviors, especially those reflecting job enlargement, were viewed as reward by some respondents but punishment by others. General principles concerning the use of punishment and reward in organizations are reviewed.



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There is little doubt that today's Naval hospital is a challenging and demanding environment for the health care professional. The job is even more demanding for Supervisors, Department Heads, and Chiefs of Service in that hospital. In addition to maintaining competence and growth in their own areas of expertise, these individuals must guide the efforts of a diverse group of professionals and technical specialists working within separate military and civilian personnel systems. In the last analysis, however, the supervisor in a health care environment shares one task with supervisors from all organizations--the need to create a work climate that encourages optimum performance.

Most health care managers are keenly aware of the basic principle that performance is improved when organizational rewards are clearly linked to individual success in accomplishing specific work goals (1). Like most organizations, the Naval hospital has developed formal systems to reward superior performers with incentives such as medals, plaques, accelerated promotion opportunities, cash awards, or higher pay. The inadequate performer, on the other hand, may be faced with formal reprimand, fines, demotion, even dismissal.

These formal systems generally work well when dealing with clearly outstanding or obviously deficient employees. Unfortunately, the same systems are often inadequate for rewarding the employee who is consistently but only slightly above average or for dealing with a subordinate whose performance is slowly eroding but remains within acceptable standards. First, the rewards and punishments these systems offer are generally too extreme for the behavior. Second, they violate a key principle in the effective use of reward or punishment, namely, that it should be administered very shortly after the behavior. Months may elapse before the formal system produces any visible outcome. Finally, and perhaps most crucial from the manager's perspective, these formal systems are seldom under the control of the immediate supervisor. Such weaknesses make it critical to discover behaviors that health care supervisors at any level may use as quick and appropriate responses for the day-to-day behavior of all their employees. The present article describes an attempt to identify some of those behaviors.

Rewarding Behavior

Such a task requires an understanding of the types of supervisor behaviors that hospital employees find rewarding or nonrewarding (i.e., punishing). Conversations with health care supervisors and a review of the current management literature (2,3) suggested more than 200 possible behaviors. However, many of these statements were similar enough to trim the final list down to approximately 80 behaviors. The resulting list was then shown to 58 Navy corpsmen working at two branch clinics. These individuals were asked to describe how rewarding or punishing they would find each of the 80 behaviors if their own supervisor used it with them. In other words, they were asked to rate each behavior on a five-point scale ranging from 1 = "Extremely punishing" to 5 = "Extremely rewarding."

The results of this rating task proved quite interesting. For example, Table 1 presents the supervisor behaviors that a clear majority of the corpsmen viewed as rewarding. For ease of comparison, the behaviors are ranked in terms of the average reward value assigned to them.

The behaviors presented in the upper half of the table were those which were ranked as most rewarding. These behaviors were given a score of 4.0 or greater by more than three-fourths of the raters and appear to possess certain key attributes, either singly or in combination. The most important of these attributes seem to be (a) public recognition of the person's worth as a superior performer, (b) recognition of the individual's expertise or ability to provide information that was valued by the supervisor in making decisions, and (c) treatment of the

Table 1

Supervisory Behavior Described as Rewarding by Navy Hospital Corps Personnel (N = 58)

