

Supervisors are essential to any organization that depends on people to achieve success. Chapter 1 introduced the field of management and the organizational pyramid. This chapter focuses on supervisory roles and responsibilities. In every organization, at least one person must take the role of supervisor. Most organizations have many supervisors. It is important to understand how the supervisor fits into the organizational pyramid and what skills a successful supervisor needs.

Supervisors and the Organizational Pyramid

You learned in Chapter 1 that management is the process of leading and working with people to accomplish organizational goals and objectives using available resources efficiently and effectively. Supervisors are an integral part of the management team and process. The legal definition of **supervisor**

is any individual having authority, in the interest of the employer, to hire, transfer, suspend, lay off, recall, promote, discharge, assign, reward, or discipline other employees, or responsibly to direct them, or to adjust their grievances, or effectively to recommend such action, if in connection with the foregoing the exercise of such authority is not of a merely routine or clerical nature, but requires the use of independent judgment.¹

Supervisors are an integral part of the management team and process.

In the workplace, it is common to hear the words *manager* and *supervisor* used interchangeably. Supervisors are typically considered part of first-line management. Figure 1.1 on page 8 shows nonmanagerial employees at the base of the organizational pyramid and first-line management in the tier above. However, it should be noted that generally managers at all levels have some supervisory responsibilities.

The following list contains typical job titles for first-line managers. Many more could be added as titles vary widely from one organization to another.

- Office manager
- Administrative manager
- Unit manager
- Branch manager
- Department supervisor
- First-line supervisor (or manager)
- Shift manager or supervisor
- Team leader
- Project manager

supervisor

an individual who typically has the authority to hire, direct, promote, discharge, assign, reward, or discipline other employees

First-line managerial positions often include a wide range of responsibilities, such as the following:

- Operational planning (one week to one year)
- Meeting production goals/quotas

- Customer service
- Coordinating staffing and work schedules
- Personnel and job assignment decisions
- Organizing training, orientation, and team-building activities
- Unit-level facilities/resource planning and purchasing
- Day-to-day and local crisis management
- Enforcing job safety regulations and accident reporting
- Coordinating and managing a team

First-line managers or supervisors have regular contact with employees and, in many situations, customers. They have responsibility for day-to-day operations, which are essential to organizational success. In addition, supervisors interact regularly with middle managers, providing them with status reports and performance updates while also receiving guidance and direction regarding organizational goals and operational plans. In organizations where participative management is practiced, supervisors may also interact with top management. Participative management, discussed more fully in the next chapter, welcomes employees' ideas and includes input into decision making by employees at all levels.

Knowledge to **ACTION**

1. Why do you think first-line supervisors are important to organizations and their management structure?
2. Assume you work in the office of a large retail store such as Best Buy or Home Depot and the company decides to eliminate all first-line management positions. What do you think will be the impact on employees and customers?

Supervisory Roles

The roles supervisors play vary by the size and type of organization, the industry, and the philosophy of senior executives. However, many roles are common to most supervisory positions. Brief explanations of the more common supervisory roles and responsibilities follow.

Trainer

As a **trainer**, a supervisor teaches employees and coworkers new information and skills. One of the keys to any new employee's success is being prepared to do his or her job. This requires proper orientation and training.

trainer
a person who teaches employees and coworkers new information and skills

Effective supervisors realize that training is an ongoing process. Although it is emphasized for new employees, all employees benefit from periodic training and professional development opportunities. Chapter 8, "Setting Up Employees for Success," discusses new-employee orientation and training for new and current employees.

