# Supervisory Skills

Manmohan Joshi

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# 1  Meaning and scope of supervision

## 1.1  Introduction

In modern business organizations the forces of change are constantly at work. The size, strategy, structure, and motivation of employees underline the need for a creative touch in successfully piloting their affairs. Modern technology, new ideas and new products appear day after day in order to cater to the changing trends of consumer tastes and needs. The seemingly endless competitive drive to sustain existing markets and capture new ones necessitates an extremely careful handling of refined consumer requirements. It is the efficiency of the supervision system and supervisory skills that regulate productive activities through the coordinated use of material and human resources.

### 1.1.1  Definition

Supervision can be defined as the function of getting things done through people and directing the efforts of individuals as well as groups towards the achievement of a common objective. It is concerned with the direction and control of various activities, following the advice and suggestions of the management, to attain the objectives of the organization. It is also defined as the execution or implementation of the processes such as planning, organizing, directing, controlling, and following up the progress achieved on the job and to accomplish stated objectives by the efficient use of human and other resources.

Supervision is also an art for bringing about a desired result through the application of skills.

### 1.1.2  Meaning

Supervision deals with the achievement of specific objectives. Generally, the effectiveness of a supervisor is measured by the extent to which these objectives are achieved. Hence supervisors focus their attention and efforts on bringing about successful action. They know where to start, what to do to keep things moving, and how to follow the directions of their managers. Supervision is a distinct activity which can be learned and practiced in real work situation. It deals with not only monitoring the activities of the team but also with improving the work environment, and stimulating people to perform more efficiently. Therefore, the activity of supervision requires special skills, qualifications, talent and authority to achieve the common goal of the organization.

To supervise means to manage people, to administer, and to be in the driver's seat for managing the affairs of the section/department. It is the supervisors' responsibility to create a link between the workforce and the management. Since they are first-line managers, they need to focus their attention on team building and motivating the workforce.

## 1.2      Scope of a supervisor

Activities of a business organization can be divided into the following categories:

- **Technical:** Production, manufacturing and adopting.
- **Commercial:** Buying and selling, marketing.
- **Financial:** Searching for optimum use of capital.
- **Security:** Protection of property and people.
- **Accounting:** Stock taking, Balance Sheets, Costs and Statistics.
- **Managerial:** Includes supervisory skills for planning, organizing, coordinating and controlling.

The scope of a supervisor's work is complex. He/she must continue performing the functions of management. It is their responsibility to follow up the processes in the work environment that would be carried out by their subordinates, and to provide up to date information to the management about the progress of the work being performed. The task of supervision involves ensuring proper control and supervision. The work can be delegated to the foremen in the industrial sector. A supervisor acts as a 'direct link' between the workforce and the management, by using the functions of management, for which Luther Gullick(1936) coined the words in a mnemonic 'POSDCORB' from the initial letters of management functions: **P**lanning, **O**rganizing, **S**taffing, **D**irecting, **C**oordinating/**C**ontrolling, **R**eporting and **B**udgeting. All these functions are performed by managers but the supervisor acts as a link between the workforce and the management in order to implement the decisions taken by the management.

## 1.3      Who is a supervisor?

A supervisor is a first-level manager who:

- Accomplishes work with and through subordinates; and
- Directs the work activities of people who themselves are individual performers.

### 1.3.1      A supervisor's image

A management consultant asked the HRD manager of a large insurance company, "How does your business keep running so smoothly? Each time I visit here I learn of another shake-up in top management. Vice-Presidents come and go as if they were big league basketball managers. Yet I hear that your policy-holders don't complain too much about service."

"I think I can answer your question," replied the HRD manager, "our day-to-day work gets done by our office supervisors and their subordinates. It doesn't matter who the players are at the top of the company. The game is the same down below. Most of our supervisors have been with us a long time. They make sure the work gets done without worrying about the politics in the executive suite."

Although comments made by this manager may seem to be overdramatic, they do illustrate an important part of work life.

Organizations cannot be run properly without competent first-level managers. Supervisors are the key to success in any organization. Because of the widespread recognition of this fact, supervisors are usually held accountable for whatever goes wrong in a work organization.

## 1.4    Different supervisory skills

The basic job performed by a supervisor varies in complexity. Some supervisors are expected to prepare a budget, contribute to long-range planning and solve technical problems. Another person may be called a supervisor, yet may spend almost all of the workday checking to see that others are working properly. However, such supervisory positions are becoming increasingly rare.

### 1.4.1    Managing resources

A supervisor has to manage various resources. The following resources are generally at the disposal of a supervisor:

- **People:** This is the most difficult resource to manage. People have different needs, attitudes, abilities and personalities. These are not constant and can change from day to day, hour to hour. A good supervisor will maximize the strengths and minimize the weaknesses.
- **Time:** This is the most democratic of resources. Everyone has 60 seconds in a minute, 60 minutes in an hour etc. It is how this time is used that determines supervisory effectiveness.
- **Space:** This is expensive and many work places suffer from lack of it. However, much can be made of the space available to improve the working environment and, consequently, people's behaviour.
- **Finance:** All supervisory personnel will be involved with budgets and expenditure to some degree.
- **Equipment:** It includes machinery, tools, furniture, stationery, computers etc. Every supervisor must ensure that their team has sufficient equipment for their needs, while bearing in mind that idle equipment is a non-productive asset.
- **Information:** It is to be ensured that all information received is given the right priority and used as appropriate to help the team. Their utilization will help the team and the individuals within the team, so managing these resources is vital.
- **Activities:** It is the responsibility of a supervisor to monitor the activities being undertaken by the team. A well-planned schedule of events, activities and processes will ensure that the planned targets are achieved.

# 2    Supervisory functions

## 2.1      Planning

Planning is the basic managerial/supervisory function. Planning helps in deciding the course of action to be followed for achieving various organizational objectives. It is a decision in advance, what to do, when to do, and who will do a particular task. Planning is a process which involves 'thinking before doing.' It is a process of looking ahead. The primary objective of planning is to achieve better results. It is a continuous process that takes place at all levels of management. A detailed planning is done in the beginning but the actual performance is reviewed and suitable changes are made in plans when actual execution is done. Plans may be of many types, such as short-range plans, medium-range plans, strategic plans, administrative and operational plans. Supervisors are mainly concerned with operational plans.

### 2.1.1      Establishing priorities

A supervisor and his team need to prioritize the actions that are to be taken and put into a sensible order rather than to try out every action at the same time. While establishing priorities, the intention is to decide what to do first in the order of importance, not to pick out the easy tasks and forget the more difficult ones or concentrate only on things we like to do.

Asking these questions will help:

- Is the action short or long term?
- Is the action realistic or feasible?
- What kind of resources will be needed in terms of:
    - ✓   People
    - ✓   Money (This is generally not in the scope of a supervisor.)
    - ✓   Equipment
    - ✓   Tools
    - ✓   Materials
    - ✓   Time
- What are the constraints in terms of:
    - ✓   Time
    - ✓   Money (This is generally not in the scope of a supervisor.)
    - ✓   Resources
    - ✓   Tools and equipment
    - ✓   Skills
    - ✓   Availability
    - ✓   Level of support

- Who else needs to know or be involved?
- What is a sensible order of events?
- What are the expected improvements or benefits in terms of:
  - ✓ Output
  - ✓ Quality
  - ✓ Cost effectiveness
  - ✓ Safety
  - ✓ Welfare
  - ✓ Systems
  - ✓ Procedures
  - ✓ Behaviour
  - ✓ Communication
- Having asked these questions, is the action justified?

### 2.1.2  Approach to planning

A systematic step-by-step approach reduces the likelihood of the plan being unrealistic or unachievable:

- ☐ Micro plan – break down each action into various steps.
- ☐ Examine each step and decide the following:
- What is the objective of this step and how does it fit into the overall action?
- Who is the person or people who will be responsible for carrying out this step?
- What is the time frame (start and finish)? Is it movable?
- What resources are needed?
  - ✓ Money – How much? Where from? (Generally this is not a supervisor's responsibility.)
  - ✓ People – How many? What skills? Directly or indirectly controlled?
  - ✓ Equipment – What type? Where from?
  - ✓ Tools – What type? Where from? Who needs?
  - ✓ Permits – Are they needed? Who issues? (This is looked after by the Department manager.)

- Reporting progress – frequency, method, who to?
- What difficulties can be anticipated? How can they be overcome?
- Who will be affected? How do we communicate?
- How do we monitor and control progress?
- ☐ Using information gathered above, formulate the overall plan.
- ☐ Having formulated the plan, check the plan's validity. If it is properly prepared, it should answer the following:
- Why are we doing this?
- When will we do it?
- Where will it be done?
- Who will do it?

- What are we going to do?
- How will it be done (methodology)?

☐ Reviewing progress: A review of progress can and should take place at pre-specified intervals both during execution and on final completion of the plan. The following questions should be posed at each review:

- Did the plan start on time? If not, why not? Was the original timing correct? Are there any learning points?
- Is progress as per schedule? If not, why not? Are there any learning points?
- Are the objectives and the plan correct? If not, why not? Were they too ambitious or unrealistic? Did the personnel involved really understand what was needed? Are there any learning points?
- Is a re-plan necessary?
- How do we consolidate the learning points? Are we sure of the reasons why things went wrong? Can we ensure that the same mistakes are not repeated?

