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# UNIT 12 SUPERVISORY BEHAVIOUR

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## 12.0 OBJECTIVES

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After going through this Unit, you should be able to :

- understand the importance of a supervisor in an organisation,
- learn about useful skills required for effective supervision, and
- formulate your ideas about the problems faced by supervisors.

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## 12.1 INTRODUCTION

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When you join an organisation, you may take up the job of a supervisor or work under a supervisor. Similarly in your own enterprise, you **perform** supervisory roles. Hence, we attempt to familiarise you with supervisory behaviour in this Unit. It is a common feeling among majority of the people that they have a fairly good idea of who the supervisors are and what are their job roles. In fact, the word supervisor means different things to different people and can have different applications as well. For some, any person at a supervisory position in an organisation, is a supervisor to all his subordinates. Others subscribe to the thinking that the immediate superior is a supervisor. Of course, the most popular application of the term 'supervisor' is to the first level supervisor - the one to whom the workers report. This Unit will explain to you the role of a supervisor in an organisation, the skills required for effective supervision and problems faced by supervisors.

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## 12.2 IMPORTANCE OF FIRST LINE MANAGEMENT

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A supervisor, as a leader of the group, is a member of the first line of management. A supervisor controls the activities of people reporting to him or her and is responsible for carrying out the management's policies and programmes.

The job of a supervisor is important not because his/her task is to get things done through people, but also because he/she is the only link between the management and the workers and is responsible for implementing management decisions. The attitude of the team members toward the organisation and the quality and size of the contribution each member is prepared to make, to a large extent, depends upon the way a supervisor performs his/her responsibilities. The success of an organisation, therefore, depends upon each supervisor for ensuring that the team makes a positive contribution.

The first line supervisors are called 'foreman', 'chief check' or 'section managers'. The workers' ability to perform depends on a supervisor's ability to plan. A supervisor's performance in training and placing makes the difference between superior and average performance of the job function.

The first line supervisor implements schedules in such a way that work flows evenly and steadily. A supervisor's responsibility is to see that the workforce has the necessary equipment to do the work besides proper surroundings to work and a well organised team of

fellow workers. A supervisor is also responsible for his group members being willing and capable of doing the work. He has to set objectives for his group leading to the accomplishment of the organisation's set objectives.

There are two basic ingredients for a successful supervisor :

- Firstly a supervisor must know what is expected of him, and
- a Secondly a supervisor must have an application of management of people.

For effective supervision, the first line management requires :

- the support of the top management, especially through well-laid down selection and training of supervisors,
- a manageable team to supervise,
- a pragmatic targets and timely information, and
- an understanding of management policies and changes therein through people.

The success of the supervisor is largely measured by his ability to get other people to work effectively. The following conditions can pave the way for having effective supervision :

- A **workgroup** of not more than fifteen persons, otherwise the supervisor will be unable to treat the group members as individuals and delegate to them effectively.
- A supervisor must be able to tell his group in advance about the policies or changes that will effect them. This is essential to gain the trust and confidence of group members.
- a A good working relation with the members of the group.
- A supervisor must take risks where necessary. At the same time, he should never get impatient.
- a A supervisor' must ensure that his group is well organised and that the members are appropriately trained to **carry** out their activities on the job.
- A supervisor must ensure effective communication with subordinates, other supervisors, and higher level managers in the management ladder.

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## 12.3 EFFECTIVE SUPERVISION : SOME SKILLS

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The supervisor occupies a place of prominence in the organisation as a-useful instrument in achieving organisational goals. Besides, he provides a lead to the workers and has an important role to play in motivating the workers because he is the one who by virtue of his duty, is very close to the workers. In a nutshell, an effective supervisor should possess traits like, dominance (within limits), self-assurance, effective verbal communication, pleasing physical standards, perceived occupational level, self-confidence, intelligence, perception of ability and personality, differentiation, scholarship, creativity, diplomacy, tactfulness, sympathy, extrovert nature, enthusiasm, initiative, responsibility, etc. An efficient and effective supervisor requires a set of skills, some of which are explained in the following Sub-sections.