Planner

A **planner** evaluates goals, objectives, and future needs to prepare plans that provide the necessary resources and action items to achieve success. In most organizations, senior management is primarily responsible for broad strategic planning, and middle managers and first-line supervisors implement those plans. A key to success is to have plans for achieving department-level goals and objectives. This includes planning for training, staffing, purchasing, advertising, evaluation, and more. Important components of planning include setting goals, defining critical success factors, and developing tactics for getting your employees involved. Chapter 6 focuses on planning.

planner
a person who evaluates goals, objectives, and future needs to prepare plans that provide the necessary resources and action items to achieve success

Scheduler

a person who prepares the schedule to ensure proper staffing and resources are available to meet production or customer needs

Scheduler

As a **scheduler**, a supervisor prepares the schedule to ensure proper staffing and resources are available to meet production or customer needs. In organizations both large and small, supervisors need to arrange human, material, and informational resources productively. In addition, supervisors are responsible for scheduling facilities, inventory, and equipment to maximize efficiency and provide exceptional quality and/or service. Several chapters discuss different types of scheduling.

Motivator

a person who inspires people to perform at their best and achieve a common goal

Motivator

Supervisors also serve as **motivators** who inspire their employees to perform at their best and achieve a common goal. One of the most difficult but important roles for a supervisor is that of motivator. To inspire their teams to work together, managers and supervisors need to recognize that each person is unique and that everyone is not motivated by the same incentives and rewards. For example, some people thrive on praise and recognition. For others, a salary increase or promotion is a strong incentive. Frequent feedback may encourage some employees but may be a disincentive to others. A number of chapters focus on different aspects of motivation, and Chapter 11 describes it in detail.



This supervisor values her employees' opinions. By being involved in planning sessions, they are more likely to achieve desired team results. Meaningful participation can be a powerful motivator in today's complex and fast-paced workplaces.

Coach

A **coach** is a person who guides employees with instruction, feedback, and encouragement. Effective supervisors coach their employees. Coaching goes beyond motivation by helping employees focus on their "high-payoff" activities, providing positive feedback, allowing them to learn from their mistakes, and celebrating successes. In addition, it is important for supervisors to spend time coaching all their employees—the top performers as well as the underachievers. Chapter 8 offers proven coaching strategies.

Controller

As a **controller**, a supervisor measures quality and performance. Control does not have to be negative or unpleasant. In fact, positive and proactive supervisors realize their job is to focus on controlling quality and keeping things headed toward organizational goals and objectives. Success needs to be measured so deviations can be corrected. Effective supervisors involve their employees in developing tools to assess quality and performance. By involving employees, supervisors share the responsibility for control with their team. Ultimately, supervisors are responsible for the performance of their units. However, involving team members makes assessing quality and performance a much more open and positive experience. Chapter 9 provides techniques for evaluating performance.

Leader

A **leader** sets the tone for the organization, creates vision, and inspires others to achieve. Supervisors set the tone for their employees. This includes everything from attitude to behavior. We have all heard the advice "lead by example." This is essential for supervisors because their employees will look to them to establish moral and ethical values; create a positive, pleasant work environment; communicate in a professional manner; and use technology appropriately—all the while staying focused on organizational goals, production standards, and customers' needs. Chapter 4, "Leadership Essentials," describes strategies, skills, styles, and qualities of successful leaders.

Recruiter

A **recruiter** assists in identifying potential job candidates, screening applications, interviewing, and hiring new employees. Supervisors are involved in many aspects of recruitment. In a small business, the supervisor may handle all elements. In larger organizations, supervisors generally work with the human resources department to accomplish these tasks. Chapter 7 presents recruiting strategies and considerations.

coach
a person who guides employees with instruction, feedback, and encouragement

controller
a person who measures quality and performance

leader
one who sets the tone for the organization, creates the vision, and inspires other to achieve

recruiter
one who assists in identifying potential job candidates

Essential Skills for Successful Supervisors

Supervisors need to be passionate about their jobs, with a strong desire to do the work, help other people succeed, and accept additional responsibility. Individuals who apply for supervisory positions simply because they want to earn more money are usually not successful. This section provides an overview of essential skills for supervisors. Future chapters will place additional emphasis on many of these skills.

Communication

Supervisors need to be passionate about their jobs, with a strong desire to do the work, help other people succeed, and accept additional responsibility.

