

# 1

# CHAPTER

## Supervision Fundamentals

### Key Concepts

After completing this chapter, you will be able to define these supervisory terms:

- conceptual competence
- controlling
- effectiveness
- efficiency
- employee engagement
- first-level managers
- interpersonal competence
- leading
- management
- management functions
- middle managers
- operative employees
- organization
- organizing
- planning
- political competence
- process
- skill
- supervisors
- supervisory competencies
- sustainability
- technical competence
- top management

## Chapter Outcomes and Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, you will be able to:

- 1-1. Explain the difference among supervisors, middle managers, and top management.
- 1-2. Define *supervisor*.
- 1-3. Identify the four functions in the management process.
- 1-4. Explain why the supervisor's role is considered ambiguous.
- 1-5. Describe the four essential supervisory competencies.
- 1-6. Identify the elements that are necessary to be successful as a supervisor.

Acestock/Alamy



# Responding to a Supervisory Dilemma



Eric Carr/Alamy

Organizations are changing, but are organizations changing their traditional structures? By and large, the answer is no, traditional organizational structures are still evident today. However, some organizations are changing the traditional organizational structure to appeal to potential employees. One such company is Google. According to *Fortune* magazine, Google ranks in the top five best places to work and has ranked so for five consecutive years.<sup>1</sup> What makes this organization so different from others? Why are employees flocking to organizations such as Google?

The traditional organizational pyramid has operative employees at the bottom of the triangle, supervisors above them, middle managers above supervisors, and top management above all (see Exhibit 1-1). This structure is a vertical approach to management in which the decision making is done at the top and orders are sent down to the operational employees at the bottom of the organizational hierarchy. Operative employees do not have much say in the organization's operations.

Google uses a cross-functional organizational structure combined with a unique philosophy. Their cross-functional organizational structure is more of a team approach to management and is structured horizontally. According to Google.com, they purposefully maintain "an open culture often associated with startups, in which everyone is a hands-on contributor and feels comfortable sharing ideas and opinions."<sup>2</sup> Google's benefits package also plays a major part in attracting employees. Google states that, from employee retirement funds to their free lunch and dinner program, they strive to offer customizable programs that suit the needs of each of their employees. What more could an employee want?

Which organizational structure do you think works best and why? Do you think the vertical structure works better in some cases, whereas the horizontal structure works better in others? Would you prefer a more relaxed working environment or do you prefer something more structured?

This book is about the millions of supervisors working in today's dynamic organizations and the jobs they do in helping their organizations reach their goals. This book will introduce you to the challenging activities and the rapidly changing world of supervision today!

## OBJECTIVE 1.1

Explain the difference among supervisors, middle managers, and top management.

## OBJECTIVE 1.2

Define *supervisor*.

## organization

A systematic grouping of people brought together to accomplish some specific purpose.

## Organizations and Their Levels

Supervisors work in places called **organizations**. Before we identify who supervisors are and what they do, it's important to clarify what we mean by the term *organization*. An organization is a systematic grouping of people brought together to accomplish some specific purpose. Your college or university is an organization. So are supermarkets, charitable agencies, churches, neighborhood gas stations, the Indianapolis Colts football team, Nokia Corporation, the Australian Dental Association, and Cedars-Sinai Hospital. These are all organizations because each comprises specific common characteristics.

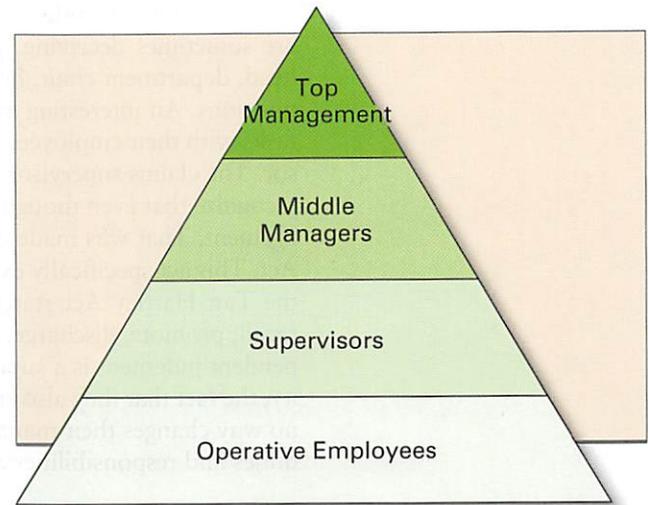
<sup>1</sup>Fortune, "100 Best Companies to Work for," *CNN Money*, 2014, <http://money.cnn.com/magazines/fortune/best-companies> (accessed May 23, 2014).

<sup>2</sup>Google, "Our Culture," Google.com, <http://www.google.com/intl/en/about/company/facts/culture> (accessed May 23, 2014).

## WHAT COMMON CHARACTERISTICS DO ALL ORGANIZATIONS HAVE?

All organizations, regardless of their size or focus, share three common characteristics. First, every organization has a purpose. The distinct purpose of an organization is typically expressed in terms of a goal or set of goals that the organization hopes to accomplish. Second, each organization is composed of people. It takes people to establish the purpose and to perform a variety of activities to make the goal a reality. Third, all organizations develop a systematic structure that defines the various roles of members and that often sets limits on members' work behaviors. This may include creating rules and regulations, giving some members supervisory responsibility over other members, forming work teams, or writing job descriptions so that organizational members know their responsibilities.

Although organizations and their structures vary widely, often adapting to the environment in which the organization operates, we can show—in most traditional organizations—an organization's structure as a pyramid containing four general categories (see Exhibit 1-1).



**Exhibit 1-1**

*Levels in the traditional organizational pyramid.*

## WHAT ARE THE ORGANIZATIONAL LEVELS?

Generally speaking, organizations can be divided into four distinct levels: operative employees, supervisors, middle managers, and top management. Let's briefly look at each level.

The base level in the pyramid is occupied by **operative employees**. These employees physically produce an organization's goods and services by working on specific tasks. The counter clerk at Burger King, the claims adjuster at Progressive Insurance, the assembly-line worker at the Toyota auto plant, and the UPS representative who delivers your packages are examples of operative employees. This category may also include many professional positions: doctors, lawyers, accountants, engineers, and information technology specialists. The common feature these operative workers share is that they generally don't manage or oversee the work of any other employee.

Now turn your attention to the top two levels in Exhibit 1-1. These are traditional management positions. **Top management** is a group of people responsible for establishing the organization's overall objectives and developing the policies to achieve those objectives. Titles of typical top management positions in business firms include chair of the board, chief executive officer, president, and senior vice-president. Among nonprofit organizations, top management may have such titles as museum director, superintendent of schools, or governor of a state. **Middle managers** include all employees below the top management level who manage other managers. These individuals are responsible for establishing and meeting specific goals in their particular department or unit. Their goals, however, are not established in isolation. Instead, the objectives set by top management provide specific direction to middle managers regarding what they are expected to achieve. Ideally, if each middle manager meets their goals, the entire organization meets its objectives. Examples of job titles held by middle managers include vice-president of finance, director of sales, division manager, group manager, district manager, unit manager, or high school principal.

Let's again return to Exhibit 1-1. The only category that we haven't described is **supervisors**. Like top and middle managers, supervisors are also part of an organization's management team. What makes them unique is that they oversee the work of operative employees. Supervisors, then, are the only managers who don't manage other managers. Another way to think of supervisors is as **first-level managers**. That is, counting from the bottom of the traditional pyramid-shaped organization, supervisors represent the first level in the management hierarchy.

### **operative employees**

Employees who physically produce an organization's goods and services by working on specific tasks.

### **top management**

A group of people responsible for establishing an organization's overall objectives and developing the policies to achieve those objectives.

### **middle managers**

All employees below the top management level who manage other managers and are responsible for establishing and meeting specific departmental or unit goals set by top management.

### **supervisors**

As part of an organization's management team, supervisors oversee the work of operative employees and are the only managers who don't manage other managers. *See also* first-level managers.

### **first-level managers**

Managers who represent the first level in the management hierarchy. *See also* supervisors.

What kinds of titles are likely to tell you that someone is a supervisor? Though names are sometimes deceiving, people with job titles such as assistant manager, department head, department chair, head coach, foreman, or team leader are typically in supervisory positions. An interesting aspect of supervisors' jobs is that they may engage in operating tasks with their employees. The counter clerk at Burger King may also be the shift supervisor. The claims supervisor at Progressive may also process claim forms. It is important to recognize that even though they perform operative tasks, supervisors are still part of management. That was made clear in 1947, when the U.S. Congress passed the Taft-Hartley Act. This act specifically excluded supervisors from the definition of *employee*. Moreover, the Taft-Hartley Act stated that any person who can "hire, suspend, transfer, lay off, recall, promote, discharge, assign, reward, or discipline other employees while using independent judgment is a supervisor." Because first-level managers usually have this authority, the fact that they also engage in the same kind of work that their employees perform in no way changes their management status. In reality, they are still expected to perform the duties and responsibilities associated with the management process.