### 12.3.1 Handling People

The job of a supervisor, as we have discussed, is to get things done through the people under him. It, therefore, follows that the effectiveness of the supervisor will largely depend upon the way he treats other people. That is, if the supervisor respects people and treats them the way he himself would like to be treated. He is creating the kind of atmosphere in which the members of the group will be able to give their best. A supervisor should recognise that each individual has a contribution to make and ensure that full use is made of the combined wisdom, knowledge and experience of the people within the group. A supervisor must regard himself not as a superior but as a member of the group, having some extra responsibilities of achieving the group's common aims. In fact, a supervisor as the leader of a group relies on the other people of the group for achieving the group's common goals, as well as the goals of the organisation. For doing so, the supervisor should :

- set and maintain the group's objectives and standards and make sure that they are known and understood by every person,
- involve the group as a team in the accomplishment of those objectives,

- gain the commitment of group members to implement the management's decisions,
- be accessible and be able to spend time with the group members,
- delegate authority and responsibility for taking decisions that directly effect their work situation,
- keep the management informed about the group's reactions and requirements,
- listen to the ideas and suggestions presented by the group members, evaluate them and act where required,
- a communicate to the group about achieving its targets,
- a recommend good work for rewards or incentives to the management, and
- recognise success, learn from failures, review objectives and involve the group members in planning or replanning for the future.

### 12.3.2 Leadership

In order to get the best out of each member of the group, a supervisor aims at making full use of the strengths, skills and positive characteristics of the group members in addition to developing his/her own ability to lead.

Effectiveness of a leader depends on the ability to influence and be influenced, either by the team or the individuals who make up those teams. A supervisor has to ensure that the required tasks are completed satisfactorily without any danger or risk to the team identity. It must be recognised also that each person in the team is an individual first and who has his needs, hopes, ideas and so on, which must be realised if the individual is going to be effective. If too much concentration is on achieving the task, whatever the cost, then sooner or later the group will start disintegrating. In the same manner, if the individual needs are not recognised the team will disintegrate. A successful leader has to strike a balance between task needs, group needs and individual needs.

To provide the right atmosphere and opportunities so that each individual member in the group can have job satisfaction, is probably the most difficult part of the job of a leader/supervisor. A good supervisor could ensure this by way of :

- a helping subordinates to realise that work can be a satisfying and integral part of life,
- providing clear targets by which their **performance** can be assessed,
- considering any incentive not necessarily financial,
- a giving praise where it is due,
- a keeping people informed of any changes etc. so that **they** feel secure in their jobs,
- a respecting the staff, and treating them as individual human beings,
- a involving people in the overall job, so that they develop an interest in what they are doing,
- a keeping a close eye on working conditions, and
- a looking out for improved layouts, methods and systems, etc.

If a **supervisor/leader** actively involves his group as a whole in determining objectives, in choosing working methods, in recognising work schedules, in solving problems, and in making decisions, he will have the backing of his team.

### 12.3.3 Communication

Organisations are basically a human arrangement created for certain specific goals. These goals can not be **accomplished** unless human efforts are consciously coordinated and integrated. Consequently the activities of individuals in an organisation are functionally inter-related and inter-dependent. The smooth working relationships among individuals depend largely upon effective communication. In fact, organisations cannot exist without sound communication. An organisation has to lay emphasis on Downward Communication, Upward Communication, and Horizontal Communication. Since a supervisor is an important link between the lower and the upper echelons of management, he plays a significant **role** in **ensuring better communication**.

- a Communication failures are expensive. For example, a group of foreign tourists were to go for a sight seeing tour in a coach immediately after checking in at 12.30 p.m. and their lunch was organised at the site. Improper communication or no communication resulted in non-availability of the coach at the scheduled time for the tourists. The cost of this lack in communication can not be calculated only in terms of **time/hours** lost but it upset the whole rhythm of productivity service to the customers.
- In case of any change within the organisation, the **full** benefits of change can be achieved only where there is an adequate communication system for explaining directly. May be a written communication followed by face-to-face discussion with the employees can let them know what is required of them and why.
- Improved productivity may be expected in case the communication is adequate. The employees can direct their efforts more effectively and cooperate with their leaders because of proper and adequate communication.
- a Each individual is ambitious and is inquisitive to know about his future prospects in the company. Therefore, to avoid losing potential manpower it is important to communicate to the subordinates where they stand and what their future within the organisation is likely to be.
- a People will put in their best only when they fully understand the decisions that affect them and the reasons behind those decisions. All the subordinates need to understand what they have to do and, how they are performing against the fixed norms and standards. Full proof and well spelt out communication will lead to better involvement of workers with their work as expected. It will amount to greater efficiency, higher morale and improved cooperation.

What to communicate and which method to choose for communicating are some of the vital considerations for a supervisor. A supervisor needs to decide his priorities so far as communication is concerned. Everything cannot be communicated to everyone. A supervisor **needs** to decide the method - **face-to-face**, through staff representatives or mass methods such as House Journal, notice board, etc., to use for communication. An understanding of what can be communicated through each method and what the possible limitations are of each method is essential for communicating effectively. Communication takes place not only within the organisation but also with people outside the organisation. The most difficult situation arises in communication in the field of customer-relations when something goes wrong. For example, if the product has failed, or the service is not meeting the laid down standards, or promises have not been kept, whatever may be the reason the customer gets displeased and the supervisor and his group members have to deal with this displeasure. It is very normal to go on the defensive but there is no surer way of losing a customer forever. In fact, it is more efficient to encourage a customer to give us information about our products, services or performances correctly. A complaint must be received as a gift and the response to it could be :

"Thank you very much for making us aware and informing us about the aspect" or "we assure you that in future no such occasion for a complaint will be there".