In Chapter 1, you learned soft skills are needed at all levels of management. Communication skills are among the most important soft skills. Depending on the circumstances, supervisors may communicate with a variety of groups, including their employees, customers, suppliers, managers, government agency representatives, banks, labor unions, the media, consumer advocacy groups, and the public. Every day, supervisors encounter opportunities to exchange information with others. To be effective, they need to understand their audience, be clear about the message they wish to convey, and seek feedback. The following communication capabilities are essential:

- Listening
- Interpreting nonverbal communication
- Articulating their point, both orally and in writing
- Projecting a positive demeanor

Communication skills for supervisors and managers are so important that Chapter 13, "Effective Workplace Communication," is devoted solely to this topic.

Entrepreneurial

Thinking

Organizations move at a rapid pace, and change is the norm rather than the exception. This type of environment requires supervisors to be quick on their feet. Entrepreneurial thinkers tend to stand out as supervisors.

Entrepreneurial thinkers are employees who have learned to think and act like owners of an entrepreneurial or start-up



© iStock/Shutterstock.com



© Robert Frencklo/Shutterstock.com



© Geo Marino/Shutterstock.com

Nonverbal communication can occur through eye contact, facial expression, gestures, body position, and other means. These three businesspeople are communicating different nonverbal messages. How do you interpret them?

business. When supervisors in any type of organization take ownership of their areas of responsibility, they tend to make the same types of decisions the business owners would make. Entrepreneurial thinkers adapt quickly, are creative problem solvers, and develop new ideas to increase productivity, enhance quality, increase profits, and/or expand market share. They are opportunistic, meaning they know when the time is right to make a change or try something new.

Decision Making

Supervisors make decisions every day. Some are routine and others more complex, with significant short-term and longer-term consequences. Regardless of the type of decision, supervisors need the ability to gather information, validate facts, identify consequences, analyze data, and stay focused on the goal. In addition, their decisions need to be ethical ones that are in the best interests of the organization and society.

In the chapter opening interview, Charles Bass cites making decisions as one of the most important responsibilities of his job. When making a hard decision on a teammate's request, Bass considers the effect not only on the teammate but also on other teammates and the entire company. The "Soft Skills for Success" activity at the end of the chapter focuses on decision making.

Technical Skills

You learned about technical skills in Chapter 1. Remember that they involve the entire package of skills required to do a job effectively. For example, if you plan to become an executive chef, you need all the culinary and kitchen management skills to handle this responsibility, train your employees, and solve problems as they arise. Recall, too, that first-line managers need significantly more technical skills than middle managers or executives.

Computer information systems are commonplace in both small and large organizations. As mentioned earlier, nearly every position requires computer and software skills. Supervisors should understand computer technology and information systems and how these tools can be used to benefit both individuals and the organization.

Team Building and Leadership

Doris Christopher, founder of The Pampered Chef, attributes much of her success to the team of people who work for her company.² Recruiting, training, and motivating a group of individuals to work together to achieve a common goal requires careful planning based on proven approaches. In addition, a team needs a leader like Doris Christopher who can inspire, motivate, and adapt quickly. Chapter 4 introduces qualities, styles, and other factors in effective leadership, while Chapter 5 provides established strategies for developing and leading both traditional and virtual teams.

SUPERVISORY ROLES IN MANAGING TECHNOLOGY

Supervisors play many roles in managing technology in their areas. The primary technology roles are as follows:

- Ensure employees are aware of, understand, and follow all company technology policies. Many companies have policies regarding protection of company information; social media, email, and Internet use; use of mobile devices to access company data; and a host of other areas.
- Provide appropriate technology for employees to perform their jobs effectively and efficiently.
- Balance the need for upgrading technology with budgetary constraints.
- Ensure employees are trained properly and know how to use new technology appropriately.
- Monitor the use of technology to avoid abuse, particularly in Internet sites visited, information posted on social media sites, and email use.
- Ensure productivity is not hindered by time spent on personal activities such as following sports, shopping, visiting social media sites, or texting friends.
- Ensure the quality of electronic communications—especially external communication such as email and posts to Internet sites—meets business standards and conveys a positive image of the company.
- Use technology to improve working conditions for employees, appropriately based on company policies such as flexible scheduling and working from remote locations.
- Provide employees who work outside the office or travel for business purposes with suitable technology to do their work.