**OBJECTIVE 1.3**

Identify the four functions in the management process.

**management**

The process of getting things done, effectively and efficiently, through and with other people.

**process**

The primary activities supervisors perform.

**efficiency**

Doing a task right; also refers to the relationship between inputs and outputs.

**effectiveness**

Doing the right task; goal attainment.

## The Management Process

Just as organizations have common characteristics, so, too, do managers at all levels of the organization. Although their titles vary widely, there are several common elements to their jobs—regardless of whether the supervisor is a head nurse in the Heart Center unit of the Washington Hospital Center who oversees a staff of eleven critical-care specialists, or the chief executive officer of the 82,000-plus-member Exxon Corporation. In this section, we look at these commonalities as we discuss the management process and what managers do.

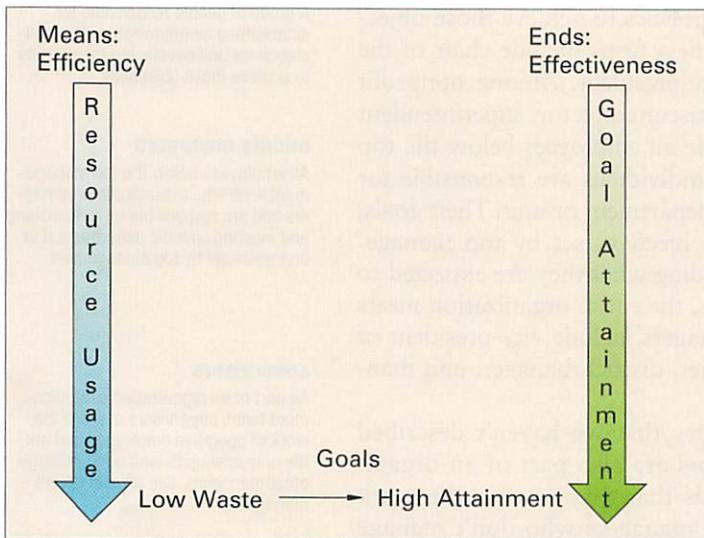
### WHAT IS MANAGEMENT?

The term **management** refers to the process of getting things done, effectively and efficiently, through and with other people. Several terms of this definition warrant some discussion: *process*, *efficiently*, and *effectively*.

The term **process** in the definition of management represents the primary activities that supervisors perform. We call these the management functions. The next section describes these functions.

**Efficiency** means doing the task right and refers to the relationship between inputs and outputs. If you get more output for a given input, you have increased efficiency. You also increase efficiency when you get the same output with fewer resources. Because supervisors deal with input resources that are scarce—money, people, and equipment—they are concerned with efficient use of these resources. Consequently, supervisors must be concerned with minimizing resource costs.

Although minimizing resource costs is important, it isn't enough simply to be efficient. A supervisor must also be concerned with completing activities. We call this **effectiveness**. Effectiveness means doing the right task. In an organization, this translates into goal attainment. Exhibit 1-2 shows how efficiency and effectiveness are interrelated. The need for efficiency has a profound effect on the level of effectiveness. It's easier to be effective if you ignore efficiency. For instance, you



**Exhibit 1-2**

Efficiency versus effectiveness.

could produce more sophisticated and higher-quality products if you disregard labor and material input costs—yet that would more than likely create serious financial problems. Consequently, being a good supervisor means being concerned with both attaining goals (effectiveness) and doing so as efficiently as possible.

## WHAT ARE THE FOUR MANAGEMENT FUNCTIONS?

In the early part of the twentieth century, a French industrialist named Henri Fayol wrote that all managers perform five **management functions**: They plan, organize, command, coordinate, and control.<sup>3</sup> In the mid-1950s, two professors at UCLA used the functions of planning, organizing, staffing, directing, and controlling as the framework for their management textbook.<sup>4</sup> Most management textbooks continue to be organized around management functions, though these have generally been condensed to the basic four: planning, organizing, leading, and controlling (see Exhibit 1-3).

Because organizations exist to achieve some purpose, someone has to define that purpose and the means for its achievement. A manager is that someone. The **planning** function encompasses defining an organization's goals, establishing an overall strategy for achieving these goals and developing a comprehensive hierarchy of plans to integrate and coordinate activities. Setting goals keeps the work to be done in its proper focus and helps organizational members keep their attention on what is most important.

Managers also have to divide work into manageable components and coordinate results to achieve objectives. This is the **organizing** function. It includes determining which tasks will be done, who will do them, how the tasks will be grouped, who will report to whom, and when decisions will be made.

We know that every organization contains people and that part of a manager's job is to direct and coordinate the activities of these people. Performing this activity is referred to as the **leading** function of management. When managers motivate employees, direct the activities of others, select the most effective communication channel, or resolve conflicts among members, they're engaging in leading.

The final function managers perform is **controlling**. After the goals are set, the plans formulated, the structural arrangements determined, and the people hired, trained, and motivated, something may still go amiss. To ensure that things are going as they should, a manager must monitor the organization's performance. Actual performance must be compared with the previously set goals. If there are any significant deviations, it's the manager's responsibility to get the organization back on track. This process of monitoring, comparing, and correcting constitutes the controlling function.

### management functions

Planning, organizing, leading, and controlling.

### planning

Defining an organization's goals, establishing an overall strategy for achieving these goals, and developing a comprehensive hierarchy of plans to integrate and coordinate activities.

### organizing

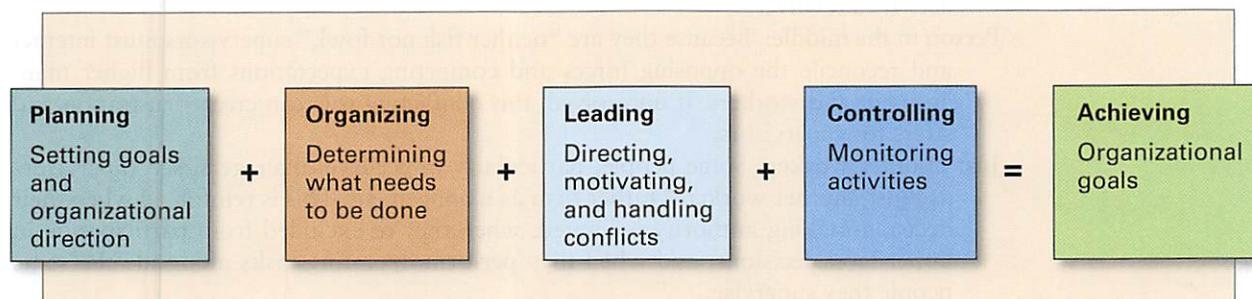
Arranging and grouping jobs, allocating resources, and assigning work so that activities can be accomplished as planned; determining which tasks are to be done, who is to do them, how the tasks are to be grouped, who reports to whom, and when decisions are to be made.

### leading

Motivating employees, directing activities of others, selecting the most effective communication channel, and resolving conflicts among members.

### controlling

Monitoring an organization's performance and comparing performance with previously set goals. If significant deviations exist, getting the organization back on track.



**Exhibit 1-3**

Management functions.

<sup>3</sup>H. Fayol, *Industrial and General Administration* (Paris: Dunod, 1916).

<sup>4</sup>H. Koontz and C. O'Donnell, *Principles of Management: An Analysis of Managerial Functions* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1955).

## DO MANAGEMENT FUNCTIONS DIFFER BY ORGANIZATIONAL LEVELS?

A manager's level in an organization affects how these management functions are performed. A supervisor in the sales department at Black & Decker won't do the same kind of planning as Black & Decker's president. That's because although all managers perform the four management functions, there are important differences relating to their level. Typically, top management focuses on long-term strategic planning such as determining what overall business a company should be in. Supervisors focus on short-term, tactical planning such as scheduling departmental workloads for the next month. Similarly, top management is concerned with structuring the overall organization, whereas supervisors focus on structuring the jobs of individuals and workgroups.

### OBJECTIVE 1.4

Explain why the supervisor's role is considered ambiguous.

## Changing Expectations of Supervisors

Seventy years ago, if you had asked a group of top executives what they thought a supervisor's job was, you would have gotten a fairly standard answer. They would describe a man (which it was likely to be back then) who forcefully made decisions, told employees what to do, closely watched over those employees to make sure they did as they were told, disciplined them when they broke the rules, and fired those that didn't "shape up." Supervisors were the bosses "on the operating floor," and their job was to keep the employees in line and get the work out.

