



Unit 1

Role and Responsibilities of a Supervisor

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ✓ Clarify the scope and nature of a supervisory position.
- ✓ Learn some ways to deal with the challenges of the role

Unit 1

Role and Responsibilities of a Supervisor

Adjusting to Your Role

A Survival Guide

Often, new supervisors feel that they're thrown into the deep end of a pool with no idea of what to do except tread water. This workshop is an excellent beginning to your new role and will help you to determine what you need to do, whether you are receiving support and guidance from your manager or not.

There are five keys to surviving life as a supervisor. Some of these come from Michael Watkins' bestselling book for new leaders, called *The First 90 Days: Critical Success Strategies for New Leaders at All Levels*.

Be a learner.

This is not the time to be a superhero and pretend that you know everything. Remember that there is no such thing as a dumb question. Ask others for advice, including your own supervisor, your colleagues, and experts in the area. Meet your employees and find out what's going well, and where things are not working. Be open to their insight, experience, and wisdom.

Refresh your network.

The network you had before you had this job has changed, even if you are now a supervisor within the same company. You'll need to establish new relationships, ask for introductions, or introduce yourself. You'll need to learn about the culture of the organization at the level you are now at, which is different than it was as part of the front line. You'll also need to connect to the people who can help you with your new work.

Leverage a mentor.

Find someone that you can trust for advice and guidance. A seasoned supervisor is ideal, but anyone that you know and trust (and that is knowledgeable) can help you to develop your skills as a leader, engage with your new team, and help you find your way. Remember to thank your mentor sincerely.

Set limits.

Learn to say no, to plan, to prioritize, and to manage your time and resources. As a new supervisor you may want to please everyone or demonstrate your worth, but saying yes to everything can quickly wear you out.

Let go.

When we are achieving our goals and life is going where we want, we sometimes encounter people who want to hold us back. Your old manager may want you to continue to work on your previous job while your previous co-workers may want you to continue to be a part of the same group. If you are now supervising co-workers, you can expect challenges to your authority. Be realistic about what you can and cannot do. Make a conscious decision to move on from your former position and embrace the new one while you set clear expectations, as well as limits and boundaries.

Pre-Assignment Review

As a supervisor, are you about the same age as the people you supervise, or are you a lot older or younger?

How many years do you have with the company compared to the people you supervise?

Were you promoted from the ranks because you are strong technically, or because of leadership skills, or a combination of both?

What is your highest level of education?

How does that compare to other supervisors you now work with?

With the people you supervise?

With members of the management team you report to?

Making the Transition

What Will Change?

Usually people are promoted because they are good at doing something. They might have been doing something very well for a long time, but at the time they start a new position – that supervisor’s role – they have to learn a whole bunch of new things. What are the biggest differences between being a front-line employee and being a supervisor?

Several things may change, but two things will almost certainly be different for a supervisor.

- The work will be different. There will be more administrative work, more supervising, and more managing, with less involvement with the actual work of the group.
- The responsibilities will increase. As a supervisor you are responsible for the work of others, not just your own output.

Dealing with Older Employees

Treat older employees as individuals, respect their skills, and give them opportunities to shine, but refuse to be bullied into accepting behavior that isn’t right, such as disregarding safety. Employees who are about to retire have a lot of valuable information to share if they are encouraged, so ask for their input. Research tells us they are just as interested and capable of learning as younger employees, providing they have the opportunity and don’t feel threatened.

Organizations who at one time didn’t want to spend training dollars on older employees because of a fear they wouldn’t learn (or that they would learn, but leave and take that expensive knowledge with them), realize that with the impending skills shortage they can’t afford to leave one segment of the workforce out of the loop when it comes to training.

Dealing with Friends Who You Now Supervise

Everyone needs friends, and friendships in the workplace can survive providing there are guidelines. Most of the supervisors who have been successful maintaining their friendships say they talked it over with their friend and made an agreement to only talk work at work, never during their social time together. Other guidelines include going to parties and social events but leaving earlier than the others, and never getting intoxicated with the people they supervise.

Dealing with Unions

Know the union collective agreement (contract) inside out. Keep the lines of communication open with both union stewards and all employees so everyone hears the same message: you want to work with them for the benefit of everyone. Establish a relationship with the union steward but don't rely on them to get your message out to the employees.