☐ After reviewing the plan, modify and extend it, if necessary. A supervisor needs to consult the Department manager for this purpose.

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## 2.2      Organizing

Every organization needs the services of a number of people to look after its different aspects. The management sets up the objectives or goals to be achieved by its personnel. The energy of each individual is channelized to achieve the organizational objectives. The function of organizing is to arrange, guide, coordinate, direct and control the activities of the organization. It provides the necessary framework within which people associate for the attainment of objectives. It also includes designing jobs, and training employees to do so.

Organizing:

- Promotes collaboration and negotiation among individuals and groups;
- Improves effectiveness and efficiency of communication;
- Creates clear-cut lines of authority and responsibility; and
- Improves activating and controlling functions of supervisor.

### 2.2.1      Process of organization

The process of organization involves the following steps:

- To identify the work to be performed;
- To classify or group the task;
- To assign these groups of activities or work to individuals;
- To organize training;
- To delegate authority and fix responsibility;
- To coordinate these authority-responsibility relationships of various activities.

### 2.2.2      Division of labour

Division of labour is essential to maximize the output of workers and machines. Division of labour means dividing large tasks into smaller packages of work to be distributed among several people. Such work specialization helps an employee to master a task in the shortest possible time and with a minimum skill. It also allows human labour to become interchangeable, thus contributing greatly to organizational efficiency. As division of labour creates many different and often narrow jobs, there is an increasing need for an effective supervisory coordination. Advantages of division of labour, in general, outweigh the disadvantages. They are:

- Improved efficiency;
- Contribution to mass production techniques;
- Higher levels of industrial and service output.

## 2.3      Coordinating

Organizing and coordinating are very closely linked, and very frequently coordinating is an essential continuation of organizing. Coordinating involves ensuring that all efforts move smoothly in the same direction, that is, towards the common objectives.

Coordination is as essential at top management as it is at supervisory levels. A supervisor must coordinate the work of his subordinates in his section so that different people might be performing different tasks. Work will, when necessary, flow smoothly and continuously from one person to the next. Coordination does not simply "happen" by itself. It has to be planned.

### 2.3.1      Organizing workgroups

**Definition:** A workgroup may be defined as "two or more independent individuals who interact with and influence one another in order to accomplish a common purpose."

A workgroup is a group that interacts primarily to share information and to make decisions to help one another perform within each member's area of responsibility with a given work.

Although groups or teams have always been a central part of organizations, they are gaining increasing attention as important organizational assets. Accordingly, supervisors need to be concerned with creating effective teams or workgroups that make real contributions to quality products and services and thus contributing to the success of the total organization.

It has been observed that if supervisors take care in creating, coordinating and mentoring workgroups, they outperform individuals when the tasks being done require multiple skills, judgment, and experience. Workgroups are more flexible and responsive to changing events than are traditional departments or other forms of permanent groupings. Workgroups have the capability to quickly assemble, deploy, refocus, and disband.

**Types:**

- **Formal or "official":** They are formed by the management to perform certain tasks in order to achieve organizational goals. It is for the supervisors to ensure that these workgroups remain cohesive and productive teams.
- **Informal:** These are the groupings which are formed by the employees themselves according to their own needs. These types of workgroups have also been found to be very effective in the pursuit of organizational goals. If supervisors encourage such groupings and guide them, they will perform their tasks willingly and efficiently.

**Importance:** Group work is extremely important to quality and organizational effectiveness. The organizational improvements processes, such as Total Quality Management (TQM) and Process Re-engineering, heavily rely on workgroups.

Workgroups are particularly good at combining talents and providing innovative solutions to possible unfamiliar problems. The wider skill and knowledge set of the workgroup has an advantage over that of an individual. The range of skills provided by its members and the self-monitoring, which each workgroup performs, makes it a reasonably safe recipient for delegated responsibility. The motivational aspect of participating in the decision making process will clearly enhance its implementation.

If each workgroup gets trained, through participation in group decision making, in an understanding of the organization's objectives and work practices, then each will be better able to solve work-related problems in general. A supervisor's role is crucial in mentoring these workgroups as not only proper guidance can be provided but also a better control on the workgroup's activities can be exercised in a harmonious environment.

## 2.4      Directing

Directing is concerned with carrying out the desired plans. It initiates organized and planned action, and ensures effective performance by subordinates towards the accomplishment of group activities. Direction is called management in action. Directing is influencing others to achieve organizational objectives. It is also referred to as leading. Supervisors are engaged in directing when they motivate, counsel or discipline subordinates.

## 2.5      Motivating

Motivation is the will to act. What we call "motives" are the reasons why people act in certain ways. Today's increasingly competitive business world needs a highly motivated workforce for any organization seeking to achieve good results. It is only through the efforts of the workforce that the objectives of the organization can be achieved. Hence a supervisor should be aware of what these motivational forces are. Therefore, the managerial function of motivation is concerned with the human resource of an organization.

However, research in human behaviour has suggested that people are motivated by a number of different needs, at work and in their personal life. Recognizing and satisfying these needs will help a supervisor to get the best from people. Hence a supervisor, who is the first-line manager, must make an attempt to know something about each of their subordinates. For example:

- Financial reason is the main motivating force for a large number of people. In any case, this may ultimately result in a better performance.
- Job satisfaction is the motivating factor for several people. These people get motivated when they feel that their skills and efforts are being recognized and appreciated by the management.
- Some people may do their best when they are given field jobs. On the other hand, there are others who would prefer desk jobs. Both categories of employees work best in their preferred work situation.

A supervisor has to ensure that his/her team works willingly. For this it is necessary to recognize what the correct motivation for each member is.

There are a lot of "motivators" that actually drive people to achieve. These are what a supervisor should aim to provide in order to maintain a satisfied workforce. How much a person enjoys achievement depends on its recognition. The ability to achieve, in turn, depends on having an enjoyable job and responsibility. The greater that responsibility the more that individual can feel the satisfaction of achievement. Motivators are built around obtaining growth and self-actualization from tasks. A supervisor can raise motivation in his/her staff by increasing their responsibility, thereby enriching their jobs.

An essential foundation for motivation is a positive environment created by a supervisor. Employees have the right to expect fair treatment and understanding. They also expect professional competence, part of which includes delegating tasks in order to increase staff members' self-management and participation. A supervisor should establish a system that is constructive – not obstructive – in which people can hope to perform at their best. He/she should find out where subordinates' strengths and interests lie, and then delegate responsibilities accordingly.

There must be a two-way communication within an organization. All employees must be regularly informed about matters which affect them. The ideal approach when providing information is that everybody should know about everything that concerns them directly or indirectly, in full and accurate detail, as soon as possible.

A supervisor must ensure that subordinates have a sense of job security. Threats of dismissal or any other punitive action may induce better benefits in the short term, but they are not recommended in modern management as they are likely to result in an unsatisfied workforce. Subordinates want to be looked upon as human beings and not as mere tools of performance. They expect a fair and unbiased approach from their supervisor who must, therefore, demonstrate the right leadership qualities.

A supervisor must understand the fact that free or easy-to-supply incentives are a simple way to motivate subordinates and get their cooperation. For example, he/she may start by thanking people for a job well done, and follow this up with a written acknowledgement. He/she must be friendly and polite at all times – bad manners de-motivate – and deal sympathetically with personal requests, such as time off for a special purpose. Such actions on the part of a supervisor ensure that the subordinates will have loyalty to their supervisor and be ready to work well and willingly.
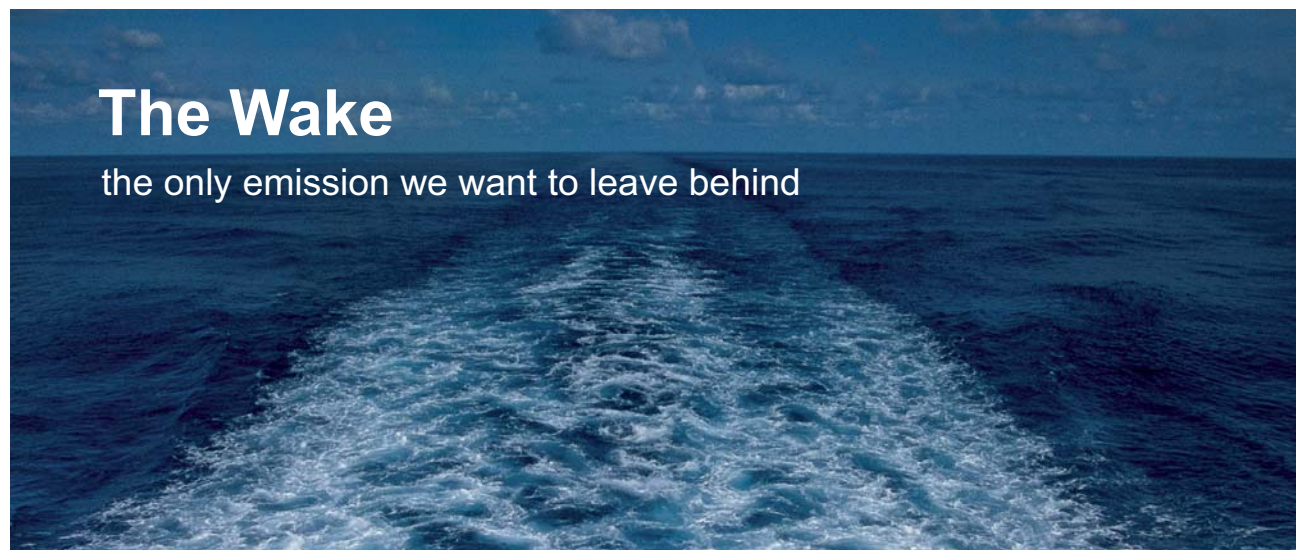
## 2.6    Controlling

Controlling is the managerial function of ensuring that performance conforms to plans. Control is essential for achieving the objectives of an organization. The planning of various activities does not ensure automatic implementation of policies. Control is the process which enables management to get its policies implemented and take corrective action if performance is not according to the pre-determined standards. If planning is the beginning of the management process, controlling may be said to be the final stage.