If you ask top executives that same question today, you'll find a few who still hold to the supervisor-as-boss perspective, but you'll also hear executives describe today's supervisor using terms such as *trainer*, *adviser*, *mentor*, *facilitator*, or *coach*. In this section, we look at some of these changing expectations of supervisory managers.

## WHAT ROLES DO SUPERVISORS PLAY?

The supervisor's job is unique in that it bridges the management ranks with the operating employees. No one else in the organization can make that claim. Yet because of this uniqueness, supervisors have an ambiguous role. Each of the following offers a different viewpoint of the supervisor's role:<sup>5</sup>

- Key person:** Supervisors serve as the critical communication link in the organization's chain of authority. They are like the hub of a wheel around which all operating activities revolve.
- Person in the middle:** Because they are "neither fish nor fowl," supervisors must interact and reconcile the opposing forces and competing expectations from higher management and workers. If unresolved, this conflicting role can create frustration and stress for supervisors.
- Just another worker:** Some people, particularly upper-level managers, see supervisors as "just another worker," rather than as management. This is reinforced when their decision-making authority is limited, when they're excluded from participating in upper-level decisions, and when they perform operating tasks alongside the same people they supervise.
- Behavioral specialist:** Consistent with the belief that one of the most important abilities needed by supervisors is strong interpersonal skills, they are looked at as behavioral specialists. To succeed in their jobs, supervisors must be able to understand the varied needs of their staff and be able to listen, motivate, and lead.

<sup>5</sup>Based on J. Newstrom and K. Davis, *Organizational Behavior: Human Behavior at Work*, 9th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1993), 239.

Although each of these four role descriptions has some truth to it, each also offers a slanted view of the supervisor's job. Our point is that different people hold different perceptions of this job, which can create ambiguity and conflicts for today's supervisor.

## Comprehension Check 1-1

1. All of the following except one are characteristics of all organizations. Which one is not a characteristic?
  - a. Purpose
  - b. Profit
  - c. People
  - d. Structure
2. The term *process* in the definition of management refers to
  - a. the primary activities supervisors perform on their jobs.
  - b. the transformation of raw materials into goods.
  - c. the relationship between doing a task correctly and doing the correct task.
  - d. the means of goal attainment.
3. The management function that involves monitoring activities to ensure that targets are being met is called
  - a. planning.
  - b. organizing.
  - c. leading.
  - d. controlling.
4. A key person in a supervisory role is someone who
  - a. interacts with opposing forces to reconcile differences.
  - b. serves as the critical communication link in the organization.
  - c. is just another worker.
  - d. has a strong ability to listen and understand what is being said.

## ARE SUPERVISORS MORE IMPORTANT IN TODAY'S ORGANIZATIONS?

Regardless of what people think and the different role perceptions they hold, a case can be built that the supervisor's job will continue to become increasingly important and complex in the future. Why? We can provide at least three reasons.

First, organizations are implementing significant change and quality programs to cut costs and increase productivity. Examples of these programs include continuous quality improvements, the introduction of work teams, group bonus plans, flexible work hours, and accident-prevention and stress-reduction programs. These programs tend to focus on the work activities of operating employees. As a result, supervisors have become increasingly important because they typically assume responsibility for introducing and implementing these change efforts at the operations level.

Second, organizations are making extensive cutbacks in their number of employees. Boeing, General Motors, United Airlines, Motorola, IBM, and American Express are just a few of the major companies that have cut anywhere from 1,000 to 50,000 jobs. Organizations are constantly thinning their ranks among middle managers and staff-support personnel. "Lean and mean" continues to be a major theme for the best corporations. The implications of these cutbacks will be that supervisors have more people directly reporting

to them. Moreover, many tasks previously performed by people in support units—such as work design, process flow, scheduling, and quality control—will be reassigned to supervisors and their employees. The net effect will be significantly expanded responsibilities for supervisors.

Finally, employee training is more important than ever as organizations seek to improve productivity. New employees—many of whom are poorly prepared for work or have language or communication deficiencies—require basic training in reading, writing, and mathematics. Changes in jobs brought about by computers, automation, and other technological advances require additional skills training among current employees to prevent their skills from becoming obsolete. Supervisors will carry the primary burden for identifying these skill deficiencies, designing appropriate training programs, and in some cases, even providing the training itself.

Obviously, being a supervisor is both challenging and exciting. One thing we know for sure is that supervisors matter to organizations. The Gallup Organization, which has polled millions of employees and tens of thousands of supervisors, has found that the single most important variable in employee productivity and loyalty isn't pay or benefits or workplace environment; it's the quality of the relationship between employees and their direct supervisors. Gallup also found that relationship with their supervisor is the largest factor in **employee engagement**—which is when employees are connected to, satisfied with, and enthusiastic about their jobs—accounting for at least 70 percent of an employee's level of engagement.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, a report from Towers Watson, a global consulting firm, found that the way a company manages its people can significantly affect its financial performance.<sup>7</sup> What can we conclude from such reports? Supervisors matter, and will continue to matter, to organizations!

### employee engagement

When employees are connected to, satisfied with, and enthusiastic about their jobs.

## IS SUSTAINABILITY IMPORTANT TO A SUPERVISOR?

Organizations recognize the need to add products that will meet the challenges of a changing world and contemporary corporate action affirms that sustainability and green management have become mainstream issues for supervisors. What's emerging in the twenty-first century is the concept of managing in a sustainable way, which has had the effect of widening corporate responsibility not only to supervising in an efficient and effective way, but also to responding strategically to a wide range of environmental and societal challenges.<sup>8</sup> Although "sustainability" means different things to different people, in essence, according to the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (2005), it is concerned with "meeting the needs of people today without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." From a business perspective, **sustainability** has been defined as a company's ability to achieve its business goals and increase long-term shareholder value by integrating economic, environmental, and social opportunities into its business strategies.<sup>9</sup> Sustainability issues are now moving up the agenda of business leaders and the boards of thousands of companies. As supervisors at Walmart are discovering, running an organization in a more sustainable way will mean they have to make informed business decisions based

### sustainability

A company's ability to achieve its business goals and increase long-term shareholder value by integrating economic, environmental, and social opportunities into its business strategies.

<sup>6</sup>E. Fraunheim, "Managers Don't Matter," *Workforce Management Online* (April 6, 2010); and K. A. Tucker and V. Allman, "Don't Be a Cat-and-Mouse Manager," The Gallup Organization, [www.brain.gallup.com](http://www.brain.gallup.com) (September 9, 2004).

<sup>7</sup>"WorkUSA® 2004/2005: Effective Employees Drive Financial Results," Watson Wyatt Worldwide, Washington, DC.

<sup>8</sup>KPMG Global Sustainability Services, *Sustainability Insights*, October 2007.

<sup>9</sup>*Symposium on Sustainability—Profiles in Leadership*, New York, October 2001.

on thorough communication with various stakeholders, understanding their requirements, and starting to factor economic, environmental, and social aspects into how they pursue their business goals.

### DOES A SUPERVISOR NEED TO BE A COACH?

Today's supervisors are far less likely to be able to do all aspects of their employees' jobs. Supervisors need to know what their employees are doing, but they are not necessarily expected to be as skilled at specific job tasks as each employee. Moreover, employees don't need an authority figure to tell them what to do or to "keep them in line." Instead, they may need a coach who can listen to, guide, train, and assist them. In their coaching role, supervisors are expected to ensure that their employees have the resources they need to do a first-class job. They must also develop their employees' skills and knowledge, clarify responsibilities and goals, motivate employees to higher levels of performance, and represent their workgroup's interests within the organization.



McClatchy-Tribune/Alamy

*Like athletic coaches, today's supervisors need to get their employees "ready for the game" and cheer them on to success.*

## Transition from Employee to Supervisor

It wasn't easy making the move from being one of the quality-control specialists in the department to being the supervisor. On Friday I had been one of them. The next Monday I became their boss. Suddenly, people that I had joked around and socialized with for years were distancing themselves from me. I could see that they were apprehensive. They weren't sure, now, if I could be trusted. I didn't think our relationship was going to be much different. Hey, we were friends. We went out together every Friday after work. But I'm management now. I still think I'm like them—part of the group. But they don't see me that way. Even when I join them for drinks, it's not like it used to be. They have their guard up now. It's been a hard adjustment for me.

These comments from an individual promoted to quality-control supervisor at Monsanto capture the dilemma many new supervisors face when they're promoted from the ranks.

It's important to reflect for a moment on what this step of becoming a supervisor really means. For many in the workforce, becoming a supervisor is a major turning point in their career. It's a time when one becomes responsible not only for one's own work but also for the work of others. It's a time when authority is given to someone; and that authority can be used in a variety of ways. It's a time of added responsibility and accountability to the organization—when one becomes part of the management team.