Delegation

Delegation is the process of sharing authority and responsibility with others. Supervisors need others to get things done. This requires delegating appropriate tasks and authority to the right employees. It also requires preparing employees to succeed with delegated tasks. Chapter 5 discusses delegation.

Political Skills

When you see or hear the word *political*, do you immediately think of elected officials in public office? In the workplace, political skills focus

on positive attributes including the ability to build long-term relationships of trust with others. Just as good politicians understand the needs of their constituents, politically savvy supervisors understand the needs of their employees, boss, organization, and internal and external customers.

With this knowledge, supervisors are better prepared to make good decisions, to be responsible, and to be accountable. Effective supervisors are diplomatic. They know how to get things done through support, cooperation, and effort from others. Managers and supervisors who are politically naive can get shortchanged. Consider this situation, for example:

You attend an important meeting in which managers will vote on a plan to reorganize the support staff. You make a carefully prepared speech in support of the plan, only to find that other managers who oppose it got together earlier and “decided” the outcome. You’re defeated without having the chance to make your case. If you had acted as they did, talking to other managers beforehand and building support, the outcome might have been different.

Emotional Intelligence and Self-Awareness

Research has shown that academic intelligence, represented by items such as test scores, grades, and intelligence quotient (IQ), is not always a reliable predictor of success in work and life. Social skills play a very important role. While others had previously studied this topic, a series of books by psychologist and journalist Daniel Goleman presenting his concept of social or emotional intelligence have had a profound impact on the business world.

As Goleman defines it, **emotional intelligence** means “managing feelings so that they are expressed appropriately and effectively, enabling people to work together smoothly toward their common goals.”³ For instance, the manager who never loses his or her cool and is known for the ability to calm a heated exchange or achieve a consensus among sharply divided parties is using emotional intelligence.

Increasing your self-awareness is an important aspect of developing emotional intelligence. With emotional intelligence, supervisors are able to position themselves and their employees in situations that reduce negative emotional responses and increase the likelihood of positive interactions. Chapter 15 discusses self-awareness, emotional intelligence, and personal discovery.

emotional intelligence

the ability to manage feelings so they are expressed appropriately and effectively, enabling people to work together smoothly toward common goals

They
Said It
Best

Emotional intelligence seems to be largely learned, and it continues to develop as we go through life and learn from our experiences—

—Daniel Goleman

Source: Goleman, Working with Emotional Intelligence, 7.

Administrative Skills

Supervisors spend a lot of time organizing, scheduling, planning, preparing and managing budgets, conducting performance appraisals, monitoring quality and key indicators, and processing paperwork or online forms. All these activities require an understanding of basic business functions and the related legal issues as well as the ability to execute effectively in each of these areas. Several chapters focus on key administrative skills.

Time Management

Time is valuable to the individual and the organization alike. Supervisors need excellent time management skills, including the ability to say no and manage an ever-changing schedule. The following tips can be useful in time management:

- Remember that an online personal information management (PIM) system, such as *Microsoft® Outlook®* messaging software, facilitates sharing materials and assignments. It is also more efficient and effective than a paper-based system. If you do not have access to a PIM, use a paper-based planner.
- Don't underestimate the value of organization. An organized workspace and files, including electronic files, will save you substantial amounts of time.
- Converting paper-based files to electronic files makes storing information and accessing it quickly much easier.
- Use your PIM to create a realistic “to-do” task list each day. Set priorities, and group like tasks together.
- Try to handle each document only once.
- Read email at set intervals rather than interrupting your work when it arrives. If possible, act on email as soon as you read it and then store it if necessary.
- Streamline tasks. Constantly look for ways to apply the productivity tools in your software or to do tasks more efficiently.
- Tackle your toughest assignments when you are freshest.