Besides, a supervisor in order to be effective must possess requisite skills to properly fix the targets; provide timely feedback to the workers; coordinate the work of all concerned; have proper liaison with the top management and other wings; understand the workers' behaviour; be sincere with praise; promote participation; promote cooperation and team-work and provide growth opportunities.

In some cases, it is observed that the supervisors fail to be effective. The major **reason(s)** for it may include :

- a Inability or unwillingness to delegate the work,
- Improper use of authority,
- a Trying to be oversmart,
- a Setting a poor example,
- a Self-centeredness, and bad temperament, etc.

In keeping with the **well accepted** principles of hierarchy, unity of command, span of control, etc. a **supervisor's job/role** calls for a number of functions to be performed. It includes : work performance in **time and cost-effectiveness**; maintaining discipline; record keeping;

performance appraisal; promotion of workers and other incentives to be given to them; training and orientation of workers; courteous and humane attitude; respect for workers' dignity; maintaining **decorum** and code of conduct; balancing the interests of the number of persons under **his/her** charge and to have conformity of the organisation's interests with the workers' interests etc. Since the functions are so many, obviously the problems too are many. Some of the crucial problems faced are as follows :

- a) Gigantic work targets : The top management fixes and passes on to the supervisors heavy targets, **which** are not possible to be achieved by the group of workers and the supervisor in a given amount of time. Such a situation poses a great problem before the supervisors.
- b) Inadequate Infrastructure and Supplies : Required infrastructure in the form of machines, staff, working conditions, raw material are a must for getting the work output in quality and quantity. Lack of these put the supervisors in a dock.
- c) Improper Support from the top : Of course, a supervisor is the boss of the **workers**. But his position in the overall organisational set-up is not of a high order. He **needs** to get timely and proper support from the top bosses, in order to achieve the fixed goals. Absence of proper support and guidance make the position of a supervisor miserable.
- d) Lack of coordination between various wings : An organisation is a system with a number of sub- systems having further wings, each under the control of different supervisors. Unless there is proper coordination, the work of each wing gets affected posing serious problems to the supervisors as this hampers their teams' performance.
- e) Varying Interests of the employees : The workers in any organisation have different interests, motives, needs and impulses. Unless, the top management seriously builds the work culture where the organisation's interests are dominating over the individual's interests, it becomes thoroughly difficult for the supervisor to get proper work output from the team.

Check Your Progress

1. What is your idea about the role of a supervisor in an organisation ?

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2. What qualities should an ideal supervisor possess ?

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3. What is the importance of communication in effective supervision ?

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4. Visualise some problems that a supervisor may face.

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## 12.5 LET US SUM UP

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In this Unit, an analysis has been made of the significance of supervision, that is, the first line management, some effective supervisory skills, and the problems faced by the supervisors. The role of a supervisor is of great importance in an organisation may it be a Production Unit, a Service industry, or an Entertainment wing. Besides, personal traits to be possessed by the supervisors and proper support from the top management is a must for expecting required output from the supervisors leading to the effective outcome of the organisation.

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## 12.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

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<p><b>Check Your Progress</b></p>
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1. See Sec. 12.2
2. Read Sub-secs. 12.3.1 and 12.3.2 and write according to your thinking.
3. Read Sub-sec. 12.3.3.
4. After a careful reading of Sec. 12.4, answer the question based on your ideas.

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## SOME USEFUL BOOKS FOR THIS BLOCK

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- Andrew J. Dubrin : **Fundamentals of Organisational Behaviour**, New York, 1974.
- Blair J. Kolasa : **Introduction to Behavioural Science for Business**, New York, 1969.
- Fred Luthans : **Organisational Behaviour**, New Delhi, 1981.
- Sahni P & Sharma : **Organisational Behaviour**, New Delhi, 1988.
- Thomas A. Harris : **I am OK — You are OK**, New Delhi, 1969.

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## ACTIVITIES FOR THIS BLOCK

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### Activity-1

Analyse the behaviour of each member of your **family**.

### Activity-2

Take up any small group and analyse the behaviour of its members.

### Activity-3

Suppose you are a supervisor with five employees working under you. How would you lead the group?

### Activity-4

If possible visit any organisation. Try to find out how different departments in that organisation interact **with** each other.

### Activity-5

Interview a person performing supervisory role regarding the problems **he/she** faces in the job.