Although for many this is an exciting time, being a supervisor can present challenges. Meeting goals, making appropriate decisions, supervising employees, and being the communication vehicle for information that needs to get to employees can be overwhelming. But they can also be rewarding when one has the skills and competencies to be an effective supervisor.

A number of recent surveys of first-time supervisors reveal a broad spectrum of reactions to, and realities of, their supervisory position. Ten percent of supervisors say they're prepared, trained and qualified, and yet 48 percent of first-time supervisors fail. Although fully 68 percent of supervisors confess they really don't like being in their position, 40 percent of supervisors are ranked in the top ninetieth percentile of effectiveness and 40 percent are reported to be in the bottom tenth percentile of effectiveness. And yet, 42 percent of new supervisors believe they know how to succeed at their jobs. Ninety percent of workers who responded to a survey said that good supervisors are



Hero Images/Corbis

*Supervisors must understand that supervising employees today is dramatically different from in the past. A supervisor must act as a coach rather than as a taskmaster. This translates into being aware of employees' needs and being willing to let them do their jobs, giving support wherever it is needed.*

effective in increasing their loyalty to the company, and 42 percent of workers responding said that communicating ideas/expectations clearly was the most important quality in a good boss.<sup>10</sup>

In this section, we look at the primary roads people take to becoming supervisors and the challenges they face in mastering a new identity.

## WHERE DO SUPERVISORS COME FROM?

Many new supervisors are promoted from within the ranks of their current employers. The second major source of supervisory personnel is new college graduates. Occasionally, employees from other organizations are hired

to become first-line supervisors; however, this is increasingly rare because if employers have an open supervisory position, they often prefer to fill it with someone they know and who knows the organization. That favors promoting from within.

Employers tend to promote operative employees to first-line management jobs for several reasons. Employees know how the operations function. They understand how things are done in the organization. They typically know the people they'll be supervising. Another advantage is that the organization knows a lot about the candidate. When management promotes "one of its own" into a supervisory position, it minimizes risk. When hiring from the outside, management must rely on limited information provided by previous employers. By promoting from within, management can draw on its full history with a candidate. Finally, and very important, promoting from within acts as an employee motivator by providing an incentive for employees to work hard and excel.

What criteria does management tend to use in deciding who to promote into first-line managerial positions? Employees with good work records and an interest in management tend to be favored. Ironically, not all "good" operative employees make good supervisors. The reason is that people with strong technical skills don't necessarily have the skills needed to manage others. Organizations that successfully promote from the ranks select employees with adequate technical skills and provide them with supervisory training early in their new assignments.

Recent college graduates provide the other primary source of candidates for supervisory positions. Two-year and four-year college programs in supervision and management provide a basic foundation for preparing for the supervisor's job. With additional organizational training, many new college graduates are equipped to step into first-line management.

## IS THE TRANSITION TO SUPERVISOR DIFFICULT?

Moving from one middle-management job to another or from a middle-management position to one in top management rarely creates the anxiety that comes when one moves from being an employee to being a supervisor. It's a lot like being a parent. If you already have three kids, the addition of one more isn't too big a deal. Why? It's because you already know quite a bit about parenting—and you've been through it before. The challenge lies in the transition from being childless to being a parent for the first time. The same applies

<sup>10</sup>Based on D. Zack, "Lead From Your Strengths," *T&D*, February 2013, pp. 72–73; M. S. Plakotnik and T. S. Rocco, "A Succession Plan for First-Time Managers," *T&D*, December 2011, pp. 42–45; D. Zack, "How to Manage When You Hate Being a Boss," [www.fastcompany.com](http://www.fastcompany.com), September 26, 2012; A. Fox, "Help Managers Shine," *HR Magazine*, February 2013, pp. 43–48; A. Fisher, "Unhappy Manager? You're Far from Alone," [management.fortune.cnn.com](http://management.fortune.cnn.com), July 20, 2012; J. Yang and P. Trap, "What Is Effective in Increasing Your Loyalty to Your Company," *USA Today*, August 14, 2012, p.1B; D. Meinert, "Executive Briefing," *HR Magazine*, May 2012, p. 18; and K. Plombino, "No. 1 Quality in a Good Boss?" [hrcommunications.com](http://hrcommunications.com), November 26, 2012.

here. The challenge is unique when one moves into first-line management; it is unlike anything managers will encounter later in their rise up the organizational ladder.<sup>11</sup>

A previous study of what nineteen new supervisors experienced in their first year on the job helps us to better understand what it's like to become a first-line manager.<sup>12</sup> Fourteen men and five women participated in this study. All worked in sales or marketing. However, what they experienced would seem relevant to anyone making the employee-supervisor transition.

Even though these new supervisors had worked in their respective organizations as salespeople for an average of six years, their expectations of a supervisory position were incomplete and simplistic. They didn't appreciate the full range of demands that would be made on them. Each had previously been a star salesperson. They were promoted, in large part, as a reward for their good performance. But good performance for a salesperson and good performance for a supervisor are very different—and few of these new supervisors understood that. Ironically, their previous successes in sales may actually have made their transition to management harder. Because of their strong technical expertise and high motivation, they depended on their supervisors less than the average salesperson for support and guidance. When they became supervisors and suddenly had to deal with low-performing and unmotivated employees, they weren't prepared for it.

The nineteen new supervisors actually encountered a number of surprises. We briefly summarize the major ones because they capture the essence of what many supervisors encounter as they attempt to master their new identity.

**Their initial view of the manager as “boss” was incorrect.** Before taking their supervisory jobs, these managers-to-be talked about the power they would have and of being in control. As one put it, “Now I'll be the one calling the shots.” After a month, they spoke of being a “troubleshooter,” a “juggler,” and a “quick-change artist.” All emphasized solving problems, making decisions, helping others, and providing resources as their primary responsibilities. They no longer conceived of their jobs as being “the boss.”

**They were unprepared for the demands and ambiguities they would face.** In their first week, these supervisors were surprised by the unrelenting workload and pace of being a manager. On a typical day, they had to work on many problems simultaneously and were met with constant interruptions.

**Technical expertise was no longer the primary determinant of success or failure.** The supervisors were used to excelling by performing specific technical tasks and being individual contributors, not by acquiring managerial competence and getting things done through others. It took four to six months on the job for most to come to grips with the fact that they now would be judged by their ability to motivate others to high performance.

**A supervisor's job comes with administrative duties.** These supervisors found that routine communication activities such as paperwork and exchange of information were time consuming and interfered with their autonomy.

**They weren't prepared for the “people challenges” of their new jobs.** The supervisors unanimously asserted that the most demanding skills they had to learn in their first year dealt with managing people. They expressed being particularly uncomfortable in counseling employees and providing leadership. As one stated, “I hadn't realized...how hard it is to motivate people or develop them or deal with their personal problems.”

Given this and similar issues that arise when one becomes a supervisor, what does it take to be an effective supervisor? What competencies or general categories of skills are needed? Are these the same, regardless of one's level in the organization? We answer these questions in the next section.

<sup>11</sup>See, for example, R. D. Ramsey, “So You've Been Promoted or Changed Jobs. Now What?” *Supervision*, November 1998, 6–8.

<sup>12</sup>This section is based on L. A. Hill, *Becoming a Manager: Mastery of New Identity* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1992).

## DO YOU REALLY WANT TO BE A SUPERVISOR?

The fact that you're learning about supervision indicates you're interested in understanding how to supervise people. What is it about supervising people that excites you? Is it the fact that you can help an organization achieve its goals? Is it the challenge of supervising others—directing their work—that interests you? Is it the fact that supervision may lead to a management position and hopes of climbing the career ladder? Whatever your reasons, you need a clear picture of what lies ahead.

Supervisory positions are not easy. Even if you've been a superstar as an employee, this is no guarantee that you'll succeed as a supervisor. The fact that you are capable of doing excellent work is a big plus, but there are many other factors to consider. You need to recognize that supervising others may mean longer work hours. You're often on the job before your employees and leave after they do. Supervising can literally be a twenty-four-hours-a-day, seven-days-a-week job. Now, that's not to be interpreted as being on the job every hour of every day. But when you accept the responsibility of supervising others, you really never can “get away” from the job. Things happen, and you'll be expected to deal with them—no matter when they happen or where you are. It's not unheard of to get a call while you're on vacation if problems arise. Organizational policy may require peers and subordinates to contact you via cell phone or wireless handheld device in the event of any unforeseen event. How was someone in the organization able to contact you during your getaway? You are probably required by organizational policy to provide emergency contact information and to call in periodically to see how things are going.

You also need to recognize that as a supervisor, you may have a seemingly endless pile of paperwork to complete. Although organizations are continually working to eliminate much of their paperwork, a lot remains. This may include employee work schedules, production cost estimates, inventory documentation, or budget and payroll matters.

