

Topic 6 Section 5

Managing Personnel

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Managing Personnel

The supervisor on a construction site takes on a management role in his/her interaction with personnel working on the site. In managing site personnel, the supervisor's main aim is to work with other people to achieve the company's goals. For example, if the goal is to complete a contract to upgrade a section of road, then the supervisor's job is to manage the day to day running of the job so that the work is completed safely, on time, within budget and according to the specifications and contract conditions.

The supervisor's role in managing personnel will require him/her to perform four main functions:

- Planning
- Organising
- Leading
- Controlling



The following paragraphs describe the general kinds of functions that are performed under each of these headings. The table describes how the four management functions relate to each of the main supervisory designations on a construction site.

Supervisory Function	Applicability to:		
	Leading Hand/ Ganger	Foreman	Project Supervisor
Planning	Plan construction activity, e.g. install culverts 1–4	Plan a group of construction activities, e.g. install all drainage works on site	Plan all stages of the project e.g. clearing, earthworks, drainage, paving, bitumen seal
Organising	Carry out organising function for a defined construction activity	Carry out organising function for a group of construction activities	Carry out organising function for whole project
Leading	Direct and co-ordinate people in performing a defined construction activity	Direct and co-ordinate people in performing a group of construction activities	Direct and co-ordinate people in all stages of the project
Controlling	Monitor performance and make corrections applicable to a defined construction activity	Monitor performance and make corrections applicable to a group of construction activities	Monitor performance and make corrections applicable to the project as a whole

Planning

The planning function involves:

- defining goals and job outcomes
- establishing clear strategies to achieve them
- develop plans to co-ordinate all required skills and activities, so that these strategies can be put in place.

(See also previous section in this topic, ‘Planning for Productivity’).

Organising

The organising function involves:

- co-ordinating personnel, materials, plant and other resources, so that work can progress smoothly and efficiently
- developing suitable organisational structures, so that each person knows to whom they are responsible and their role in the overall organisation.

Leading

The function of leading involves:

- directing people in their work activities
- good communication skills
- motivating workers, resolving conflict and setting an example.

(See also Topic 9, Constructive Relationships).

Controlling

Controlling is a requirement that applies no matter how good a person's planning, organising and leadership skills are. There will always be unexpected problems, breakdowns or delays.

The 'controlling' function therefore involves:

- taking control of situations
- getting the job back on track
- monitoring performance
- comparing it against desired or expected results
- making corrections as necessary.

People Management Skills

Supervisors require a range of skills to successfully manage a project. These skills may include technical skills, people skills and decision-making skills. In this section, we are concerned with personnel management, and the types of people skills that are important would include:

- Communication skills
- Leadership and motivational skills
- Problem-solving skills
- Conflict management skills
- Interpersonal skills.

An additional, important point is the effects of the supervisor's own behaviour on people in the workplace and from outside organisations. This aspect was mentioned in Section 3 under Industrial Relations; it is covered in more detail in Topic 8 (Constructive Relationships) in this training series.

Communication

Good communication skills are vital to a supervisor and Topic 7 contains a detailed description of the communication skills that are necessary on a construction site. In summary, these skills are:

- The ability to communicate effectively face-to-face, in a group situation or using a telephone or two-way radio. These skills also include active listening and the use of techniques to overcome communication barriers
- The ability to communicate effectively in a written form using letters, memos or emails

Leadership and Motivational Skills

Supervisors must take on a leadership role and motivate workers so that they can carry out their work effectively. As a leader, the supervisor must:

- set goals and develop a vision or long-term plan
- make jobs and tasks more meaningful
- communicate effectively and give feedback
- develop a teamwork approach to the job
- provide support and help for workers

The kind of supervisory climate that promotes motivation is described in Section 2 of this topic and leadership skills are dealt with in more detail in Topic 10.

Problem Solving

There are a number of steps that can be used to take a systematic approach to problem solving. This process is suited to decision making by workgroups or teams but could also be used by an individual. The six steps are:

1. Define the problem
2. Analyse the problem
3. Identify possible solutions
4. Select the best option
5. Implement the decision
6. Review

Define the Problem

The first step is to define the problem, being careful to look past the more obvious symptoms to determine the cause. Keep asking 'Why' to get to the root cause of the problem. It is also important to determine whether there is one root cause or several. For example, if an item of machinery is constantly breaking down, then this can delay other work and create a number of secondary problems. However, if the real cause of the problem is lack of

maintenance on the machine, then it is important that this is identified clearly so that time and effort is not directed towards addressing the symptoms without fixing the cause of the problem.