<u>Behavior</u>	<u>Mean Rating</u>	<u>Standard Deviation</u>
<u>Part I. Rewarding Behaviors</u>		
Recommends a pay raise or promotion	4.50	.82
Gives you more authority and freedom to do job your own way	4.45	.78
Publicly awards plaque or certificate citing your work	4.40	.82
Tells superior about examples of your best work	4.36	.87
Makes a point of introducing you to visiting dignitaries	4.29	.70
Listens carefully to what you have to say	4.26	.71
Asks for your opinions	4.26	.76
Asks you to help train newcomers in job	4.22	.73
Recommends special training that gives you greater job security	4.17	.88
Compliments your actions in public	4.12	.94
Holds you up to coworkers as a good example	4.12	.92
Finds something good to say when reviewing your work	4.10	.64
Gives leeway when personal problems interfere with your work	4.00	.70
<u>Part II. Somewhat Rewarding Behaviors</u>		
Makes an effort to be a personal friend	3.95	.89
Gives you up to an hour off by covering for your absence	3.93	.97
Gives you the most desirable jobs	3.93	1.02
Uses his or her own money to buy a small gift	3.91	.97
Singles you out as heir apparent for a prestigious job	3.91	.94
Gives extra time for lunch breaks or coffee breaks	3.90	.72
Lets you participate in deciding what work needs to be done	3.84	.81
Allows you to determine what rewards you want to work for	3.83	.94
Tries to get recognition for you from persons outside your group	3.81	.85
Chats informally with you about your work	3.81	.89
Personally explains why he or she made a specific request of you	3.78	.63

Note: Behaviors were rated on a 5-point scale where 1 = Extremely Punishing,
5 = Extremely Rewarding.

individual as a responsible person who is committed to the organization. Such attributes are clearly evident in the award of greater freedom to perform the job as one sees best, the public award of a plaque or certificate of merit, and soliciting the subordinate's opinions. Generally, this class of behavior seems to derive much of its reward value from implications that the organization views the individual as competent and able. Thus, these behaviors not only provide information about how well the person is doing the job (feedback) but also enhance self-esteem.

Table 1 also presents a second set of behaviors which were viewed as rewarding by a sizable proportion of the corpsmen, but which did not receive the clear consensus of the first set. Sixty to 80% of the respondents listed these behaviors as rewarding but the average rating was less than 4.0. Behaviors in this latter category generally reflect either (a) flexibility in applying the rules of (b) personal privileges granted by the supervisor.

Many of these behaviors are similar to those traditionally described as leader support but many others reflect the interpersonal style and skills of the supervisor. Finally, the ties to performance seem more tenuous with this group of behaviors than is the case with the highest ranked set.

This last observation pinpoints the greatest danger in using the second set of behaviors as rewards. Their value to the organization exists only if they are administered fairly because of performance and merit and not because of favoritism. If favoritism is the primary reason for their use, these behaviors may prove more disruptive than beneficial. Further, the reward value attached to many of these behaviors depends on the quality of the relationship between the supervisor and the employee. Thus, while this second class of reward behaviors plays an important part in an effective supervisory style, care must be exercised in how they are applied and interpreted.

In reviewing this table, one is struck by the fact that most of these behaviors, even those with high reward value, involve little added cost to the organization and require little extra effort from the supervisor. More important, most can be accomplished without delay and require minimum concern about the number of times they are awarded or the proportion of employees who receive the award. Such characteristics are in direct contrast with the formal reward system which is often costly, cumbersome and slow. Thus, the health care supervisor who is sensitive to the reward value of the behaviors in this list (as well as similar behaviors) has an effective tool for responding to subordinate performance on a timely and appropriate basis.

A note of caution is important here. Rewards, like many commodities in excess supply, may lose value if awarded indiscriminately. Worse, the inappropriate use of reward may actually decrease some aspects of employee motivation. In a classic study, Edward Deci (4) found that persons who received money for performing an interesting task showed a decrease in intrinsic motivation. In a similar study, Lepper and Greene (5) found that both extrinsic rewards and adult surveillance turned "play" into "work" for preschool children. That is, when children were monitored and paid for doing something that they enjoyed, they lost interest and subsequently engaged in the activity only if they were rewarded.

Does this mean that the Navy should stop rewarding good performance with promotions and other awards? Certainly not. There is no doubt that reward is an important determinant of job satisfaction and performance (6). What is at issue is the character and appropriateness of the reward. For example, external rewards do not undermine motivation for tasks that are boring or highly structured (7). In fact, they may even increase motivation for such jobs (8). Furthermore, non-monetary rewards such as verbal reinforcement and positive feedback increase intrinsic motivation (4). Thus it appears that good supervisory policy might be to allow individuals to do what they enjoy doing (insofar as possible), reduce surveillance of employee actions, and encourage good performance primarily with social reinforcements if the jobs are inherently interesting. On the other hand, it may be necessary to provide extra incentives for necessary jobs that offer little intrinsic satisfaction.