Another matter of importance that you should consider is the effect the supervisor's job may have on your pay! In some organizations, a raise in your base pay when you become a supervisor may not translate into higher annual earnings. How so? Consider that, as a supervisor, you are generally no longer eligible for overtime pay or commission. Instead, you may get compensatory (comp) time (time off). When you are an operative employee, your organization is legally required to pay you a premium rate (typically time-and-a-half) for overtime work. That may not be true when you become a supervisor. If you get a \$6,000 raise when you become a supervisor, but earned \$6,500 last year in overtime, you're actually earning less as a supervisor. This is something that you'll need to discuss with your organization before making your decision to become a supervisor.

What are the previous paragraphs really saying? They're telling you to think about why you want to supervise. Managing others can be rewarding. The excitement is real—and so are the headaches. You need to understand exactly what your motives are for becoming a supervisor—and what trade-offs you're willing to make to become the best supervisor you can be.

### OBJECTIVE 1.5

Describe the four essential supervisory competencies.

#### supervisory competencies

Conceptual, interpersonal, technical, and political competencies.

## Supervisory Competencies

More than thirty years ago, Professor Robert Katz began a process of identifying essential **supervisory competencies**.<sup>13</sup> What Katz and others have found is that successful supervisors must possess four critical competencies: technical, interpersonal, conceptual, and political competencies. They are as relevant today as when Katz originally described them.

<sup>13</sup>R. L. Katz, “Skills of an Effective Administrator,” *Harvard Business Review*, September–October 1974, 90–102; and B. Humphrey and J. Stokes, “The 21st Century Supervisor,” *HR Magazine*, May 2000, 185–192.

## Something to Think about (and promote class discussion)

### BECOMING A SUPERVISOR

Becoming a supervisor is a challenging opportunity. Some individuals look forward to “taking the helm” of a crew of workers, whereas others are put into this situation with little advance notice or training. As you consider going into a supervisory position—or making yourself a more effective supervisor than you are today—think about the following two areas.

1. List five reasons why you want to be a supervisor.

---



---



---



---



---

2. Identify five potential problems or difficulties that you may encounter when you become a supervisor.

---



---



---



---



---

### WHAT IS TECHNICAL COMPETENCE?

Top management is composed of generalists. The activities that consume top managers—strategic planning, developing the organization’s overall structure and culture, maintaining relations with major customers and bankers, marketing the product, and the like—are essentially generic in nature. The technical demands of top management jobs tend to be related to knowledge of the industry and a general understanding of the organization’s processes and products. This isn’t true for managers at other levels.

Most supervisors manage within areas of specialized knowledge: the vice-president of human resources, the director of computer systems, the regional sales manager, and the supervisor of health claims. These supervisors require **technical competence**, which is the ability to apply specialized knowledge or expertise. It’s difficult, if not impossible, to supervise employees with specialized skills effectively if you don’t have an adequate understanding of the technical aspects of their jobs. Although the supervisor need not be able to perform certain technical skills, understanding what each worker does is part of every supervisor’s job. For example, the task of scheduling work flow requires technical competence to determine what needs to be done.

#### **technical competence**

The ability to apply specialized knowledge or expertise.

## News Flash!

### THE SUPERVISOR'S ROLE IN MODERN ORGANIZATIONS

For years, the role of the working or front-line supervisor has been considered by many organizations to be little more than a stepping-stone into management. Business and management schools devoted their attention primarily to teaching principles and theories applicable to upper management. Many professors figured their graduates would hold down beginning supervisory roles for a short period and then move into something more challenging. How things have changed!

Today's organizations are complex. Some of the complexity is a result, in part, of the following:

- A more culturally diverse workforce than ever before.
- Molding a productive team out of a mix of full-timers, part-timers, "temps," and contract workers.
- Implementation of quality and productivity programs such as ISO certification and six sigma, just-in-time and lean manufacturing, and organizing work using self-directed teams.
- Enforcing the ever-growing number of employment laws pertaining to hiring and dismissal, antidiscrimination, sexual harassment, disability accommodation, workplace violence, Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) of 1993, Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) of 1996, worker's compensation, overtime, and ergonomics.
- Globalization and international competition, downsizing, outsourcing, and flattening of the organizational structure by removing levels of management.

#### The Good News for Supervisors

To meet all the challenges inherent in the complexity of modern organizations, the role of the front-line supervisor has changed dramatically. This is great news for someone aspiring to become a front-line supervisor because, although challenging, these changes present tremendous career and growth opportunities.

1. *The stature of the front-line supervisor has been elevated.* Instead of being a bit player at the bottom rung of the management ladder, the

supervisor has become a key position. The obvious reason is that many middle- and upper-level management positions have been eliminated. Organizations are "flattening" their organizational hierarchy. There are fewer middle- and upper-level managers in flat organizations. The flat organizational structure means that more authority, power, and responsibility are being delegated to lower-level managerial positions. The talent and skill of the supervisor in a flat organization is a major factor to its success.

2. *Empowerment of the supervisor's job is ongoing.* Some of the "power" previously held by those whose jobs have been eliminated will be delegated to the supervisors that they used to supervise. This shift means that line supervisors or "team leaders" of the past can take a more positive stance. They can submit new suggestions with more freedom and more influence. In short, the line supervisor will play a bigger role in the total management team. Upper management (those left) will have to listen more and react to what they hear.
3. *Supervisors have more autonomy.* With fewer directives to follow, fewer inspections from those above, and fewer people to please, supervisors have the power and responsibility to run their departments or "teams" more like the owner of a small business might do. Supervisors will be encouraged to operate with more authority while also being held accountable.
4. *Supervisors receive more advanced training.* As upper management shifts additional responsibilities to their front-line supervisors, they will provide more training to help them succeed. In addition, more supervisors will appoint assistants and prepare them for temporary "take-over" roles when they are absent. In other words, front-line supervisors will move closer to those upper-management leaders who remain with the firm and whose roles, in turn, will be expanded.
5. *Supervisors derive tremendous personal benefits from their role in today's business culture.* For example:
  - Effective supervisors will be easier to spot and will be "first call" on promotional possibilities.

(continued)

## Continued

- Women who excel as front-line supervisors will discover that the so-called glass ceiling is less likely to affect them.
- The challenges of front-line supervision provide a great training ground and preparation for upper-management positions.
- Supervision offers the opportunity to engage in meaningful and challenging work that will enhance one's self-respect and the respect from others.
- Supervisors will receive more immediate positive reinforcement of their contribution

to organizational success as a result of leading their employees through collaborative and team-based approaches than was possible through former top-down management methods.

- Supervisors will have greater opportunities to engage in continuous learning, which is a top motivator.

*Source:* C. Goodwin and D. B. Griffith. "The Supervisor's Role and Responsibility in the Modern Organization," *Supervisor's Survival Kit*, 11th ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson/Prentice Hall, 2006), 32–34.

### HOW DO INTERPERSONAL COMPETENCIES HELP?

The ability to work well with people, understand their needs, communicate well, and motivate others—both individually and in groups—constitutes **interpersonal competence**. Many people are technically proficient but interpersonally incompetent. They might be poor listeners, be unconcerned with the needs of others, or have difficulty dealing with conflicts. Supervisors get things done through other people. They must have good interpersonal skills to communicate, motivate, negotiate, delegate, and resolve conflicts.

#### **interpersonal competence**

The ability to work with, understand, communicate with, and motivate other people, both individually and in groups.

### WHAT IS CONCEPTUAL COMPETENCE?

**Conceptual competence** is the mental ability to analyze and diagnose complex situations. Strong conceptual abilities allow a supervisor to see that the organization is a complex system of many interrelated parts and that the organization itself is part of a larger system that includes the organization's industry, the community, and the nation's economy. This gives the supervisor a broad perspective and contributes to creative problem solving. On a more practical level, strong conceptual abilities help managers make good decisions.

#### **conceptual competence**

The mental ability to analyze and diagnose complex situations.

### WHY MUST ONE HAVE POLITICAL COMPETENCE?

**Political competence** is supervisors' ability to enhance their power, build a power base, and establish the "right" connections in the organization. Supervisors engage in politics when they attempt to influence the advantages and disadvantages of a situation. It goes beyond normal work activities. Whenever two or more people come together for some purpose, each has some idea of what should occur. If people try to influence the situation such that it benefits them more than the others, or keeps others from gaining some advantage, politics is "being played." But not all political behavior is negative. It doesn't have to involve manipulating a series of events, complaining about fellow supervisors, or sabotaging the work or reputation of another to further one's career. There's a fine line between appropriate political behavior and negative politics. We come back to organizational politics in Chapter 14.

#### **political competence**

Supervisors' ability to enhance their power, build a power base, and establish the "right" connections in the organization.