Analyse the Problem

To analyse the problem, gather all of the facts and data necessary to understand the full extent of the problem. In the example used previously, this might include finding out how often the breakdowns occurred, where and when they occurred, who was operating the machinery and what work they were doing at the time. With these facts it may be possible to identify the true cause and extent of the problem.

Identify Possible Solutions

Having identified the cause, or causes, of the problem, the next step is to identify one or more possible solutions. Sometimes the solution to the problem may be found using analytical skills but in other cases it may need a more creative approach. If a workgroup is involved in problem solving then a brainstorming technique may be used to generate a large number of ideas. In the example used, some possible solutions could be:

- employ a person to carry out regular maintenance on machinery
- purchase newer, more reliable machinery
- sub contract the work and sell the unreliable machinery

Select the Best Option

The next step is to select the best option from the solutions that have been identified. The best option must be practical and achievable and must also take into account the following aspects:

- safety
- cost effectiveness
- efficiency
- company policies

This decision will also take into consideration other relevant factors such as risk and time e.g. if the job has to be finished within a week then the option of buying new machinery may not be viable within that time span.

Implement the Decision

Once the best option has been selected and agreed upon, then the next step is to implement the decision. In some cases, this may result in other changes and could affect the work schedule. This might then require support from other supervisors or the Project Manager and approval for expenditure.

Review

The final step in the procedure is to check the progress or outcomes of the implementation to see if the solution that was applied has been effective in achieving the desired results. If not, then adjustments or modifications may have to be made. The review is also useful in improving the effectiveness the problem solving procedure. For example, the solution to the problem may have had unintended side effects and may have created more problems.

Conflict Management Skills

Conflict occurs when two people or groups of people have different goals or needs and there is a disagreement or clash between them in trying to satisfy these goals or needs. Conflict is an inevitable part of life and at times it will occur on the job site. While it may be difficult, and often impossible, to eliminate the causes of the conflict, the situation must be managed so that it does not escalate to the point where it affects normal working relationships and cause problems at the work site. An important part of a supervisor's role is to deal with conflict in a firm and decisive manner so that a harmonious work place is maintained. This may mean making hard or unpopular decisions at times.

The level of conflict can range in intensity between mild discomfort and, at worst, a state of crisis but there are situations where conflict can have a positive effect. Conflict can sometimes trigger innovative thinking to resolve a disagreement that can bring about a better result for both parties. The process of conflict management has some similarities with problem solving in that it involves following a number of logical steps in gaining an understanding of the cause of the conflict and then looking for a satisfactory solution.

Define the Problem

It is important to clearly identify the true cause of the problem. Sometimes conflict between two people may seem to arise over a trivial incident however there may be other underlying issues that have been 'bubbling away' for a long period of time. The incident may be a symptom of these deeper issues and in order to resolve the real problem it may be necessary to identify these underlying issues and deal with them. For example, external factors such as family or business affairs may be involved.

Analyse the Problem

Once the problem has been identified, the next step is get the facts and find out the 'how', 'why', 'when', 'where' and 'what' details of the situation. In trying to resolve a conflict in the workplace, the supervisor should always try to be fair and unbiased. He/she should be careful also not to jump to conclusions and should take the time to gather all of the background information and listen to both sides of the story.

Identify Possible Solutions

If conflict arises between two people over an incident where one person is clearly in the wrong, then finding a solution to the problem may not be too difficult. However, in many cases the situation is more complex and both parties may feel that they are right and that the

other party is wrong or is being unreasonable. The supervisor may then need to negotiate an agreement where one or both parties have to compromise their position and make concessions to reach a satisfactory solution. Sometimes, even giving the parties the opportunity to air a grievance can, of itself, clear the air and contribute towards a resolution.

Select the Best Option

The best solution will be a ‘win-win’ situation where both parties will be satisfied with the outcome. It is not always possible to achieve this and so the supervisor may have to weigh up a number of different options in trying to balance the need for productivity while maintaining harmony in the workplace. It is best to avoid unproductive strategies such as confrontation, aggression, avoiding the issue or placing blame unfairly.