### 2.6.1    Elements of control

The process of control involves the following elements:

- **Planning:** It involves decisions with respect to scope, time and cost, human resources of a project. Planning ensures that objectives and targets are identified. The questions to be addressed at this stage are: What precisely is to be done? Why? What is the purpose? What resources are required? What risks are involved?

- **Establishing standards:** Standards of performance need to be established. These standards are to be measurable. A control standard is a target against which performance will be compared. Such standards need to be consistent with the organization's goals. They should also identify what the performance indicators are. These standards must be known to all the employees.

- **Monitoring performance:** A monitoring mechanism needs to be set up. The formal and informal communication within an organization includes meetings and day-to-day contacts. All these formal and informal communications are crucial in understanding and improving the control process. For this purpose, the system of feedback is necessary. This feedback is compiled in the form of a report. This is followed by decision making procedures and implementing them.

- **Comparing performance against standards:** It involves measurement of performance in relation to standards and targets set. Actual performance may be higher or lower than the standard. It may even be identical. This process involves continuous monitoring and forecasting. Deviations must receive immediate attention.

- **Taking corrective action:** If deviations from established standards are found in actual performance, corrective action needs to be taken. It involves considering what must be done to rectify the situation. Factors to look at are: What action is to be taken? What steps are to be taken in this process? What time frame is required?

2.6.2      Quality standards

Quality standards concern the various stages in the manufacturing process of a product as well as the finished or final product. In order to ensure that these standards are achieved, it is necessary to have production control and inspection.

Standards used could be of the following types:

- **Ideal standards:** These are the perfect standards which must be achieved in an ideal situation. It is really very difficult – or mostly almost impossible – to attain total perfection. Not being able to achieve them could be a de-motivating factor for the employees.
- **Attainable standards:** These are standards which are possible to be attained with reasonable effort. In fact, different employees are capable of varying levels of attainment, and it becomes a difficult task for management to decide what really an attainable standard is. A lot depends on the attitude of the workforce and the management's attitude towards its workforce. However, if the management understands, it is possible to achieve attainable standards regularly. When this is done, employees are quite motivated and also the management is able to exercise control on their performance.

2.6.3      Types of control

- **Preliminary control:** It is achieved through policies and procedures. Implementation of Quality Assurance System is an effective step in this direction.
- **Concurrent control:** It is the least of the operating control which means that supervisors being first-line operational managers are responsible for ensuring that the products and/or services being offered by the company are available for sale at the right time, in the right quantity at an appropriate cost.
- **Feedback control:** It is carried out after gathering some data, analyzing and returning for corrective action.

The management function of controlling is the supervision of employees and subordinates. It is to ensure that the employees complete their allotted work as per procedures, and that they avoid wastage of effort or materials. Only giving instructions is not sufficient. It is necessary that the subordinates are supervised, and for this purpose they have also to be given motivation, guidance and training.

Another important aspect of controlling is maintaining records of performance. These records related to various aspects, such as production, sales etc., provide guidance for future planning. Periodical reports – daily, weekly, monthly etc. – ensure that the management is able to exercise control over the various activities of the organization.

# 3 Supervisory responsibilities

## 3.1    To higher management

The expectations management has of the supervisor in turn become the functions to be performed by the supervisor. In order to meet the expectations of higher management, the supervisor must interact with other groups. Each role demand is usually met by coordination with somebody else.

## 3.2    To employees

Much of a supervisor's job involves carrying out of responsibilities to employees. Proper discharge of these responsibilities is the primary way in which supervisors meet the demands placed on them by the management. Employees have expectations on their supervisor. They expect him/her to provide them with direction and support. They expect him/her to be their representative to the higher management. They expect him/her to look after their personal and social needs, and the supervisor must deal with their expectations.

Supervisors have so many different expectations from their subordinates and so many different obligations towards them that it would be difficult to cover all of them. Differences in subordinates, jobs, work organizations and cultures are among the several different factors that influence which responsibilities supervisors have towards their subordinates. A boss in charge of newly recruited subordinates would have to provide more emotional support than would a boss in charge of a group of existing subordinates.

A representative example of supervisory responsibility towards subordinates is as follows:

- Establish a warm and trusting work climate within the section/department. Be considerate and open with employees.
- When employee problems occur, handle them promptly. A staff member might need a day off in order to attend a friend's wedding. The supervisor should take care of this problem before it causes the employee to be distracted from the job.
- Be fair in relationships with employees. Although one worker in the section/department may be more likeable than some others, it is important to make work assignments strictly on the basis of job competence or other organizational requirements.
- Provide all employees with a clear explanation of all matters related to their jobs – sometimes employees need an explanation for seemingly self-apparent work rules. One receptionist went to the rest room – in the midst of a telephone call – while she held a customer on "hold." When reprimanded, she said she thought a person had the freedom to go to the rest room 'whenever nature called!'
- Train staff in job-related skills. Most need on-the-job training.
- Counsel with employees when legitimate needs for counseling exist. Although supervisors are not expected to function as personal counselors, it is often important to listen to their problems and then recommend that they seek outside help.
- Discuss contemplated changes before they take place. By doing so, a supervisor is often able to overcome subordinates' resistance to change.
- Help in orientation of new employees. Although most of them receive some kind of orientation programme from the organization, it is important that the supervisor familiarizes the new employee with major personal policies, work regulations, organizational structure, management expectations etc.
- Coordinate and schedule work in ways that minimize peaks and valleys in the work load. Such action helps avert troublesome problem of employees being overworked or underworked.
- Develop a satisfactory level of morale within the group. The term 'morale' refers to a positive attitude and feeling about a number of things such as quality of supervision and attitudes towards colleagues and supervisors.
- Support employees when they are being treated arbitrarily from above. Supervisors gain respect to the extent that they can perform this delicate act. Supervisors cannot go against orders from above, but they can see to it that upper management take another look at a situation in which it appears an employee has been treated unfairly.

## 3.3     Responsibilities to co-workers (other supervisors)

If supervisors act too independently, team work is not possible. Perhaps the supervisor's responsibilities towards co-workers are not as extensive or as important as those responsibilities towards higher management and subordinates. Yet coordination with other sections/departments is essential, as given below:

- Coordinate whatever work flow or paper work that needs to be exchanged among supervisors.
- Communicate with other sections/departments about mutual needs and problems. If you as a supervisor notice a morale problem in your section/department, it could be worth checking to see if other sections/departments are experiencing a similar problem. It could be an organization wide concern.
- Coordinate policy interpretations with other departments to ensure consistency and uniformity.

# 4 Managerial attributes and skills

## 4.1 Managerial attributes

Most people associate the following attributes to successful supervisors:

### 4.1.1 Basic knowledge and information

**Command of basic facts:** Successful supervisors know what is in their organization. They have knowledge about objectives and plans, product, organizational hierarchy etc. It is necessary for them to store all this information otherwise they will not know where to look for information about all such matters.

**Professional knowledge:** This includes technical knowledge such as production technology, basic principles of management like planning, organizing, directing, motivating, controlling.

### 4.1.2 Skills

- **Sensitivity to events:** A successful supervisor senses what is going on around him/her. They are open to information such as facts and figures, and also feelings of other people. Such a supervisor is able to take appropriate decisions in various situations.
- **Social skills:** Management is often defined as "getting things done through other people." Though this may not be a complete definition of management, it tells us that a supervisor being the first-line manager requires interpersonal skills. The successful supervisor develops a number of abilities which are necessary in various activities, such as communicating, delegating, negotiating, persuading, using authority etc.
- **Decision making skills:** A supervisor is often called upon to make decisions. Sometimes these can be made using logical techniques. Other decisions may require the ability to weigh advantages and disadvantages. Sometimes they need to have a very high level of judgment. Therefore, the supervisor must develop decision making skills and have the ability to find a balance between logic and personal feelings.

### 4.1.3 Personal qualities

- **Emotional balance:** The supervisor works in situations which involve authority, leadership, meeting targets and deadlines, conflicts etc. The successful supervisor has to be able to maintain emotional balance and self-control so that they may face various situations confidently and successfully.
- **Being proactive:** The supervisors have some objectives to achieve. They cannot plan everything in advance. Several times they have to respond to the needs of the situation which has arisen suddenly. The supervisor must also be able to have qualities such as being committed, having a missionary zeal, taking responsibility instead of passing the blame to others.