Settle problems at the lowest level possible, hopefully before they become official grievances. Organizations don't usually like supervisors whose behavior leads to a great number of grievances. On the other hand, you don't want to be seen as a pushover, so your success lies in knowing the contract and conducting yourself within the terms of that contract. If you are new and don't know the contract, find someone who will explain it to you, and ask questions.

The Puzzle Exercise

Autocratic Leader

You are the supervisor for a new group of people who are to put as many pieces of a puzzle together as possible in 15 minutes. You will give them their instructions precisely and proceed to assign a task to each individual. Example: Jon will do the edges, Charlie's task will be to put the blue sky together, while Sally is to work on the buildings.

You will be a disciplinarian. Participants will not be allowed to talk because they are working. They don't get to see the cover of the puzzle box. They take their instructions from you. They don't need to see the box.

You are there to monitor, not to pitch in and work. You probably alternate between hovering over them and drifting off to leave them on their own.

You choose an autocratic style of supervising, frequently criticizing, but never praising, and certainly never happy with what they've accomplished while you've left them on their own.

When the 15 minutes are up, your team will put the puzzle back in the box and move on to the next supervisor. You will greet the new team that is just arriving.

Participative Leader

You are the supervisor for a new group of people who are to put as many pieces of a puzzle together as possible in 15 minutes. You will give them the general scope of the project, but then invite them to tell you what they want to do. Example: “Charlie, what are you interested in working on?”

You will be a supportive leader, creating a warm and supportive atmosphere of everybody working together. You all talk and laugh, and you make suggestions when appropriate. You show them the cover of the puzzle and keep it there for them to see at all times. You invite suggestions from the team.

You are there as team leader. As such, you pitch in and work right along with the group. You choose a supportive style of supervising, frequently praising the team on their efforts, and encouraging them to continue the good work.

When the 15 minutes are up, your team will put the puzzle back in the box and move on to the next supervisor. You will greet the new team that is just arriving.

A Supervisor’s Responsibilities

Regardless of what industry you work in, there are some fundamental responsibilities to management, to your team, and to yourself, that you must be prepared for.

What are my responsibilities to management?

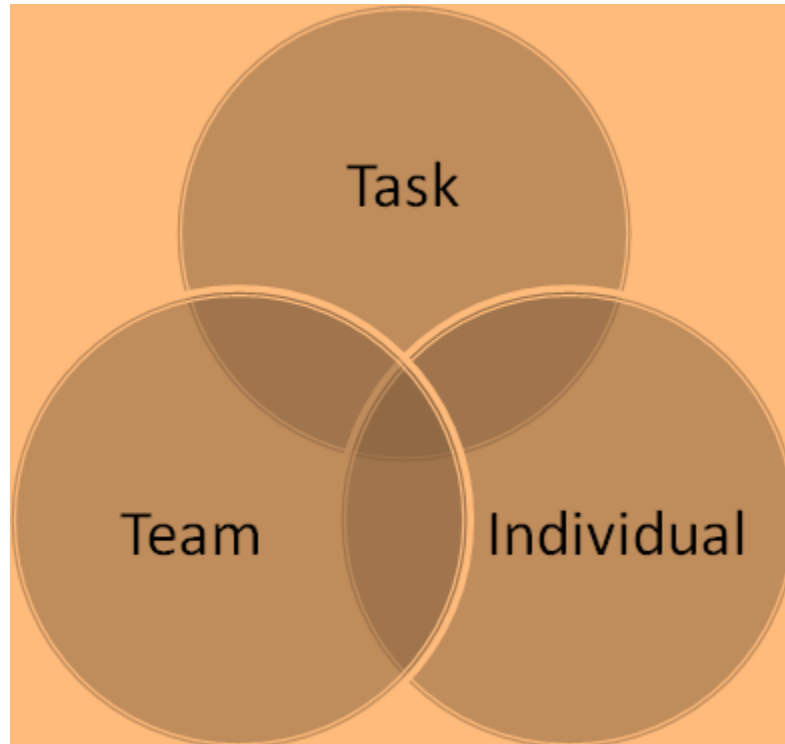
What are my responsibilities to my workgroup?

What are my responsibilities to myself?

Action-Centered Leadership

The Action-Centered Leadership Model

We just explored how a supervisor has responsibilities to themselves, management, and their team. How do you balance all of these priorities, especially when they conflict? The action-centered leadership model developed by John Adair can help. This model shows how leadership is a balancing act of individuals, their groups, and the work to be done.



Let's look at each piece individually.