Implement the Decision

Once the decision has been made regarding the best course of action to take, then the supervisor should inform the parties that are in conflict and seek their agreement and co-operation in resolving the issue. The supervisor must be assertive in dealing with the situation so that both parties are aware that they have a responsibility to cooperate in resolving the problem, in a satisfactory manner, as soon as possible. At all stages in handling conflict, and especially when implementing solutions, the supervisor must be guided by the company’s human relations policies and procedures. It is also important to seek clarification if the meaning or intent of any clause in a written policy document is unclear.

Review

The supervisor should monitor the results of efforts to resolve conflict in the workplace to make sure that the desired outcome is achieved. If a satisfactory resolution is not reached then other strategies or options may have to be used to fix the problem.

Dispute Resolution

Sometimes conflicts arise out of, or in connection with, a contract between two parties and this dispute may have to be handled in a formal manner. In this case the supervisor must become familiar with the conditions of the contract and make sure that all matters are dealt with strictly in accordance with these conditions.

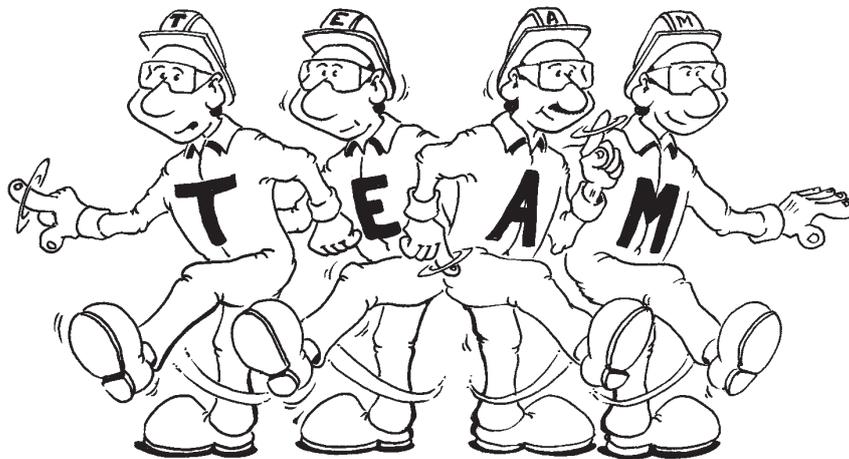
The first step may involve giving notice of the dispute, in writing, to the other party and to the person named as Superintendent of the contract. This notice should be delivered by hand or by certified mail and should identify the cause of the dispute and outline the details. The next step is to get both parties together in the presence of the Superintendent to try resolve the dispute. If the dispute cannot be resolved satisfactorily at this meeting and no agreement can be reached on methods of resolving the dispute by other means then the dispute may be referred to arbitration or litigation.

Resolving disputes by legal means is costly in terms of money and also in terms of time and effort and should be avoided if at all possible. Supervisors should try to resolve issues before they escalate to the dispute proceedings stage. If this is not possible, then the supervisor should

always ensure that he/she acts in accordance with contract conditions and should seek the advice and assistance of senior company officers or legal advisers who have more experience in these matters.

Group Conflict

Conflict within groups or between groups can be more difficult to manage because of the complex relationships that may exist within or between the groups. The ability to manage group conflict is a key skill for a supervisor. One of the best ways to address this type of conflict in the workplace is to encourage a teamwork approach and get the people involved to focus on a common goal. A good example of this is the way that people forget their differences and work well together in times of emergency such as flood, bushfire or other natural disaster.



Groupthink

Groupthink is a type of behaviour that has been observed in certain situations and represents a specialised kind of within-group conflict. Its origins may relate to prejudice against one member of the group, or a desire to prove that person wrong.

Groupthink occurs when groups are highly cohesive and are under considerable pressure to make a quality decision. Groups experiencing groupthink do not consider all alternatives and desire unanimity at the expense of quality decisions.

As a decision-making process, it may lead to spectacularly unsuccessful results. In the early 1960s, the involvement of the United States government in the Bay of Pigs incident in Cuba became well-known as an example of groupthink.

Some negative outcomes of groupthink include failures to:

- Examining enough alternatives
- Accept analysis or criticism of ideas
- Seek expert opinion where it is required
- Use sufficient sources when gathering information
- Adopt contingency plans.