Nonrewarding Behavior

So far we have talked primarily about rewards. Nonreward, in the form of punishment threat of punishment, is also a fact of life in most organizations. Indeed, a glance at Table 2 shows that agreement about punishing behaviors was almost as great as agreement about rewarding behaviors. More important, however, was the fact that punishing behaviors seemed to evidence some of the same key attributes (although in reverse) described earlier

Table 2

Supervisory Behavior Described as Punishing by Navy Hospital Corps Personnel (N = 58)

<u>Behavior</u>	<u>Mean Rating</u>	<u>Standard Deviation</u>
Part I. Punishing Behaviors		
Fines you or withholds pay	1.37	.64
Holds you up to coworkers as a poor example	1.39	.62
Makes you do the job over without telling you what you are doing wrong	1.71	.77
Gives you additional work while allowing coworkers to sit idle	1.76	.86
Criticizes your actions in public	1.78	.99
Takes away special privileges	1.81	.74
Withholds training that would give you greater job security	1.86	.69
Complains about your work behind your back	1.86	.94
Makes snide comments about the way you do your work	1.93	.93
Publicly praises everyone in the group but you	1.95	.85
Documents negative things you do	1.96	.98
Part II. Somewhat Punishing Behaviors		
Holds back information that would make your job easier or more pleasant	2.02	.87
Watches over your shoulder while you are working	2.02	.87
Brings up past mistakes	2.02	.76
Tells superiors about your past mistakes	2.03	.88
Points out rules that everyone knows implying that you need to have them specially explained	2.05	.87
Ignores you when you ask for small favors	2.10	.72
Keeps you from doing parts of the job you find most satisfying	2.16	.74
Breaks up your conversation with coworkers	2.21	.69

Note: Behaviors were rated on a 5-point scale where 1 = Extremely Punishing, 5 = Extremely Rewarding.

for reward. For example, public display seemed to be associated with more negative ratings, as were surveillance or other actions implying that the person lacked skill, judgment, responsibility or commitment.

One of the most striking factors about the behaviors described as punishing, however, is the ease with which they may occur inadvertently or may be blamed erroneously on a supervisor whose intentions were entirely different. For example, the supervisor who gives explicit credit to the contributions of some members of the group may unintentionally punish the members not mentioned. Similarly, the supervisor who consistently turns to his or her most capable and dependable employees in times of crisis or stress may punish these individuals by allowing less capable or less dependable employees to sit idle. Likewise, the tendency for managers to increase structure under times of stress (9) may be interpreted as taking away privileges or reducing the subordinate's ability to do satisfying parts of the job. The list in Table 2 appears to provide important insights for the manager who wishes to avoid such unintentional punishment.

However, to an even greater extent than was required for reward, the manager must be sensitive to problems in the use of punishment. First, punishment is usually the least preferable form of behavior management. Unless administered very skillfully, it may cause more problems than it resolves. Punishment often fosters frustration and resentment, which in turn can lead to hostility toward the supervisor, fighting, negligence, and turnover. What's more, punishment often has to be fairly intense in order to be effective, but this very intensity creates a generalized response and suppresses other desirable behaviors. In other words, punishment tends to disrupt positive as well as negative behaviors.