- **Creativity:** It means that the supervisor must have the ability to come up with new responses to situations. They must have new ideas and also be able to recognize a good idea when it comes from another source.
- **Mental agility:** The supervisor must have the ability to grasp problems quickly, to think of several things at the same time, and assess the whole situation quickly. In the busy modern world of business this quality is necessary for success.
- **Learning habits:** Effective supervisors are independent as learners. They take responsibility for the rightness of what is learned, and are not dependent on others.
- **Self-knowledge:** Whatever the supervisor does is affected by their own view of their job and role, objectives, strengths and weaknesses etc. So they must be aware of these attributes. Hence the supervisor must develop skills of looking at himself critically.

## 4.2    Managerial skills

In order to handle their jobs effectively supervisors require a combination of five key managerial skills. These are classified as technical, human, conceptual, diagnostic and political. The first three have been recognized for many years. Diagnostic and political skills have also now received attention as organizations have become more complex.

### 4.2.1    Technical skill

Technical skill is proficiency in a specific activity that involves methods, processes, procedures or techniques. Individual performers expect their supervisor to be able to help them with technical problems.

### 4.2.2    Human skill

Human skill is the ability to work with, understand, motivate, and communicate with individuals and the group. Human skill also includes the ability to communicate with people, to resolve conflict, and to discipline. Since the supervisor's job involves constant interaction with people, human skills are essential.

### 4.2.3    Conceptual skill

- Conceptual skill is the ability to understand abstract or general ideas and apply them to specific situations.
- Conceptual skill usually means understanding how the total organization can be affected by a specific activity.
- Although it may not always be apparent, every action taken in an organization has ramifications elsewhere.

### 4.2.4    Diagnostic skill

- Diagnostic skill is the ability to analyze the nature of a problem with people, ideas, things or events. A good diagnosis precedes a recommended solution to a problem (like in medicine or automotive repair or management). Supervisors are frequently called on to size up a problem in order to take appropriate corrective action.
- Diagnostic skill overlaps with the other four managerial skills. This occurs because supervisors usually need to use technical, human, conceptual or political skills to make their diagnosis.
- Many supervisors regard diagnostic skill as the most exciting part of their jobs. An experienced supervisor expressed it this way: "Figuring out what's wrong is why I am here. If all problems had a ready solution, you wouldn't need a supervisor."
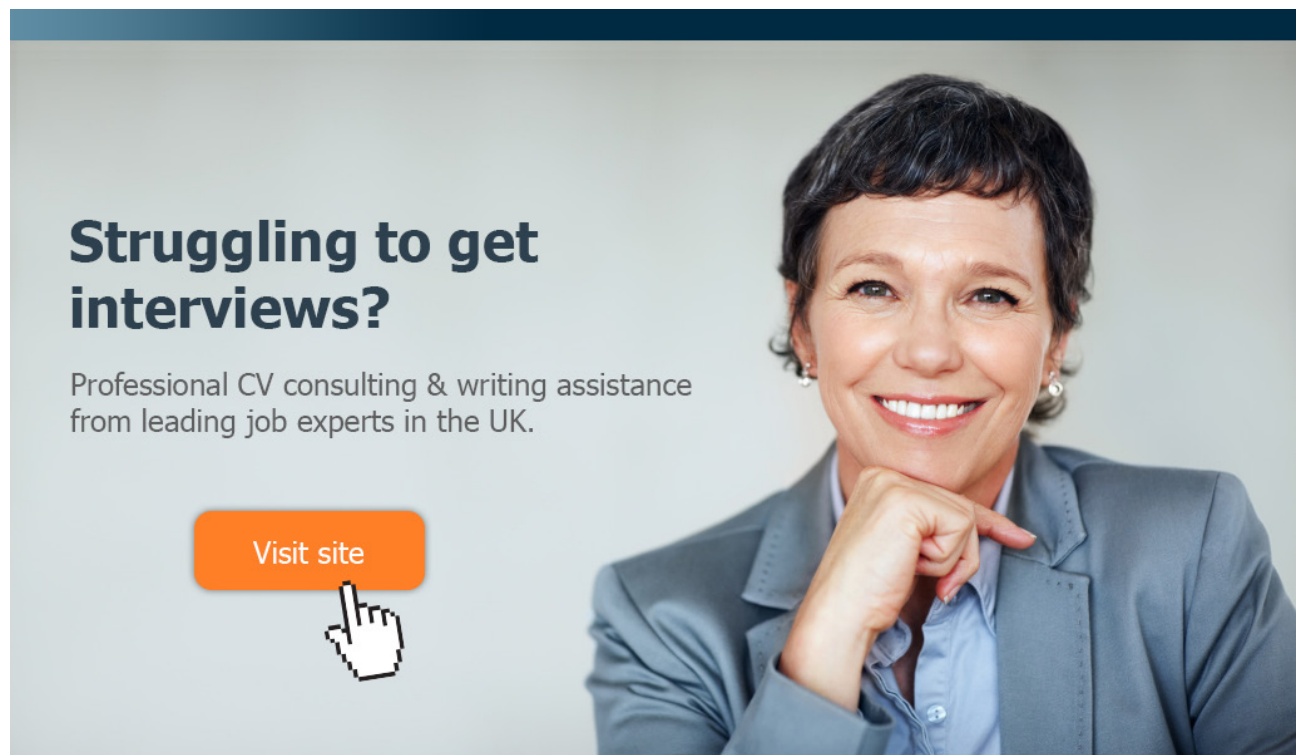
### 4.2.5    Political skill

Political skill is the ability to acquire the power needed to achieve one's objective. Specific political skills include being able to win others over to your cause.

# 5    Roles of a supervisor

The term 'supervisor' includes all types of foremen and junior executives below middle management level. Generally, there are three levels of supervisors. The first level supervisor represents the level where a person no longer performs an operator's job. He is full-time on supervision and devotes most of his time in planning, decision making, and communication. The second and third level supervisors are almost similar, but may cover a wider range.

Sometimes the job of a supervisor becomes more complex and difficult than that of higher level managers because a supervisor has to maintain relationship between two groups – management and workers – who are not only different from the function point of view but they also differ in many other respects, namely, education, skills, socio-cultural backgrounds, levels of expectations in the organization, and the identity of group and group goals.

Supervisors are directly related with workers. They take directions from middle managers. It is assumed that a supervisor is like any other member of management, but actually both his function and status are quite different. A supervisor's job differs from that of other managers because the group he supervises is different. This requires him to interact with two groups – managers, who are his superiors and workers who are his subordinates.

## 5.1    As a manager

A supervisor is a person who has direct supervision over the workforce in office, factory, sales field or other areas of activity of the organization. As a manager, the functions of a supervisor include the following:

- Supervision of the foremen, workers;
- Procurement of needed material and tools;
- Planning, scheduling and assignment of work of each individual;
- Training of workers;
- Issuing of orders;
- Maintenance of quality;
- Care of machines and equipment;
- Getting out the required production;
- Improving working conditions;
- Developing morale and team spirit;
- Maintaining discipline;
- Controlling absenteeism;
- Adjusting grievances;
- Improving methods of production; and
- Representing the management to workers and the workers to the management.

### 5.1.1    Key qualities for managers

In order to understand a supervisor's work as a manager it is essential to know what qualities he/she is expected to possess. John Humphries (2000) specifies ten key qualities:

- ☐ Providing clear directions by:
  - Establishing clear goals and standards;
  - Communicating group goals;
  - Involving people in setting targets;
  - Being clear and thorough when delegating tasks.
- ☐ Encouraging open, two-way communication by:
  - Being open when dealing with people;
  - Being honest, direct and to the point;
  - Establishing a climate of trust.
- ☐ Willing to coach and support people by:
  - Being supportive and helpful;
  - Being constructive when correcting poor performance;
  - Supporting the staff upwards.

☐ Providing clear objective recognition by:

- Recognizing good performance more often than criticizing;
- Relating rewards to the excellence of performance.

☐ Establishing on-going controls to:

- Follow up on important issues and actions;
- Give staff feedback on their performance.

☐ Selecting the right people to staff the organization (This may not fall under a supervisor's function.)

☐ Understanding the financial implications of decisions.

☐ Encouraging new ideas.

☐ Giving out clear cut decisions when necessary.

☐ Constantly demonstrating high levels of integrity.

## 5.2    As a leader

A supervisor must, by definition, be a leader. His supervisory and managerial functions are concerned with planning, organizing, coordinating, controlling and directing the activities of other people towards the achievement of an objective. The different attributes needed by a successful leader, in managerial and supervisory terms, are many and varied, and to a large extent will be demanded by the circumstances under which the leadership has to be exercised.

The leader needs:

- Awareness of what is going on in groups, the group process or underlying behaviour, and the actual content of discussion;
- Understanding, that is, knowing that a particular function is required;
- Skill to do it effectively, which can be usually judged by whether the group responds or changes course.