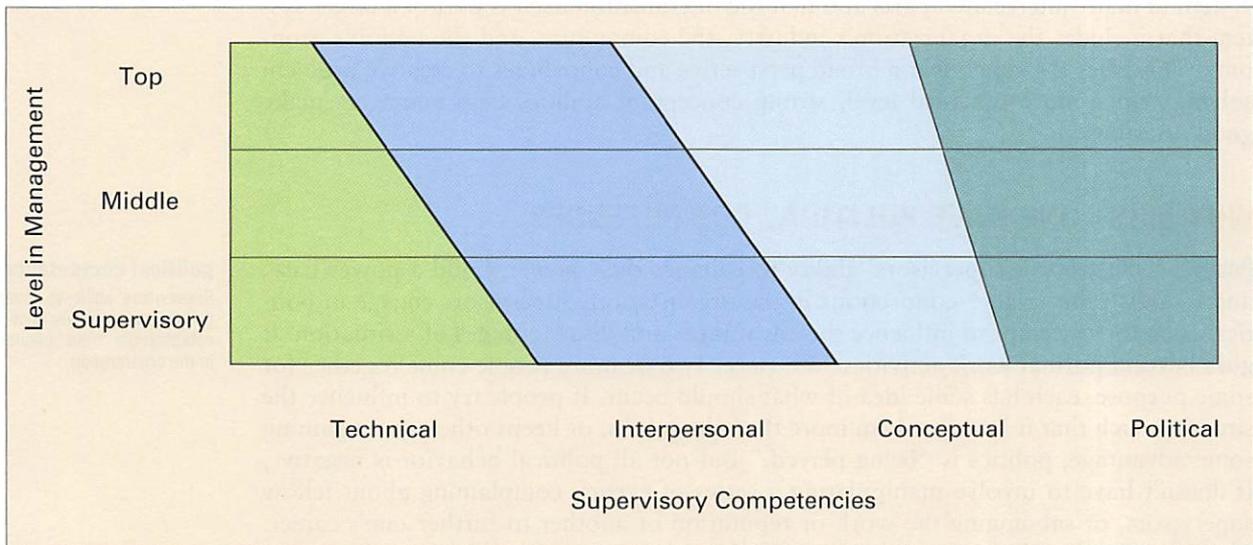
### HOW DO COMPETENCIES SHIFT BY MANAGERIAL LEVEL?

Although supervisors need to possess all the four competencies, the importance of each competency in any manager’s job varies with the individual’s level in the organization. As Exhibit 1-4 illustrates, (1) technical competence declines in importance as individuals rise in the organization; (2) interpersonal competencies are a constant for success, regardless of level in the organization; and (3) conceptual and political competencies increase in importance as managerial responsibility rises.

Technical abilities typically have the greatest relevance for first-level managers. This is true for two reasons. First, many supervisors perform technical work as well as managerial work. In contrast to other levels of management, the distinction between individual contributor and first-line manager is often blurred. Second, supervisors spend more time on training and developing their employees than do other managers. This requires them to have a greater technical knowledge of their employees’ jobs than that needed by middle- and top-level managers. There is overwhelming evidence that interpersonal abilities are critical at all levels of management. This shouldn’t come as a shock because we know that managers get things done through other people. Supervisors are particularly in need of interpersonal competencies because they spend so much of their time in leading-function activities. When we talked with dozens of practicing supervisors, the one common viewpoint they shared was the importance of people skills to the successful achievement of their units’ objectives.

The importance of conceptual competence increases as managers move up in the organization. This is because of the types of problems managers encounter and the decisions they make at higher levels. Generally speaking, the higher managers rise in an organization, the more the problems they face tend to be complex, ambiguous, and ill defined. These problems require custom-made solutions. In contrast, supervisors generally have more straightforward, familiar, and easily defined problems, which lend themselves to more routine decision making. Ill-structured problems and custom-made solutions make greater conceptual demands on managers than do structured problems and routine decision making.

Finally, the higher one climbs in the organization’s hierarchy, the more critical political competence becomes. Because resource-allocation decisions are made at higher levels in an organization, middle and top managers are “fighting” for their piece of the organizational pie. Their need to develop alliances, support one project over another,



**Exhibit 1-4**  
How competency demands vary at different levels of management.

or influence certain situations involves higher-level political skills. But don't interpret this as implying that politics are less important for supervisors. Because so much of the supervisor's job is well defined, they need strong political skills to get their unit's work completed and to survive.

## From Concepts to Skills

Knowledge about a subject is important, but just as important is whether you can do anything with that knowledge. Can you put your knowledge into practice? Just as you wouldn't want a surgeon who had never operated on anyone taking a knife to you, or to fly on an aircraft with a pilot who's never flown, it's not enough for you to just know about supervision. You should be able to actually supervise! You can learn to be an effective supervisor! No one is born with supervisory skills, although some people have a head start.

It's true that supervision comes easier to some people than to others. Individuals who are fortunate enough to have parents, relatives, or friends who supervise employees have role models to emulate and give them insights into what the job entails. Similarly, individuals whose parents helped them set realistic goals, provided positive feedback, encouraged autonomy, practiced open communication, and fostered the development of a strong self-concept have learned behaviors that will help them as supervisors. Also, those who have had the fortune to work for a good supervisor have a role model to imitate. However, those without these advantages can improve their supervisory abilities. This book will help you to be an effective supervisor by focusing on both conceptual knowledge and practical skills. In a succeeding chapter, for example, we discuss the importance of planning to a supervisor's success and show how setting goals is a key part of planning. Then, we present specific techniques for helping employees set goals and provide you with an opportunity to practice and develop your goal-setting skills.

### WHAT IS A SKILL?

A **skill** is the ability to demonstrate a system and sequence of behavior that is functionally related to attaining a performance goal.<sup>14</sup> No single action constitutes a skill. For example, the ability to write clear communications is a skill. People who have this skill know the particular sequence of actions to take to propose a project or summarize a report. They can separate primary from secondary ideas. They can organize their thoughts in a logical manner. They can simplify complex ideas. None of these actions is by itself a skill. A skill is a system of behavior that can be applied in a wide range of situations.

Which key skills are related to supervisory effectiveness? Although there is no unanimous agreement among teachers and trainers of supervision, certain skills have surfaced as being more important than others. Exhibit 1-5 lists key supervisory skills, organized as they are presented in this text. In aggregate, they form the competency base for effective supervision.

### WHAT ELSE IS CRITICAL FOR ME TO KNOW ABOUT SUPERVISING?

By now you may be somewhat amazed by what supervisors have to do and the skills they must have to succeed in an organization, but you should consider several other elements. Specifically, what personal issues should you address? Let's look at these.

One of the first things you'll need to do is to recognize that you are part of management as a supervisor. This means that you support the organization and the wishes of management above you. Although you might disagree with those wishes, as a supervisor,

#### OBJECTIVE 1.6

Identify the elements that are necessary to be successful as a supervisor.

#### skill

The ability to demonstrate a system and sequence of behavior that is functionally related to attaining a performance goal.

<sup>14</sup>R. E. Boyatzis, *The Competent Manager: A Model for Effective Performance* (New York: Wiley, 1982), 33.

## Related to Planning and Control

- Goal setting
- Budgeting
- Creative problem solving
- Developing control charts

## Related to Organizing, Staffing, and Employee Development

- Empowering others
- Interviewing
- Providing feedback
- Coaching

## Related to Stimulating Individual and Group Performance

- Designing motivating jobs
- Projecting charisma
- Listening
- Conducting a group meeting

## Related to Coping with Workplace Dynamics

- Negotiation
- Stress reduction
- Counseling
- Disciplining
- Handling grievances

you must be loyal to the organization. You must also develop a means of gaining respect from your employees, as well as your peers and boss. If you're going to be effective as a supervisor, you'll need to develop their trust and build credibility with them. One means of doing this is to keep your skills and competencies up to date. You must continue your education, not only because it helps you, but also because it sets an example for your employees. It communicates that learning matters.

You'll also have to understand what legitimate power you have been given by the organization because you direct the activities of others. This legitimate power is your authority to act and expect others to follow your directions. Yet ruling with an iron fist may not work. Accordingly, you'll need to know when to assert your authority and how to get things done without resorting to "Because I told you so." In the latter case, you need to develop interpersonal skills that help you influence others. This is particularly true when dealing with organizational members whom you don't supervise.

Finally, you'll need to recognize that organizational members are different—not only in their talents, but as individuals. You'll need to be sensitive to their needs, tolerate and even celebrate their differences, and be empathetic to them as individuals. Success, in part, begins with understanding what being flexible means. Throughout this text, we address each of these areas. For instance, in the next chapter, we introduce you to the diversity of the workforce and what that may mean for you. In Chapter 9, we introduce trust and credibility and their role in your leadership effectiveness.