Some symptoms of groupthink include:

- An illusion of invulnerability
- Rationalising poor decisions
- Believing in the group's morality
- Sharing stereotypes which guide the decision
- Exercising direct pressure on others
- Failure to express one's true feelings
- Maintaining an illusion of unanimity
- Using mind guards to protect the group from negative information.

Some solutions for overcoming groupthink include:

- Using a policy-forming group which reports to the larger group
- Ensuring leaders adopt an impartial position
- Using different policy groups for different tasks
- Dividing into groups to discuss differences
- Discussing within sub-groups and reporting back
- Using outside experts
- Using a 'Devil's advocate' to question the group's ideas
- Holding a 'second-chance' meeting to provide one last opportunity to choose another course of action.

Recruitment Skills

One of the more important skills that a supervisor needs to apply is in the selection and engagement of labour for the job. Since the efficiency of the work team depends to a large extent on the quality of the people employed, the supervisor must be careful and critical in his/her selection.

Points to be remembered in engaging and transferring labour include:

- Where relevant, preference clauses of industrial awards must always be observed when engaging people or transferring them from one class of work to another.
- Local people should be employed wherever it is practical and consistent with efficiency.
- Transferring workers from job to job enables the company to retain capable employees and provides continuity of employment for them. However consideration should be given to the costs involved and the availability of suitable labour in the vicinity of the new job. Plant operators are often transferred with their machines.
- The local Centrelink office may be a source of skilled or unskilled workers. Newspaper advertisements stating the type of work, location of work and the relevant Award are also useful for obtaining personnel.

- The job supervisor is responsible for ensuring that the methods of engaging labour are in line with company recruitment policies, and are free from favouritism and bias.
- Special attention must be given to owner-drivers and only bonafide owner-drivers should be engaged. No truck owned by a foreman or ganger, or in which the foreman or ganger has a direct or indirect financial interest is to be hired. Sub-contract loading and carting should always be considered as an economic alternative.
- It is the supervisor's duty to ensure that the operator holds a current endorsed licence and certificate of competency for the particular machine to be operated.

All new employees must be told when they are engaged that it is a condition of their employment that they comply with all safety regulations; in particular those concerned with wearing of personal protective equipment (PPE). Any other conditions of employment should also be brought to the attention of job applicants.

Section 5 – Assessment Activities

For information on how these assessment activities may be used as part of the learning process, see the section on ‘Assessment’ in the ‘Topic Descriptor’ section at the front of this topic.

Theory Questions

The following questions allow you to assess your progress in understanding the material presented in Section 5. The questions may be of any of the following types:

- multiple choice (identify correct answer or answers)
- multiple choice (identify incorrect answer or answers)
- fill in the gaps in a sentence or statement
- identify a sentence or statement as TRUE or FALSE
- write a few sentences or a short paragraph.

Answers to the question are shown in the separate ‘Answer’ section.

Question 1

What are the four main functions of a supervisor when managing personnel on a construction site? (Hint: Use the mnemonic POLC).

Question 2

Supervisors require a range of skills to successfully manage a project. Name three people-management skills that a supervisor should develop.

Question 3

Problem solving can be approached using the 6-step method described in the text. Arrange the following steps into the correct order.

- Select the best option
- Identify possible solutions
- Review
- Analyse the problem
- Define the problem
- Implement the decision

Question 4

When selecting the best solution for the identified problem, what four aspects must be taken in to consideration?

Question 5

Groupthink is a type of behaviour that has been observed in certain situations and represents a specialised kind of within-group conflict. List four symptoms of 'groupthink'.

Question 6

Give four examples of solutions for overcoming 'groupthink'.

Practical Exercises

Note: The following have been designed as a group-discussion exercises.

Practical Exercise 1

You are the foreman of an earthworks gang on a construction site, and you have noticed that that one worker is often late. You question the worker, who says that the reason is that his wife has been ill for a long time and he is trying to get his primary-school-aged children to a relative's house before starting work in the morning.

You talk to the project supervisor about the problem and he advises you to use a systematic problem-solving approach to resolve the issue. This approach involves:

1. Define the problem
2. Analyse the problem
3. Identify possible solutions
4. Select the best option
5. Implement the decision
6. Review

What recommendations for solving the problem would you give to the project supervisor?

Practical Exercise 2

The project supervisor on a large-scale construction project has asked you to find two more workers for the drainage gang. He says you should employ local people who are also qualified tradespeople if possible, but places no other restrictions on the selection process.

What steps do you follow in order to recruit the new employees?