### 5.2.1    Functions of a supervisor as a leader

- **As executive:** top coordinator of the group activities and overseer of the execution of policies.
- **As planner:** deciding the ways and means by which the group achieves its ends. This may involve both short-term and long-term planning.
- **As a policy maker:** the establishment of group goals and policies.
- **As expert:** a source of readily available information and skills, although there will be some reliance on technical expertise and advice from other members of the group.
- **As group representative:** the official spokesperson for the group, the representative of the group and the channel for both outgoing and incoming communications.
- **As controller of internal relations:** determines specific aspects of group structure.

- **As purveyor of rewards and punishment:** control over group members by the power to provide rewards and apply punishments.
- **As arbitrator and mediator:** controls interpersonal conflicts within the group.
- **As exemplar:** a model of behaviour for members of the group, setting an example of what is expected.
- **As symbol of the group:** enhancing group unity by providing some kind of cognitive focus and establishing the group as a distinct identity.
- **As substitute for individual responsibility:** relieves the individual member of the group from the necessity of, and responsibility for, personal decision.
- **As ideologist:** serving as the source of beliefs, values and standards of behaviour for individual members of the group.
- **As father figure:** serving as a focus for the positive emotional feelings of individual members and the object for identification and transference.
- **As scapegoat:** serving as a target for aggression and hostility of the group, accepting blame in the case of failure.

5.2.2      Nature of leadership

It is important to understand that leadership resides in the functions and not a particular person. The various functions of leadership can be shared among members of the group. If a member provides a particular function which is relevant to the activities of the group, and accepted by group members, then in those circumstances this could become a leadership function.

5.2.3      Choosing a leadership style

In the work situation it has become increasingly clear that supervisors can no longer rely solely on the use of their position in the hierarchical structure as a means of exercising the functions of leadership. In order to get the best results from subordinates, the supervisors must also have regard for the need to encourage high morale, a spirit of involvement and cooperation, and a willingness to work.

Leadership style is the way in which the functions of leadership are carried out, the way in which the supervisor typically behaves towards members of the group.

- ☐ **The authoritarian style:** It is where the focus of power is with the leader, and all interactions within the group move towards the leader. The leader alone exercises decision making and authority for determining policy, procedures for achieving goals, work tasks and relationships, control of rewards or punishments.
- ☐ **The democratic style:** Here the focus is more with the group as a whole and there is greater interaction within the group. The leadership functions are shared with members of the group. The group members have a greater say in decision making, determination of policy, implementation of systems and procedures.
- ☐ **A genuine laissez-faire style:** With this style the leader observes that members of the group are working well on their own. The leader consciously makes a decision to allow them freedom of action and not to interfere, but is readily available if help is needed. This is to be contrasted with the leader who could not care, who deliberately keeps away from the trouble spots and does not want to get involved. The leader just lets members of the group get on with the work on hand. This is more a non-style of leadership. It can perhaps be labeled as abdication.
- ☐ **The situational style:** Leadership behaviour is determined by two main situational factors – the personal characteristics of subordinates, and the nature of the task:
  - The personal characteristics of subordinates determine how they will react to the leader's behaviour and the extent to which they see such behaviour as an immediate or potential source of need satisfaction.
  - The nature of the task relates to the extent that it is routine and structured, or non-routine and unstructured. For example, when a task is highly structured and the goals readily apparent, attempts to further explain the job or to give directions are likely to be viewed by subordinates as unacceptable behaviour. However, when a task is highly unstructured or the nature of the goals is not clear, a more directive style of leadership behaviour is likely to be welcomed by subordinates.

Leadership behaviour is based, therefore, on both the willingness of the leader to help subordinates and the needs of subordinates for help. Leadership behaviour will be motivational to the extent that it provides necessary direction, guidance and support, helps clarify path-goal relationships and removes any obstacles which hinder attainment of goals. By using one of the four styles of leadership behaviour the leader attempts to influence subordinates' perceptions and motivation, and smooth the path to their goals.

## 5.3     As a decision maker

A supervisor is required to make decisions in various situations. Decision making is the foremost aspect of supervisory responsibility. The method of decision making is quite often responsible for far-reaching consequences. Decision making may be defined as the solution from among alternatives of a course of action. A decision is the outcome of hunch, intuition, reasoning and planning. It is made to achieve goals.

### 5.3.1     Features of decision making

Decision making has a number of important features:

- Decisions are made to achieve identifiable goals.
- They imply the existence of a set of alternatives to choose from.
- The process of decision making is extremely dynamic.
- Decisions are made in relation to the environment.
- It is implied that a decision maker has the freedom to do so.
- When a decision has been made, the matter does not end there. Decision making is an on-going process.
- Decisions are not made in haste. The process is intellectual or rational.

### 5.3.2     Scope of decision making

The role of the supervisor can be seen as a role concerned with three main classes of decision:

- The decisions regarding the allocation of resources (human as well as material) within the system – the organization function.
- The decisions regarding the organization of work in a well-defined direction – the directive function.
- The decisions relating to monitoring or checking – the controlling function.

### 5.3.3    Types of decisions

The decision making task of a supervisor involves making various types of decisions:

- Institutional decisions: They relate to scheduling various activities as per the approved plan.
- Strategy decisions: They involve the implementation of institutional decisions. A supervisor has to decide who should be involved in what, when, and how.
- Programmed decisions: These decisions are structured and are applied to routine problems and repetitive work.
- Non-programmed decisions: They deal with problems that result from unusual and unstructured situations. They are aimed at the problems that are not well defined.
- Initiative or forced decisions.
- Decision making under certainty, uncertainty and risk conditions.
- Personal decisions.
- Individual or group decisions.

### 5.3.4 Decision making process

Decisions do not occur in a vacuum. There is an orderly process to decision making. The process passes through a series of steps which a supervisor must take carefully:

- Recognizing, defining and limiting the problem;
- Analyzing, diagnosing and evaluating the problem;
- Establishing criteria or standards by which a solution will be judged as acceptable;
- Discovering alternate solutions;
- Collecting data;
- Selecting the best solution:
- Converting the decision into effective action.

### 5.3.5 Effective decision making

Various other factors influence effective decision making:

- **Personal values and organization culture:** The intellectual make-up, education, experience and personal values of a supervisor have a great impact on decision making ability. A supervisor with healthy attitude of mind will naturally be more effective than the one with negative disposition. Emotional and motivational factors coupled with courage on the part of the supervisor to make and implement the decision are also important. Similarly, the pattern of behaviour, shared beliefs, and values of members of the workgroup do influence a supervisor's decision making.
- **Involving the staff:** Decisions cannot usually be made in a closed-system environment. All levels of personnel in a supervisor's workgroup should participate in the process to some degree. However, it is often neither advisable nor feasible to democratize the decision process to the extent that for all decisions a vote is taken. At some point, a decision is to be made.

# 6    Supervisory activities

## 6.1    Managing workplace diversity

### 6.1.1    Definition of diversity

Diversity can be defined as the variety of experiences and perspectives which arise from differences in race, culture, religion, mental or physical abilities, age, gender and other characteristics

Workplace diversity is a people issue, focused on the differences and similarities that people bring to an organization. A diverse workforce combines workers from different backgrounds and experiences that together breed a more creative, innovative, and productive workforce.

### 6.1.2    Managing diversity

To address diversity issues, a supervisor should consider these questions: What policies, practices, and ways of thinking within the organizational culture have differential impact on different groups? What could be done to meet the needs of a diverse workforce as well as to maximize the potential of all workers?

Managing diversity means acknowledging people's differences and recognizing these differences as valuable. A supervisor should make an effort to bring harmony among the diverse groups of workers, and get the best out of their experiences, attitudes and skills.

## 6.2    Communicating effectively

Effective communication in the workplace happens with effort. This effort must include participation and agreement between supervisors and employees. Each must work with the other to achieve the goals, but the onus of ensuring this mostly lies with a supervisor.

### 6.2.1    Availability

In order to be effective, supervisors need to be available to employees. Whether they maintain an "open door" policy or not, employees should know when and how they can communicate with supervisors. If employees have ready access to their supervisors, they will be able to clarify the common goals and objectives of the workplace.

### 6.2.2        Attitude and behaviour

Much is conveyed by a supervisor's attitude and behaviour. Getting cooperation from each other is as much influenced by our attitudes as our behaviours. If we convey a positive attitude, people react to us positively. But if we convey a negative attitude, we will experience negativity in return. Consider this example:

> Negative supervisor: "You cannot finish this job if you run the grader this way."

> Positive supervisor: "There are several different ways to run that grader. How about I show you one way that will ensure a smoother job?"

### 6.2.3        Approach to problems

Consider how to approach problems in the workplace. If there is a job to complete, materials are late arriving, an employee key to the operation called in sick, and a vehicle has broken down, it is easy to throw up your hands and voice despair. Such behaviour conveys an attitude of defeat before you start solving the problem. Employees will pick up negativity and imitate it. A positive attitude can be converted to positive group interaction to solve the problem. Be assertive, announce the problem, and ask for everyone's cooperation and help in getting the job done. When employees know that supervisors believe in their abilities, and will work with them to be successful, positive attitudes will convert into positive behaviours.