**Exhibit 1-5**

*Key supervisory skills.*

## Comprehension Check 1-2

5. *True or false?* The transition from middle manager to top-level manager creates about as much anxiety as going from worker to supervisor.
6. Which one of the following is an interpersonal competency?
  - a. Specialized knowledge
  - b. Motivating others
  - c. Analyzing skills
  - d. Enhancing one's power base
7. A \_\_\_\_\_ is the ability to demonstrate a system and sequence of behavior that is functionally related to attaining a performance goal.
  - a. planning effort
  - b. political competency
  - c. skill
  - d. successful planner
8. Which one of the following items does not relate to stimulating individual and group performance?
  - a. Listening
  - b. Conducting group meetings
  - c. Interviewing
  - d. Projecting charisma

## Enhancing Understanding

### SUMMARY

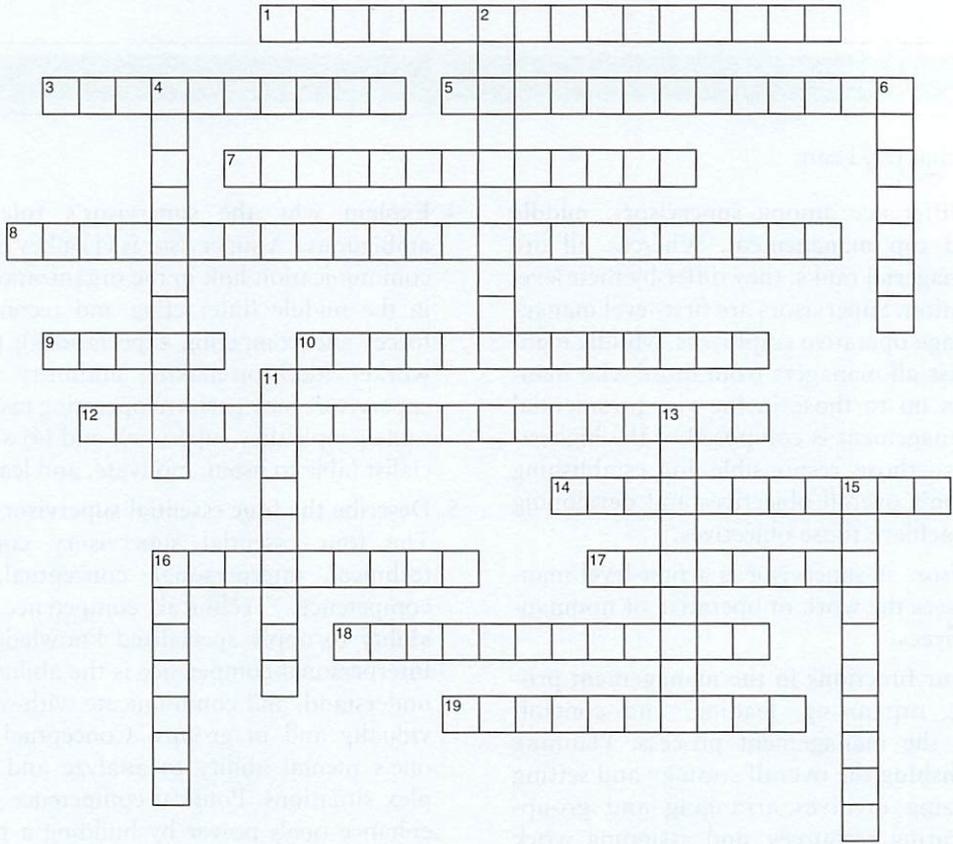
After reading this chapter, I can:

1. **Explain the difference among supervisors, middle managers, and top management.** Whereas all are part of the managerial ranks, they differ by their level in the organization. Supervisors are first-level managers—they manage operative employees. Middle managers encompass all managers from those who manage supervisors up to those in the vice-presidential ranks. Top management is composed of the highest-level managers—those responsible for establishing the organization's overall objectives and developing the policies to achieve those objectives.
2. **Define *supervisor*.** A supervisor is a first-level manager who oversees the work of operative or nonmanagement employees.
3. **Identify the four functions in the management process.** Planning, organizing, leading, and controlling make up the management process. Planning involves establishing the overall strategy and setting goals. Organizing involves arranging and grouping jobs, allocating resources, and assigning work so that activities can be accomplished as planned. Leading involves motivating employees, directing the activities of others, communicating properly, and resolving conflict among organizational members. Controlling involves monitoring the organization's performance and comparing it with previously set goals.
4. **Explain why the supervisor's role is considered *ambiguous*.** A supervisor is (1) a key person (a critical communication link in the organization); (2) a person in the middle (interacting and reconciling opposing forces and competing expectations); (3) just another worker (decision-making authority is limited, and supervisors may perform operating tasks alongside the same people they supervise); and (4) a behavioral specialist (able to listen, motivate, and lead).
5. **Describe the four essential supervisory competencies.** The four essential supervisory competencies are technical, interpersonal, conceptual, and political competence. Technical competence reflects one's ability to apply specialized knowledge or expertise. Interpersonal competence is the ability to work with, understand, and communicate with others both individually and in groups. Conceptual competence is one's mental ability to analyze and diagnose complex situations. Political competence is the ability to enhance one's power by building a power base and establishing the right connections in the organization.
6. **Identify the elements that are necessary to be successful as a supervisor.** Several elements are necessary to become a successful supervisor, including understanding that you're part of the management team, handling legitimate power properly, and recognizing differences in employees.

### COMPREHENSION: Review and Discussion Questions

- 1-1. What differentiates supervisory positions from all other levels of management?
- 1-2. Is the owner-manager of a small store with three employees an operative employee, a supervisor, or a top manager? Explain.
- 1-3. What specific tasks are common to all managers, regardless of their level in the organization?
- 1-4. Contrast time spent on management functions by supervisors versus top management.
- 1-5. "The best rank-and-file employees should be promoted to supervisors." Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Explain.
- 1-6. Why is conceptual competence more important for top managers than it is for first-level supervisors?
- 1-7. A supervisor is both "a key person" and "just another worker." Explain this phenomenon.

**KEY CONCEPT CROSSWORD**



**ACROSS**

1. people who manage other managers
3. competency in the ability to analyze and diagnose complex situations
5. competency in the ability to work with and communicate with others
7. people responsible for establishing an organization's overall goals
8. conceptual, interpersonal, technical, and political
9. the ability to demonstrate a behavior related to attaining a performance goal
10. doing the right task
12. planning, organizing, leading, and controlling
14. first-line managers
16. competency in the ability to enhance one's power
17. defining an organization's goals
18. the systematic grouping of people to accomplish a specific purpose
19. doing a task right

**DOWN**

2. the process of getting things done, effectively and efficiently through and with people
4. monitoring activities
6. motivating employees
11. competency in the ability to apply specialized knowledge or expertise
13. an employee who physically produces goods and services
15. arranging and grouping jobs
16. the primary activities supervisors perform

## Developing Your Supervisory Skills

### GETTING TO KNOW YOURSELF

Before you can effectively supervise others, you must understand your present strengths and areas in need of development. To assist in this learning process, we encourage you to complete the following self-assessments from the Prentice Hall Self-Assessment Library 3.4.

- How Motivated Am I to Manage? (III. B. 4.)
- What's My Basic Personality? (I. A. 1.)
- What's My Jungian 16-Type Personality? (I. A. 2.)
- What's My Emotional Intelligence Score? (I. E. 1.)

After you complete the assessment, we suggest you retain the results and store them as part of your “portfolio of learning about yourself.”

### BUILDING A TEAM

#### 1-8. An Experiential Exercise: Sharing and Receiving Information

When you begin a new course, do you have specific expectations of what you want from the class? You probably do, but how often do you communicate them to the instructor?<sup>15</sup> This information is important to both of you. As a supervisor, you will need to become accustomed to sharing and receiving information about your expectations and the expectations of others. You can begin by defining your expectations for this course. First, take out a piece of paper and place your name at the top. Then, respond to the following questions:

A. What do I want from this course? Why?

B. Why are these things important to me?

C. How does this course fit into my career plans?

D. What is my greatest challenge in taking this class?

When you have finished answering these questions, pair up with another class member (preferably someone you do not already know) and exchange papers. Get to know each other (using the information on these sheets as a starting point). Prepare an introduction of your partner, and share your partner's responses to the four questions with the class and your instructor.