© Stephen Lubars/Shutterstock.com

A PIM enables you to share and sync your calendar, contacts, tasks, and notes easily with your work unit or team.

- When you slow down or stall on a task, take a break or switch to something else. Even a short break can help you regain your momentum.
- Find graceful ways to control interruptions. For example, if you're working and a coworker stops by to chat, talk for a few minutes and then politely excuse yourself, explaining you have an assignment to do. Offer to continue the conversation later.

Managing Change

Change is a constant in business and nonprofit organizations, and it occurs at every level of an organization. Technology plays a major role in accelerating the pace of change. Change that affects an entire organization is often called **transformational change**. The following are common examples of transformational change:

- Acquiring or being acquired by another organization
- Expanding from a local to a regional, national, or international organization
- A new or current executive team decides to make a major change in the company's vision or management, such as moving from a hierarchical approach to a participative style of management or to extensive use of teams.

John Kotter: Leadership and Change

Transformational change is usually led by visionary senior leaders. John Kotter, an international expert on leadership and change, notes that the failure rate in organizations that try to make transformational change is very high. Kotter says that four sets of obstacles typically keep change from succeeding: structures, skills, supervisors, and systems.

Four sets of obstacles typically keep change from succeeding: structures, skills, supervisors, and systems.

In an interview with John Kotter he explains, "In many organizations, silos and fragments in authority and resources can make it difficult to take actions that support the change effort. [Silos are departments or work units that function independently and communicate little.] In others, workers may lack the skills necessary to carry out the new vision.... In some cases, supervisors are unenthusiastic or fearful of change, and actively work to undermine it. And oftentimes, the systems an organization has in place—say, for performance evaluation or sales—are subjective or outdated."⁴

Supervisors have a critical role in helping to implement major changes in an organization. Supervisors must also be able to work with employees they supervise in implementing changes in their area that are necessary for the area's success.

transformational change
change that affects an entire organization

Kurt Lewin: Stages of Change

Organizations frequently turn to a system or model for implementing change. In the early 1950s, social psychologist Kurt Lewin developed a three-step system for changing people's behavior, skills, and attitudes that organizations still use today:

1. *Unfreezing* usually involves reducing the forces that are maintaining things the way they are. Organizations sometimes accomplish this step by introducing information that shows discrepancies between desired and actual performance.
2. *Moving* is the change process in which employees learn new, desirable behaviors, values, and attitudes.
3. *Refreezing* makes the desired performance the permanent way of doing things. It often takes place through reinforcement and support for the new behavior.⁵

Supervisors can play an important role in helping employees accept change. They should recognize that change, especially technological change, is not easy. Employees often fear change because it is outside their control and has unknown consequences. Coaching and training are key elements in helping employees adapt to change.

Trends Impacting Supervisors

Trends in the workforce, business, and society frequently have a profound effect on organizations and supervisors. One trend described earlier is the increasing tendency of businesses to reduce the numbers of middle managers and to empower and expect greater leadership from first-line managers. Three other prominent trends impacting today's business, governmental, and nonprofit organizations are an increasingly diverse workforce, globalization, and changing technology.

Diverse Workforce

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) has documented the increasing diversity of the U.S. workforce over time. It reports that "compared with the labor force of the past decades, today's labor force is older, more racially and ethnically diverse, and composed of more women."⁶ Here are two examples of this change:

- In 1990, 11.9 percent of the civilian workforce was age 55 or older. By 2010, that share had nearly doubled to 19.5 percent. And by 2020, the BLS predicts that these older workers will compose 25.2 percent, or more than a quarter, of the workforce.⁷
- The BLS projects that by 2020, Hispanics, blacks, Asians, and members of other traditional minority groups will make up nearly 40 percent of the civilian workforce.⁸



Supervisors need to recognize, respect, and work with people as unique individuals.

© iStockphoto.com

Many people think of diversity strictly in terms of race, gender, and ethnicity. However, our definition is much broader, with a wide range of variables. These variables include attitudes, perspectives, opinions, gender, age, race, ethnic background, language skills, education, work experience, socioeconomic status, religion, sexual orientation, disabilities, and alternative family structures (for example, single parents or caregivers for children and parents).