### 6.2.4        Building relationships

Supervisors should not take good work for granted. Praise good work. Thank people regularly. Be specific about behaviour that needs to change. Remember that what motivates one person may not work with another. If you need overtime help, asking the most senior worker may not be doing them a favour. Perhaps the person has a sick parent at home to care for. On the other hand, another employee may welcome overtime to help pay for a newly purchased house. Build relationships with your workers, and be careful to maintain a professional attitude.

### 6.2.5        Positive attitude

One way to display a positive attitude is to give more credit than you take. If employees get credit for making supervisors look good, everyone benefits. Successful supervisors who are well-liked and respected as leaders always get credit when it is due. They also know how to share success with employees who contribute to a winning situation.

### 6.2.6        Humour

Humour has an important role in the workplace. Use it wisely, never at the expense of someone's embarrassment, and begin by directing it to yourself.

### 6.2.7    Appropriate information

Supervisors should reveal occupational goals and objectives. Just like a trip across the country, you can either wander aimlessly, or you can develop a plan, set a schedule for departure and arrival, and chart your course. You can anticipate detours along the way. The detours might be placed in your path by others or you may decide to create your own alternative route. Everyone needs to know the "road map." Consider these:

- Where are you going?
- How can you get there together?
- What obstacles might you encounter?
- Who has the skill to contribute to success?

### 6.2.8    Being fair

Be clear, consistent and fair. Stick to what you say if it is important and right. It is essential for employees to believe that what supervisors say one day will not substantially change the next day. If your actions are different from your words, your employees will believe less of what you say. On the other hand, if you need to reverse a decision or try a better way to do something, admit it. Everyone respects honesty.

### 6.2.9    Establish standards

Establish standards, and let everyone who works with you know what they are. Here is how:

- Establish standards for quality and communicate them.
- Establish lines of authority (e.g. foremen, group leaders etc.) so that everyone knows who is in charge.
- Know **what** you want before telling others.
- Tell **why** if you change your mind.
- Be brave about admitting mistakes (use it as a learning opportunity for everyone).
- Know when to compromise and have alternatives in mind.
- Know when and how to criticize (never publicly).
- Respect individuality.

### 6.2.10    Sharing the vision

When trying to motivate employees, keep in mind that usually what you are trying to accomplish is to get someone to perform the job better. In order to do a job well, employees need to know **what** the job is, **how** you want it done, and **when** you want it done. If they do not know your vision for the finished product/project, you may get a result different from what you had planned.

### 6.2.11    Communication

In an organization communication must operate in both directions – "upwards" as well as "downwards." That's why it is called "vertical" – up and down – communication. When information and instructions are passed on from supervisors to subordinates, there is "downward" communication. On the other hand, when subordinates have some problems, complaints or suggestions, there is "upward" communication from subordinates to supervisors. This vertical communication makes it possible for instructions and information to reach the subordinates, and subordinates' feedback to supervisors. This is possible with two-way communication.

## 6.3    Developing job expectations

### 6.3.1    Job analysis

Job analysis is the process by means of which a description is developed of the present methods and procedures of doing a job, physical conditions in which the job is done, relation of the job to other jobs and other conditions of employment. Job analysis is intended to reveal what is actually done as opposed to what should be done. Therefore, if a worker is found doing some activity not required of that job, it should still form part of the job analysis.

The nature of jobs changes over a period of time. New developments take place. New personnel are employed. All this necessitates that jobs are reviewed and analysed to suit the changed circumstances.

Any job involves a number of tasks. Some of these require special skill, knowledge, and/or training. Other tasks might be easier. In order to describe a job it is necessary first to analyse it. This is done to find out the following things about the job:

- What different tasks are to be performed – whether it is a single task or a small number of multiple tasks?
- How the different tasks are to be performed. It means the procedures to perform these tasks in the best possible way.
- What qualifications (education, training, skills etc.) and personal qualities (good eyesight, good hearing, pleasant voice etc.) should be possessed by the candidate.
- For what and for whom the candidate will be responsible.

The purpose of job analysis is not to describe an ideal but show the management how at the moment the constituent parts of its business are being carried out. Job analysis enables an organization to compare different jobs. This will provide information about the status of various jobs as well as for job evaluation and in training. The information concerning the job can be obtained from a number of sources such as observation of workers, interviews, questionnaire responses, bulletins etc., knowledge of the materials of work and actual performance of work. It has been found that questionnaire is best suited for clerical workers and interviewing is suited for shop floor workers. Working conditions and hazards are better described when viewed by the analyst.

## 6.3.2    Job description
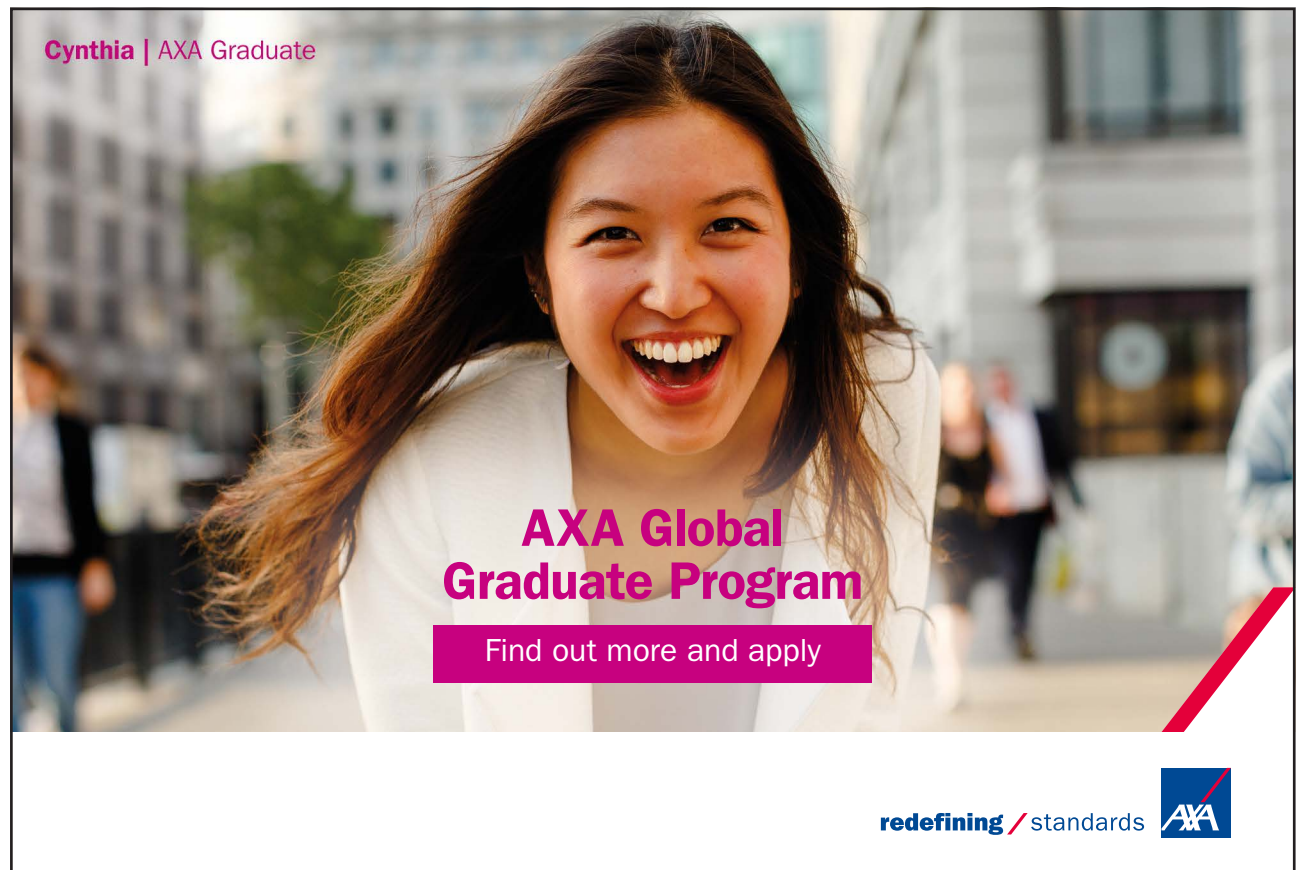
The results of job analysis are set down in job description. It defines a particular job. Writing job descriptions for production workers, clerical people and first-line supervisors is a fairly established practice. The different types of job descriptions differ from each other in the following manner:

- The lower level job descriptions are generally written by the Personnel/HR department, but the supervisory job descriptions are written by the incumbent supervisors themselves or by their managers.
- The lower level job descriptions are written for wage and salary administration and so centre directly on tangible duties and day-to-day assignments, i.e. the tasks to be performed. On the other hand, supervisory and managerial job descriptions are more closely related to organization planning and so naturally are descriptions of intangible relationships, overall responsibilities and lines of authority, i.e. the results to be achieved by the person.

A job description describes a particular job. It states the purpose of a job and its relation with other jobs and people. A job description contains the following:

- Job title, section or department, and details of the work group.
- Objectives of the job, for example, for the position of supervisor of customer service section: "To ensure that the complaints and queries of customers are promptly attended to."
- List of duties.
- Responsibilities – for what and to whom the person will be responsible.
- Information about the relationship with people connected with the job – both inside and outside the organization.
- Information about the work environment – private office or open-plan office, or shop floor.
- Details about hours of work, shift system, paid holidays, sick leave etc.
- Details about salary, overtime, bonus, and such other benefits.