### MENTORING OTHERS

A mentor is someone in the organization, usually more experienced and in a higher-level position, who sponsors or supports another employee or student (frequently called a protégé). A mentor can teach, guide, and encourage the protégé as that person is socialized to the culture of the organization. Some organizations have formal mentoring programs, but even if your organization does not, mentoring is an important supervisory skill for you to develop. Increasingly, students are asked to participate in providing service to the community by mentoring K–12 students, as well as college-level peers. Check with your program or department chair to determine whether mentoring opportunities are available within your school or community.

#### STEPS IN PRACTICING THE SKILL

**STEP 1: Communicate honestly and openly with your protégé.** If your protégé is going to learn from you and benefit from your experience, you're going to have to be open and honest as you talk about what you've done. Bring up the failures as well as the successes. Remember that mentoring is a learning process, and for learning to take place, you're going to have to be open and honest in “telling it like it is.”

**STEP 2: Encourage honest and open communication from your protégé.** You need to know as the mentor what your protégé hopes to gain from this relationship. You should encourage the protégé to ask for

<sup>15</sup>The idea for this exercise came from B. Goza, “Graffiti Needs Assessment Involving Students in the First Class Session,” *Journal of Management Education* 17, no. 1 (February 1993), 99–106.

information and to be specific about what he or she wants to gain.

**STEP 3: Treat the relationship with the protégé as a learning opportunity.** Don't pretend to have all the answers and all the knowledge. But do share what you've learned through your experiences. And in your conversations and interactions with your protégé, you may be able to learn as much from that

person as he or she does from you. So, be open to listening to what your protégé is saying.

**STEP 4: Take the time to get to know your protégé.** As a mentor, you should be willing to take the time to get to know your protégé and his or her interests. If you're not willing to spend extra time, you should probably not embark on a mentoring relationship.

## COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY

1-9. Develop a three- to four-page response to the following question: Are supervisors in a no-win situation in an organization? Present both sides of the

argument and include supporting data. Conclude your discussion by defending and supporting one of the two arguments you've presented.

## THINKING CRITICALLY

### ► Case 1-A: Transition to Supervisor

Tristan came in on the ground floor in his company and had excelled in his position for several years when he was promoted to a supervisory position. He was excited about the increased responsibility and money, and he also enjoyed the status and respect that came with the new title.

Tristan's position was to supervise a new production department at a new plant site of his small regional company. In preparation he was ordered to attend a two-week supervisor's training program at headquarters. As he expected, the training was focused on human resources (HR) concerns, customer satisfaction issues, and corporate quality production expectations. Because the new location was intended to showcase the company's strength in quality manufacturing, he was allowed to recruit his own team from among the company's statewide employee pool. Several seasoned workers, acquainted with him as a result of his time with the company, expressed interest in the startup department.

Lauren was hired as the departmental administrative assistant and William was hired as the new line foreman. Tristan was elated and felt that things were moving ahead quickly enough for his superiors to be pleased with the progress he was making. He continued to fill the necessary positions. Within a month the department was ready to get going. Everyone was excited, attitudes were positive, and he was looking forward to the inaugural production run.

Tristan had never held a supervisory position before, yet he knew Lauren and William were both strong employees with great work ethic. He was certain everyone he selected possessed a similar work ethic and was driven to succeed. However, this quickly proved erroneous, and when it became obvious the hoped-for production quality was nonexistent, everything became a

dismal failure all at once. The department failed to produce at the expected quality level, and turmoil among the employees was widespread. During the nearly two years he was supervisor, Tristan was never able to earn the respect of his employees or experience the success in production quality envisioned by the company.

In reality, many first-time supervisors earn their position by simply doing well at their job; however, without proper training, in both supervision and leadership, disappointing outcomes like Tristan's are more common than you would imagine. Just because an employee is good, or even great, it does not mean he or she will be a great supervisor.

### RESPONDING TO THE CASE

- 1-10. If you envision transitioning into a supervisory position, what can you do to ensure you don't end up like Tristan?
- 1-11. What supervisory competencies should you work to develop? Why?
- 1-12. Which of the four management functions do you believe most supervisors need help with? Why do you think this is the case?
- 1-13. The role of supervisor can be considered a first step toward management. What are the benefits and potential disadvantages of pursuing a management career?

### ► Case 1-B: Build a Better Boss

Dave couldn't have been more excited. Working for Google he knew they didn't do anything halfway. So when he had the opportunity to be part of a new supervisor training

project intended to “build a better boss,” he couldn’t wait to get started. During the training to understand what a great boss is and does, Google trainers helped Dave and his fellow supervisors compare their appraisal data to performance reviews, feedback surveys, and supporting papers turned in for individuals rated as top-supervisors. They soon found out the training materials were developed from Google’s “Project Oxygen,” which identified eight characteristics or habits of Google’s most effective supervisors.

The “big eight” characteristics listed for Dave and the others were: 1. Provide an unambiguous vision of the future; 2. Help individuals to reach their long-term work goals; 3. Express interest in employees’ well-being; 4. Ensure you have the necessary technical abilities to support employee efforts; 5. Display effective communication skills, especially listening; 6. Provide coaching support when needed; 7. Focus on being productive and on end results; and 8. Avoid over-managing; let your team be responsible. Initially Dave and the others were underwhelmed and thought these eight attributes seemed pretty simplistic and obvious. In fact Dave wondered why Google spent all this time and effort to uncover these at all. He later learned that even Google’s vice-president for people operations, Laszlo Bock, said, “My first reaction was, that’s it?”

However, as Dave and the other supervisors continued to work through the training they began to realize there was more to this list than met the eye. The next step in training was for them was to look closer and see how Google ranked the eight items by importance. As they did so the results of Project Oxygen became surprising and a lot more interesting! As supervisors, Dave and the others knew that Google’s approach to management since being founded in 1999 was for them to leave people alone and let them do their stuff. If workers got stuck, Google believed they would ask their bosses, whose deep technical expertise propelled them to supervision in the first place. It wasn’t hard for Dave and the others to see that Google wanted its supervisors to be outstanding technical specialists. The surprise for Dave was that previously in the Google context they were always reminded that to be a supervisor, particularly on the engineering side, they needed to be as deep or deeper a technical expert than the people who worked for them. Now, Project Oxygen turned that idea upside down as Google revealed that the importance of technical expertise was ranked number eight (very last) on the list.

Here is the complete list provided to Dave and his fellow supervisors and ranked from most important to least important, along with what each characteristic entails.

- Provide coaching support when needed (provide specific feedback and have regular one-on-one meetings with employees; offer solutions tailored to each employee’s strengths)
- Avoid over-managing; let your team be responsible (give employees space to tackle problems themselves, but be available to offer advice)

- Express interest in employees’ well-being (make new team members feel welcome and get to know your employees as people)
- Focus on being productive and on end results (focus on helping the team achieve its goals by prioritizing work and getting rid of obstacles)
- Display good communication skills, especially listening (learn to listen and to share information; encourage open dialogue and pay attention to the team’s concerns)
- Help individuals to reach their long-term work goals (notice employees’ efforts so they can see how their hard work is furthering their careers; appreciate employees’ efforts and make that appreciation known)
- Provide an unambiguous vision of the future (lead the team but keep everyone involved in developing and working toward the team’s vision)
- Ensure you have the necessary technical abilities to support employee efforts (understand the challenges facing the team and be able to help team members solve problems)

Now, Dave and the other supervisors at Google aren’t just encouraged to be great supervisors, they know what Google expects them to do to be great supervisors. The company continues to do its part with ongoing supervisory training, as well as individual coaching and performance review sessions for Dave and the others. Google believes Project Oxygen breathed new life into their supervisors, and vice-president Bock says the company’s efforts paid off quickly, allowing them to see a statistically significant improvement in quality for 75 percent of their worst-performing supervisors.

*Sources:* Based on R. D’Aprix, “A Simple Effective Formula for Leadership,” *Strategic Communication Management*, May 2011, p. 14; R. Jaish, “Pieces of Eight,” *e-learning Age*, May 2011, p. 6; M. L. Stallard, “Google’s Project Oxygen: A Case-Study in Connection Culture,” [www.humanresourcesiq.com](http://www.humanresourcesiq.com), March 25, 2011; J. Aquino, “8 Traits of Stellar Managers, Defined by Googlers,” [www.businessinsider.com](http://www.businessinsider.com), March 15, 2011; and A. Bryant, “Google’s Quest to Build a Better Boss,” *New York Times Online*, March 12, 2011.

#### RESPONDING TO THE CASE

- 1-14. Are you surprised at what Google found out about “building a better boss?” Explain your answer.
- 1-15. What’s the difference between encouraging supervisors to be great supervisors and knowing what being a great supervisor involves?
- 1-16. Do you agree with Google’s rank ordering of the eight characteristics of most effective supervisors? Why or why not? How would you order them and why?
- 1-17. How do Google’s eight characteristics of most effective supervisors align with Katz’s list of supervisory competencies? With the four management functions?