Just as reward behaviors enhance employee satisfaction and performance, punitive behaviors lead to work dissatisfaction, absenteeism, and lowered performance (6). A supervisor might argue that it is the employee's behavior that calls forth punishment in the first place (10). The fact is, a reciprocal influence exists between leader and subordinate, where each causes the other's behavior (6, 10). Obviously this pattern can turn into a vicious circle, wherein poor attitude and performance lead to punishment which leads to an even greater decrement in attitude and performance. What then should be done? To ignore misconduct and do nothing condones inappropriate behavior; to respond punitively seems to perpetuate an unwanted cycle. As in the case of reward, however, it is the character and appropriateness of the punishment that is at issue. Where managers have established a mutual respect with their employees; where punishment is administered fairly, consistently, and sparingly; where clear, unambiguous reasons for discipline are provided; and most important where individuals have clear alternative responses available to them, punishment techniques can be effective (7). This last condition should be underscored. Punishment is most effective when it guides the individual into organizationally desirable, reward-producing, and, thus, more attractive options. In the absence of such options, the adverse effects of punishment are likely.

Nonspecific Behavior

Before concluding this discussion, it is worth looking at a third category of behaviors found in the study. These behaviors produced highly variable reactions among respondents (See Table 3) and clearly indicate that an action by the supervisor may be viewed as a reward by one employee but a punishment by another. Especially intriguing is the fact that a sizable number of the behaviors in this list reflect the currently popular trends toward job enlargement and job enrichment (12). Thus, it appears that some employees view the receipt of added responsibility and increased standards as leading to greater challenge and more intrinsic reward, while others view these attributes as leading to increased workload, stress and pressure. Which interpretation an individual adopts is likely to reflect the nature of the job, existing workload, and the nature of the person, himself. Job enlargement behaviors especially may be rewarding in some situations and for some employees and punishing if used in other settings or with other employees. The fact that a supervisor finds it rewarding to be given greater responsibility and challenge does not guarantee that his or her subordinates will view these events in the same positive way. Therefore, the supervisor must consider both the setting and the person if the behaviors in Table 3 are to have the intended effect.

Summary

To summarize, the primary purpose of the present study was to identify for Navy health care managers and supervisors the types of leader behaviors that their subordinates view as rewarding. A number of such behaviors were identified and serve as useful examples of the actions that supervisors might take to reinforce subordinate performance when the rewards offered by the formal system are inappropriate or unavailable. These behaviors generally

Table 3

Supervisor Behaviors Receiving Highly Varying Reward or Punishment Ratings

<u>Behavior</u>	<u>Percent Rating as</u>			<u>Mean Rating</u>	<u>Standard Deviation</u>
	<u>Punishing</u>	<u>Neutral</u>	<u>Rewarding</u>		
Applies higher standards in evaluating your work than are used for anyone else	50	28	22	2.55	1.08
Gives you an average performance rating	45	45	10	2.59	.90
Makes you redo your work for minor errors	42	47	11	2.63	.82
Checks on how you are doing in a way that is visible to everyone around you.	43	45	12	2.67	.85
Assigns part of your work to others if you are slow in finishing	24	47	29	3.07	.90
Gives credit to the whole group for what you have done	29	35	36	3.07	1.09
Increases your job responsibility although there is no increase in pay	30	34	36	3.14	1.03
Takes away some of your duties	28	29	43	3.17	1.03
Looks the other way if you break minor rules	16	52	32	3.22	.84

incorporate some form of public communication that the organization valued the individual's performance and expertise. At the opposite end of the spectrum were a number of behaviors that were viewed as punishing. These behaviors generally involve a public communication that the individual's commitment or expertise were lacking in some way. More important is the fact that leaders perform many of these punishing acts inadvertently. Knowledge of this finding is important if the supervisor is to avoid punishing the persons who contribute most to the organization while rewarding those who contribute least. Finally, some behaviors, especially those related to increased responsibility and challenge provoked mixed reactions. Such behaviors must be administered with special care. The supervisor who understands the nature of these behaviors and their effects on different people will be better able to tailor his or her own actions in order to enhance performance. Such knowledge is extremely important in a health care environment where the combination of individuals from different environments, performing a variety of jobs under widely varying workloads requires high levels of management skill in order to provide optimal health care.

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