Job description gives detailed information about the job, and even enables a candidate to make a decision whether he wants to take up the job. It also prepares him/her to perform duties with full understanding and without any doubts.

## 6.4    Employee training and development

### 6.4.1    Importance of training

When new employees join an organization, they already have certain skills for the job they have to perform. However, they are new to the system and procedures of the organization. People have different levels of abilities. While some jobs are fairly easy and they can quickly learn to do them, there are some difficult jobs for which it is necessary to give them training. While some employees learn fast, others may take a little longer.

The initial training is mainly provided within the organization as the employees have to work there as members of a workgroup. Even the existing employees need further training as there are always new developments in processes and because of technological developments. In order to remain productive and useful, employees have to be provided with opportunities for further training and development. This will not only enhance the existing skills of employees but will also increase the efficiency and productivity of the organization. It is the responsibility of a supervisor to ensure that training and development programmes for subordinates are organized. If he/she is not able to provide this training himself, he/she has to engage himself/herself in supervising and controlling it.

### 6.4.2    Employee induction

☐ **Meaning and purpose:** The process of induction is meant to induct a new employee into the new social setting of his/her work. The new employee is introduced to his/her job situation and informed about the rules, working conditions, privileges and activities and other particulars pertaining to the organization.

It is important to give a new employee a good impression on the first day of work. However, the induction programme should not end there. It is also important to have a systematic induction programme, spread over several days, to cover all the ground in the shortest time effectively. Most of the information is likely to be embodied in a handbook which is distributed to all employees, and in the case of rank and file workers, the induction programme may consist of brief explanation by the supervisor with whom the employee will work.

☐ **Effective induction programme:** In some organizations, the induction programme is divided into phases. In the first phase, the induction is done by a member of the Personnel/HR department who informs the new employee about particulars relating to the organization. In the second phase, induction is done by the supervisor. He/she informs the new comers about their job, duties, responsibilities, importance of their job in relation to other jobs etc. Further, they are introduced to the rest of the work team.

☐ **What induction programme involves:** Usually induction involves the new employee meeting and listening to different people talk about aspects of the business. Other methods include written information, audio-visual aids and group discussion. The following items are generally covered in the induction programme:

- Introduction to the business/department and its personnel/management structure
- Layout of buildings (factory/offices)
- Terms and conditions of employment
- Relevant personnel policies, such as training, promotion and health and safety
- Business rules and procedures
- Arrangement for employee involvement and communication
- Welfare and employee benefits and facilities

☐ **Follow-up:** An informal "follow-up" talk between the section/department supervisor and a new employee during the first few weeks could be advantageous as it would remove any doubts or misunderstandings the employee may have. It will also ensure that the supervisor concerned is able to spot any errors or deficiencies in the new employee's work and correct them immediately. He/she may also give practical help and advice. This is likely to result in establishing a good working relationship between the supervisor and the new employees – thus ensuring efficiency and productivity of the new employees for the benefit of the organization.

### 6.4.3    Key to successful employee training

The following can be considered the key elements of successful employee training:

- Some people learn more quickly than others. It is also possible that learners may finally learn to perform better than those who thought they knew everything. Hence it is necessary for a supervisor to observe each individual carefully and guide them accordingly.
- Training somebody to do something takes longer than doing it oneself. Hence the supervisor should ensure that he/she and/or the trainer needs to have a lot of patience in explaining and must allow them adequate practice time.
- When the task is complex, it needs to be broken down in small steps. This will simplify the job, and will enable the trainee to understand faster and better.

### 6.4.4 'On-going' training to be open to all employees

Training is an 'on-going' process. New developments take place. New technology becomes available. New machinery is installed. New methods are to be adopted. Processes are changed. This entire process means that training has to be continuous. It also cannot be limited only to new employees but the existing employees also have to be made a part of the 'on-going' training programmes. This is necessary for the following reasons:

- If all employees are made a part of 'on-going' training programme, they will learn to perform various jobs. When a particular member of a workgroup is absent for some reason, another member may take over his work also. This will avoid any delays which might occur otherwise.
- When people keep doing the same routine work day after day, it leads to over-confidence, carelessness, mistakes, and even accidents. Such employees may become bored with their routine jobs and may not have interest in their work and may decide to leave. On the other hand, if they are trained to perform other specialized jobs also, they will be motivated to work with interest, and will be an asset to the organization.
- Employees know that if they learn new skills, it may mean promotion and higher financial benefits. This will encourage them to participate in 'on-going' training programmes, and also they will continue to work willingly and efficiently.

### 6.4.5 Types of training

- **Activity training:** Activity training includes on-the-job training. While some work is easy and can be learned quickly, other work may be difficult and may require a worker to gain specialized knowledge and skills. This may differ from employee to employee. These skills can be developed gradually over a period of time. For this, it is necessary to organize training on an 'on-going' basis. This on-the-job training can be further strengthened by providing activities training on a part-time basis in a technical or commercial institute/college, and can be done along with the employee's regular work schedule. However, the progress of the employee needs to be monitored by the supervisor.
- **Craft training:** This type of training is necessary for a skilled trade or craft. This is provided in polytechnics and colleges. In some countries there is a provision for 'apprenticeship.' These apprentices learn the trade or craft in a practical way with the potential employer, and after successful completion of apprenticeship they are absorbed in the organization as regular employees. A supervisor must closely monitor the apprenticeship of such people.

6.4.6        Low investment processes

Low investment processes are obviously preferred in most of the organizations since they can be carried out within normal operational activities and do not involve additional costs. However, it is important to ensure that the level of on-the-job training does not reach a stage where there is real interference with department performance levels. They include:

- On-the-job training and work experience in needed skills areas;
- On-the-job training and work experience to extend skills range;
- On-the-job training and work experience for conversion to new jobs;
- Standing in for a higher-graded employee during absence;
- On-the-job performance coaching to achieve higher output targets;
- Off-the-job training followed by the 'delivery' of in-house training;
- In-house mentoring by the supervisor for career development.

## 6.5        Delegating

Responsibility and authority are to be delegated for creating structure of an organization. It is a core element of the organizing process since organizing has little meaning without delegation of responsibility and authority.

6.5.1        Meaning of delegation

Delegation is:

- A process of assigning various degrees of decision making authority to subordinates;
- A process by which a manager/supervisor assigns some of his/her tasks to subordinates on selective basis and allows them to share responsibility and exercise authority on his behalf to perform the assigned task;
- The primary formal mechanism by which a network of responsibility-authority relationship is established.

6.5.2        Process of delegation

The following steps are to be carried out in a sequence:

- Sizing up workload;
- Assigning work appropriately;
- Fixing responsibility and granting authority;
- Creating accountability.

6.5.3        Responsibility, authority and accountability

Responsibility refers to those obligations which a person is expected to perform to the best of his abilities in a given direction. It is an obligation of subordinates to perform duty as required by his/her superior. It is the duties and activities assigned to a position.

- ☐ Features of responsibility:
  - Obligation to perform assigned work satisfactorily;
  - Acceptance of assigned work leads to becoming responsible;
  - Cannot be transferred or delegated;
  - Acceptance of responsibility leads to becoming accountable to superior;
  - Flows from lower to higher levels.
- ☐ Accountability is an obligation:
  - To keep superior informed about the progress of work on a regular basis;
  - To explain any failure in performance.
- ☐ Importance of delegation of authority:
  - Delegation of authority:
    - Is crucial to creating managerial/supervisory hierarchy;
    - Permits managers/supervisors to concentrate on key activities;
    - Facilitates decision making;
    - Causes a subordinate to accept accountability;
    - Is based on the principle of division of work.

### 6.5.4      Delegating successfully

Effective delegation can be achieved by making use of the following guidelines:

- Establishing objectives;
- Evaluating competence of subordinates;
- Defining responsibility and authority clearly;
- Motivating subordinates;
- Establishing communication channels;
- Imparting proper training;
- Exercising supportive supervision;
- Determining standards of performance;
- Incorporating a feedback system.

## 6.6      Employee counseling and disciplining

### 6.6.1      Employee counseling

A situation which can lead to disciplinary action may be avoided by taking certain steps. This involves having a talk with the subordinates, trying to find a solution to the problem which is creating such a situation. This process of settling problems without resorting to disciplinary action is termed employee counseling.

Several problems are related to work while others are personal problems. Generally a supervisor is concerned with the employees' work-related problems, but sometimes he/she may have to deal with an employee's personal problem also because that may be the cause of starting work-related problem.

Solution to a problem can be found only through a joint discussion between the supervisor and the subordinate. This needs to be a two-way process. Sometimes a supervisor arranges a counseling session, while at other times it is initiated by the employee when he/she needs to share some problem.

It is important that the supervisor keeps the information related to an employee's counseling session confidential from other employees. Every problem that needs to be addressed through counseling is individual in nature. Hence for each problem the supervisor has to adopt a flexible approach and not try to fix every problem with the same solution.

