

SUPERVISORY ROLES, FUNCTIONS, AND SKILLS (18-1)

EO 1. **MANAGEMENT** means *either* the accomplishing of goals through others *or* the group of people who accomplish goals through others, ie, who direct an organization.

SUPERVISION involves directing the activities of others and coordinating their efforts to accomplish the objectives or goals of a unit or department.

A **SUPERVISOR** is a manager with authority over and responsibility for the actions of clerical and/or technical employees. The scope of a supervisory job is usually broader in small organizations because small firms often lack highly specialized division of tasks and often do not have specialized staff units.

EO 2. **THE FOUR SUPERVISORY (or management) FUNCTIONS:**

1. **Planning**--involves developing courses of action to achieve organizational objectives. *Examples:* setting subordinates' goals, preparing budgets, and scheduling shipments.
2. **Organizing**--involves coordinating activities and resources to achieve organizational goals. It requires both creating organizational structure and allocating organizational resources. *Examples:* notifying employees of job changes and determining the appropriate personnel for a task.
3. **Directing**--involves instructing subordinates. *Examples:* teaching an underwriter to use a software program, explaining workflow procedures to new employees, and holding weekly meetings.
4. **Controlling**--involves setting standards, monitoring progress, evaluating results, and taking corrective action. *Examples:* auditing claims files and reviewing expense accounts.

A supervisor may perform nonsupervisory tasks in addition to his supervisory functions. **Nonsupervisory tasks** (aka **technical tasks**) are those the supervisor does himself rather than delegating to others.

EO 3. **THE SEVEN SUPERVISORY (or management) SKILLS:**

1. **Communicating**--is the process of receiving, processing, and transmitting information to create understanding between two parties.
2. **Listening**--involves making an effort to hear and to understand another's message. [See 18-7.]
3. **Counseling**--helps subordinates make decisions about their career plans and personal issues.
4. **Motivating**--encourages employees to perform by appealing to their personal needs. [See 18-3.]
5. **Leading**--achieves results by developing the loyalty and confidence of others. [See 18-4.]
6. **Decision making**--is the process of choosing one course of action from a group of alternatives.
7. **Training**--teaches others to perform their tasks.

EO 4. **A SUPERVISOR BECOMES PROFICIENT BY**

1. **acquiring knowledge**--A supervisor should understand the factual information and company policies relevant to his unit. *Example:* A supervisor may need to understand unit productivity indices, relevant state insurance laws and regulations, and personnel rules.
2. **developing skills**--A **skill** is the ability to use knowledge as an expert. A supervisor improves his skills through practice. [Supervisory skills were defined in EO 3.]
3. **developing sensitivity to employee attitudes and performances**--A supervisor must be attuned to employees' **attitudes** (feelings and emotions) and **performances** (job results) in order to distinguish among attitudes that hinder performance (such as rudeness to clients), attitudes that do not affect performance (such as scheduling preferences in a flexible hours plan), *and* attitudes that enhance performance (such as taking pride in product or service excellence).

EO 5. **THREE MANAGEMENT EXPECTATIONS OF SUPERVISORS:**

1. **Effective unit performance**--Management expects effective performance within the firm's general guidelines. Also, each unit is held to a certain level of **productivity** (measured as the ratio of production of outputs to consumption of inputs) with specified, acceptable quality levels.

Management also expects each unit to contribute to the firm's profitability by making cost/benefit comparisons or by showing a commitment to control costs.

2. **Effective human resource management**--A supervisor recruits and hires qualified applicants; trains new employees; informs employees of their duties, authority, and performance requirements; and monitors employees' performances.
3. **Mastery of the language of management**--To effectively communicate with other managers, a supervisor must learn the vocabulary nuances used by managers.
In particular, confusion arises regarding use of the terms line and staff. [*See below.*]

*[**Line tasks** constitute part of the firm's major operations.*

The majority of the firm's employees work in line departments supported by smaller, non-line units.

In an insurance company, line divisions include underwriting, claims, and marketing.

In an insurance agency, line tasks are performed by the sales and customer service personnel.

Staff tasks support line tasks.

In an insurance company, staff divisions include human resources, actuarial, mail room, accounting, and legal departments.

In an insurance agency, staff tasks are usually done by managers.]

*[**Line authority** involves a direct reporting relationship between bosses and their subordinates.*

***Staff authority** refers to the relationship between staff and other units--ie, the lack of line authority.*

***Functional authority** is the type of staff authority that gives a staff person the right to impose recommendations on others. Functional authority is absolute, but limited to a narrowly defined area of expertise.*

***Example:** An insurer's legal department may have authority over the wording of policy forms.]*

EO 6. **THE FIVE MANAGEMENT TOOLS TO COMMUNICATE EXPECTATIONS:**

1. **Objectives**--state the goals or desired results of each person, unit, or organization.
A supervisor's objectives support major organizational objectives such as revenue, customer service, or expense control. **Useful objectives are SMART:** specific, measurable, attainable, recorded or written, *and* time-bounded.
2. **Position descriptions**--state the duties, responsibilities, and authority of, and the qualifications for, specific jobs.
3. **Authority**--delegates to a supervisor the right to direct activities and employees.
4. **Accountability**--imposes responsibility for one's own results and the results of one's subordinates.
5. **Written guidelines**--include **policies** (general guidelines for handling routine matters) and **procedures** (specific steps for handling routine matters).
Practices are repeated, usual, or customary ways of doing things.

EO 7. **FOUR EMPLOYEE EXPECTATIONS OF SUPERVISORS:**

1. **Competency**--is the ability to direct the unit effectively.
Employees expect competency in planning, problem identification, and decision making.
2. **Fairness**--results in impartiality such as in allocating work assignments.
3. **Communication skill**--is the ability to convey information accurately between subordinates and higher managers.
4. **A helping attitude**--enhances employees' job satisfaction and helps them reach career goals.

EO 8. **THE ROLE OF THE SUPERVISOR AS 'THE PERSON IN THE MIDDLE'**--Supervisors have the unique role of directly supervising nonmanagerial employees. As the bridge between managers and employees, supervisors must balance and communicate both higher manager's concerns about performances and productivity and employees' concerns about job conditions and fairness.