

Outstanding Driver Team Managers

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For over 25 years OPC psychologists and trained assessors have worked closely with lots of train operators' Driver Manager (DM) teams across many varied projects. Regardless of what these crucial, pivotal roles may be titled; Driver Manager (DM) or Driver Team Manager (DTM) or the train operator's structure – it takes special experience, skill and a key set of competencies to successfully and effectively lead a team of train drivers.

Key leadership skills needed for good DTMs

Through research, interviews and close working partnerships, the OPC have formed an in-depth understanding of the key competencies and people skills that are really necessary to succeed in this safety-critical, vital leadership role.

Safety is first and foremost the main priority for a DM when overseeing their driver team. Their safety priorities may include implementing Non-Technical Skills (NTS) training or development; ensuring implementation of a CDP or undertaking an incident investigation to find the root cause of a safety incident. A DTM also needs technical ability to understand, translate and implement standards.

Having undertaken hundreds of Post Incident Assessments (PIA); in the OPC's opinion, the manager driver

relationship is crucial to the implementation and adherence to a CDP or an NTS development plan and thus a driver's safe and effective return to driving.

Perhaps the reason why a combined driver manager's role can be so challenging is the juxtaposed mix of 'hard' technical, safe driving competencies alongside 'soft' people management skills. Both are needed in equal measure to ensure safe and effective drivers on track.

Having worked closely with senior rail managers, in the OPC's opinion, there are 5 key managerial competencies important in a DM role:

- People skills that build positive relationships and successful teams. Leaders who have strong communication and listening skills and who are good at motivating others to deliver results and drive performance.
- Job performance abilities that deliver the role's key responsibilities.
- Thinking skills for effective problem-solving and decision making.
- Strong customer focus with both external and internal customers.
- Driving improvements in themselves and others, particularly in relation to competence and safety performance.

Recruiting the best

When recruiting for this skilled and varied role, OPC Assessment has a suite of tools and exercises that can assess the wide range of competencies and abilities required. E.g., the recently launched **Leadership Potential Indicator Test (LPI)**. Some of their tools have been designed bespoke for a DTM role.

Industry gaps and support needed for DTMs

A DTM commented: "When you first get into the role, it's a massive ocean and it's pretty quick to drown out there."

A new DM may not necessarily have all the skills to make a good leader straight away. Some managers reflected there can be a lack of formal induction or training prior to starting in post, or that there may be little or no ongoing coaching and development for DMs vs. the role's responsibility. Sometimes, candidates may also need support to 'grow' into the role before or when first in post. Therefore, secondments or Leadership Development Centres (LDC) could be good considerations. The OPC runs LDC that are a hybrid mix of personal self-assessment and learning, online tutorials and face-to-face skills development for individuals or DM groups.

Laura Hedley, senior occupational psychologist at the OPC, said: "When listening to those who lead DMs, it's easy to see why it can be hard to fill some DM industry gaps or why some managers don't stay long in the role. A DTM role is extensive and challenging with significant task-breadth and competency requirements. With more secondments, a robust selection process, effective induction training and ongoing coaching and development we may see more managers stay and flourish in this vital role."

An operations delivery manager concluded: "DTM are under huge pressure every day. They have very

strong competence and extensive knowledge of what it really takes to drive a train safely and get the best out of their drivers. They can sometimes be seen as a 'Jack of all trades' however, they are probably the most skilled managers in the business."

Read the full article about Driver Team Manager skills in May's edition of Rail Director Magazine.

If you think the OPC can help you recruit and develop outstanding Driver Team Managers, then [get in touch](#) with their friendly team.

E: admin@theopc.co.uk

Tel: +44 01923 234646

www.theopc.co.uk



the occupational
psychology centre