Age diversity provides an example of how workforce diversity can affect supervisors. The increasing proportion of older workers reflects the aging baby-boomer generation. Many boomers are staying on the job longer than they anticipated, while others are reentering the job market and ultimately working side by side with the Generation X and Y populations. Figure 3.1 shows a breakdown of these generations by birth years. Except for baby boomers, the span of birth years differs slightly according to different sources. These groups differ in more than just age or physical appearance. For example, their work ethic may be different, their perceptions of quality may vary, and the ways they learn and work often are not the same. Supervisors need to be aware of such differences in training, inspiring, motivating, and retaining employees, in order to facilitate their working together.

As you can see, the increased diversity of our workforce creates opportunities and challenges for supervisors. Successful organizations have learned how to integrate diversity into their corporate culture by leveraging individual strengths and talents to develop a more innovative, creative, and effective workforce.

FIGURE 3.1

What generation are you, and how does it impact your work life?

Generation	Birth Years
Baby Boomers	1946 - 1964
Generation X	1965 - 1980
Generation Y (Millennials)	1981 - 2000

Source: Based on discussions in Linda G. Kildewick, "Whose Generation Is It, Anyway?" *Small Business Times* (February 2, 2008), <http://www.biztimes.com/news/2008/2/8/whose-generation-is-it-anyway>, accessed on October 16, 2011; and Anne Houlahan, "The New Meeting Pot: How to Effectively Lead Different Generations in the Workplace," *Supervision* 66 (September 2007): 10-11.

Globalization

The increasingly global nature of the world economy has changed the way many organizations do business. Many companies have had to seek new and wider markets for their goods and services just to survive. Globalization affects nearly every industry and small organizations as well as large ones.

One outcome of globalization has been a change in how and where work gets done. **Outsourcing** is the use of outside organizations to complete work that was previously done internally. **Off-shoring** is the outsourcing of business

outsourcing the use of outside organizations to complete work that was previously done internally

off-shoring the outsourcing of business activities and processes to foreign countries



© Patrick J. Apple Images

Outsourcing creates opportunities for employees to monitor the performance of contractors or to work with them in external teams. Supervisors must assist employees in serving customers in different cultures and nations.

activities and processes to foreign countries. Both activities have increased as companies contract different aspects of their operations to outside firms to streamline costs, remain competitive, improve services, and increase profitability.

Business functions such as manufacturing, payroll processing, bookkeeping, technology services, human resources management, supply chain management, and marketing and public relations are just a few of many functions being outsourced. In some instances, companies may outsource certain business functions to competitors. This trend is not limited to private industry. Federal, state, and local governments also contract out certain functions to outside vendors.

Globalization creates both challenges and opportunities for supervisors. An obvious challenge is the difficulties created when outsourcing results in staff reductions. Managing the work of contractors remotely is another; implementing changes to cut costs is a third. However, outsourcing may result in the creation of new jobs as employees shift from performing certain tasks to monitoring the work of the contractors hired to do them. External teams may also assist employees in better serving customers in different cultures and nations.

Technology

Technology is changing constantly, rapidly, and in major ways. This key trend makes technology a permanent and important part of every supervisor's job. The "Leveraging Technology" feature on page 53 lists responsibilities of supervisors in managing technology, which fall generally into three categories:

- Providing technology for employees to do their work and to improve working conditions for them within budgetary constraints
- Keeping employees informed about company policies and trained on new and changing technologies
- Monitoring employee use

The tips on page 55 provide an overview of technology issues affecting supervisors. Future chapters will discuss handling flexible scheduling and telecommuting, building virtual teams, managing meetings electronically, enhancing productivity, and a variety of other technology topics.



Knowledge to
ACTION

The justification many companies give for off-shoring is that it increases productivity and decreases costs. Assume you are a manager in a company that wants to increase productivity without off-shoring. What are some things that you think might help to increase productivity with current staffing levels?