Employee counseling will be successful if the following points are considered:

- The subject for discussion should be introduced in a discrete manner and not done openly.
- The reasons for the discussion should be explained to the employee in a sympathetic manner so that he/she has confidence to discuss the matter further.
- Questions should be asked in a gentle manner so that the subordinate is able to appreciate how the supervisor is trying to help him/her.
- Quite often all the questions related to the problem may not be addressed in one session. A few more sessions may be necessary in order to get all the facts right. Hence a lot of patience is to be exercised.

After the problem has been established, an effort has to be made by both the parties to find a mutually acceptable solution. These employee counseling sessions will be effective only when the subordinates have confidence in the ability and sincerity of a supervisor to solve their problem. On the part of the supervisor it is necessary to have a lot of patience and understanding. When such a situation exists, it is possible to have a high level of employee motivation. This is also a very effective method of controlling employee behaviour.

### 6.6.2    Disciplining

Supervisors of various departments always try to motivate, guide, advice, and control their subordinates. In spite of this, occasions will arise when there is no alternative but to take disciplinary action. Before committing to any proposed disciplinary action, a supervisor might consult the HR manager and brief him/her fully on the situation that has arisen and seek guidance.

Depending on severity of the offence, disciplinary action takes different forms. The following procedure may be adopted:

- If it is a first offence, the person should be spoken to and advised. For example, if a subordinate arrives at work late without a satisfactory explanation, a counseling session may be beneficial.
- If the same employee continues behaving in the same way, for, say, a week, a formal written warning is needed. The supervisor may recommend this action to the manager concerned.
- If the employee still does not improve, he/she has to be penalized. Depending on the situation, the supervisor may recommend the employee's transfer to another section or location, suspension without pay, or dismissal from job.

## 6.7    Evaluating performance

Performance appraisal means the systematic evaluation of the performance of an employee by his/her superiors. It is a tool for discovering, analyzing and classifying the differences among workers in relation to job standards. It refers to the formal system of appraisal, in which the individual is compared with others and ranked or rated. Generally, appraisal is made by the supervisor or manager (with feedback from the supervisor) once or twice a year.

### 6.7.1    Purpose of Performance Appraisal

Performance appraisal is an important tool of HR management, and is extremely important for a supervisor to be involved in this process. It is used for a variety of purposes.

- It is used to appraise the quality of performance of different employees. It includes knowledge of the work, ability to do the work efficiently, spirit of coordination, dependability, punctuality, enthusiasm, self-confidence, leadership qualities etc.
- Through this method, the appraisal procedure is standardized so that the management may rate all the employees on the same qualities by the same method of measurement.
- It may be used for training of employees.
- It is also useful in deciding the type and nature of training programmes for employees. It helps in the placement of employees properly and also in finding out the 'misfit' who may be transferred to the right place.
- It forms an unbiased and systematic basis for any increase in the wages of employees.
- It helps in identifying employees who may be considered for promotion.

## 6.8      Health and safety

It is the responsibility of a supervisor to ensure development and maintenance of a safe and healthy 'working environment,' in which employees do not fear that their health will suffer as the result of the work they perform, or that they will be exposed to unnecessary risks of injury during their time at work.

In the context of supervisory responsibilities:

- The term 'health' refers to the freedom of employees from physical or emotional illness.
- The term 'safety' involves protecting employees from work-related accidents which could result in injury and even death.
- An 'accident' refers to any unplanned and uncontrolled event which results in harm, whether through disease or injury, to an employee or other people in the workplace. Accidents can also result in damage to or loss of plant, machinery and equipment, furniture, materials and other stocks.

### 6.8.1      Safety and security issues

There is a wide range of factors which can contribute to accidents and injuries occurring in the workplace. They include:

- The building in which work is performed might itself be unsafe; for example, floors might be uneven or might be badly covered, there might be protruding surfaces, rickety steps or dangerous openings.
- The machinery installed might be unsafe or be badly maintained.
- Bad or inadequate lighting can contribute to trips, falls and collisions.
- Poor ventilation can lead to the spread of diseases, to the spread of unpleasant or noxious smells or gases, and even to explosions.
- Generally untidy workplaces or badly positioned or balanced shelving units, racks, cabinets or cupboards, faulty electrical connections, faulty hand tools, and fire hazards, far too often contribute to accidents and injuries at work.
- The way the work has to be done – the 'design of the job' – might also create hazards. Examples include the cleaning or maintenance of machinery when it is in use, the lack of suitable seating, the need to lift or carry heavy objects, as well as processes which involve contact with dangerous substances or moving parts.

6.8.2      Creating safety consciousness

There are a number of techniques which can be used by a supervisor – in coordination with HR department – to try to persuade the employees that concern for safety makes sense. Individually, a few of them can be amalgamated quite effectively into a "campaign," to produce a cumulative long-term effect.

- **Posters and notices:** Visual reminders placed around office and/or factory premises might serve to draw people's attention to the need to take care, and to wear protective clothing. They will, however, very soon become "part of the furniture," and it is doubtful whether employees will even see them after a few weeks, let alone absorb their messages – so regular changes of posters and notices are necessary.
- **Films or videos:** These have more specific impact than do posters, and can be more explicit and detailed in their message.
- **Fear techniques:** It might be possible to show people the actual consequences of accidents which might have happened. These might include photographs of the scene immediately following an accident in their own workplace, a talk by someone who has actually suffered serious injury, or a look at a collection of damaged tools and clothing, and pictures of people who have suffered injury.

- **Discipline:** Laying down strict rules in relation to safe working practice and behaviour, and punishing those who do not conform, is regarded by some experts as the best way to teach people "a lesson." In practice, there is evidence to show that, in the longer term, people's attitude to safety actually deteriorates where discipline is used. They become pre-occupied, not with complying with the regulations, but with avoiding the detection of their non-compliance. If a supervisor considers that disciplinary action is necessary, he/she should so advise their manager and/or HR department. But a participative approach might prove more beneficial.

- **Role play techniques:** This is often an effective technique in helping to change attitudes towards safety, on a long-term basis. The idea is to encourage one employee to think himself/herself into the role of another. For example, an employee who is required to wear a safety harness might be encouraged to take the part of a supervisor, and try to persuade another employee to wear one. In trying to convince their colleague, although in a training situation, they might well convince themselves. The long-term effect of role play has been found to be greater than for any of the other techniques.

- **Coaching:** Individual or group coaching to raise awareness of hazards and danger points – and to enable employees to take responsibility for avoiding these – should produce the most long-lasting change in behaviour.

### 6.8.3    Making people safe

It is a supervisor's responsibility to ensure that individual workers know how to act and operate safely. He/she must take care of the following:

- **Making the job safe:** When considering the operations necessary to get a job done, it must be taken into account the position that the operator will have to adopt, the loads he/she will be required to lift and the distances he/she will be expected to stretch.

- **Making the work environment safe:** Regular maintenance checks, to ensure that the buildings, fixtures and equipment have not developed faults which might render them dangerous, should identify potential problems. More formalized procedures can be invoked. 'Safety sampling,' for example, is a process for counting the safety defects which can be spotted by trained observers in a given time, while systematically touring a part of the workplace.

- **Machinery and equipment:** In all cases, adequate training in the correct use of machinery and equipment is essential, and that applies equally to both manual and powered equipment. It is not sufficient to merely teach a person how to operate a particular piece of equipment. He/she must be taught to do so in the most efficient and careful manner and the need to take safety precautions at all times must be clearly understood and appreciated.

- **Fire prevention and fighting:** General precautions which can be taken in the event of an outbreak of fire include:
  - ✓ Prohibiting smoking in – and if possible – to areas in which flammable materials are stored or used.
  - ✓ Personnel employed in the section/department concerned must know from where the fire alarm can be activated.
  - ✓ Firefighting equipment appropriate to the materials housed or used in the section/ department should be readily accessible. All equipment should be regularly maintained, and everyone must know how to use it.
  - ✓ Regular practices, or "fire drills," should be held so that personnel learn what to do – and what not to do – in the event of fire.
  - ✓ Fire doors and emergency exits must be kept clear and unobstructed.

# 7   References

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# 8    The Author

Manmohan Joshi, M.A., M.Ed., Cert.EA, Dip.HRD,Dip.Mgmt. (UK) has over 40 years' teaching, training and administrative experience. He has worked as Principal of large and reputed schools in India, Kuwait and Sultanate of Oman.

For his work on Innovative Practices in Value Education he was awarded by the National Council of Educational Research and Training, India.

He is also the recipient of the Best Teacher Award from the Govt. of Tamilnadu as well as the Central Board of Secondary Education, India.

He has presented papers at various national and international conferences under the auspices of UNESCO. He has also conducted various workshops for teachers, students, parents and administrators. The topics covered a wide area viz., Leadership and Team Building, Value Education, Administration Skills, Choosing a Career, Effective Decision Making in School Administration, Effective Communication Skills, Interpersonal Relationships, Continuous Comprehensive Evaluation, Skills in Dealing with Managers, Secretarial Skills.

Currently he is working as Consultant in Arabian Institute for financial and Administrative Studies, Sultanate of Oman, and also conducts workshops for teachers, educational administrators, managers, supervisors and marketing personnel.

He can be contacted through e-mail: manmohan.joshi@gmail.com

Website: http://manmohan-joshi.webs.com