Individual

As a leader, you are responsible for helping each person grow and to be the best that they can be. This involves identifying the strengths and weaknesses of each person and understanding what their style in various tasks is. It also involves basic performance management, such as ensuring that they understand expectations, setting objectives, and providing feedback. Adair also encourages managers to help their team members become self-leaders who are rewarded with additional responsibilities and more complex roles.

Team

As a leader, you are also responsible for various groups. These may be defined teams or simply informal groups within the organization. (The organization itself can also be considered a group.) Part of your responsibility here is basic performance management. As with individuals, this involves outlining expectations, settings objectives, and providing feedback. It may also include coaching teams through the various stages of development and helping teams establish and follow group norms.

Task

Of course, a leader's role is also to ensure that work gets done on time and within budget. This involves establishing:

- What will the task involve?
- How will it fit into the big picture? Why is the task being done?
- What resources (people, material, and money) will the task be able to use?
- When will the task need to be completed by? What other milestones will the task have?
- Processes, procedures, and plans
- Reviewing and revising the task as needed

Considering the Possibilities

How is action-centered leadership currently being applied in your organization?

How could it be applied in your organization?

What challenges do you anticipate with this leadership model?

Making Plans

Old Sayings with Staying Power

Plans are what you intend to do in the future. You may have heard these old sayings many times. What do they mean to you?

A stitch in time saves nine.

He who hesitates is lost.

Paralysis by analysis.

All the plans of mice and men oft go awry.

Urgent-Important Matrix

An important part of planning is deciding what is urgent and what is important. This helps you to decide where to put your efforts in order to get things done in a priority order. The Urgent-Important Matrix can help us with this.

Matrix Overview



Breaking Down the Matrix

Let's define what we mean by urgent and important.

- **Urgent:** Failure to complete it by a certain time will conceal or reduce the benefit of doing it permanently.

- **Important:** Needs doing but doesn't have time constraints. The timeline can change.

Both types of tasks have a place. If we are less than adequate planners, we tend to get stuck in firefighting mode or crisis management, where everything is urgent. This would not have happened had the issues been dealt with in a more organized and timely manner. You should rarely be dealing with issues in that top left quadrant, because of the work that you are doing in the second and third quadrant.

Progress and Maintenance Tasks

Another way tasks can be broken down is by progress or maintenance.

- **Progress:** You believe this task may move you towards a position which is fundamentally better than the one you are in now. These usually exist in your head, are rarely urgent, are usually new, and often uncertain.
- **Maintenance:** These tasks do not move you forward, although they may very well keep you from falling back. We do more of these because they are obvious. They are usually urgent (such as month-end financial statements), we are comfortable with them, and they are easily justifiable. These tasks tend to be safe.

We need to do both types of tasks, but how many of each should we be working on? This workshop is, we believe, a progress task. As new supervisors, one danger you face will be that of doing what is safe, rather than what will move you ahead.

Prioritizing Case Study

For each task in the list below, determine whether it is progress or maintenance and urgent or important. Then, prioritize these items.

Task	Time Needed	Maintenance/ Progress	Urgent/ Important	Your Ranking
You want to have lunch with your boss.	45 minutes - 1 hour			
You were instructed the day before to prepare your equipment budget for the next 12 months.	2-3 days			
You open up your e-mail and see 53 messages waiting for you.	1-1½ hours			

Task	Time Needed	Maintenance/ Progress	Urgent/ Important	Your Ranking
You need to talk to one of your staff about the new computer program coming online next month. Staff training has not been scheduled and you are afraid there will be glitches if staff isn't trained properly.	1 hour			
You have a stack of unanswered mail that has been labeled "high priority" that you feel must be attended to urgently.	1½ hours			
You'd like to catch up on the professional journals that are piled on your desk.	1 hour			
You need to prepare a presentation for a meeting slated for next month.	2 hours			
There is a meeting at 2:00 p.m. for all supervisors, but you don't know what it is about.	1 hour			
There is a rumor that there will be some major staff changes coming down the line that could affect your whole department.	Undetermined			
One of the critical employees in your department is out sick today and you must find a replacement if you are to fill an important order for a client.	30 minutes			

The Elements of Planning

Plans are what come out of the planning process. Plans are what you intend to do in the future. Before you can develop plans, however, you must set targets – goals or objectives.

There are four elements of planning:

- **Goals:** Goals or objectives specify future conditions you want to reach.
- **Actions/Strategy:** These are the preferred course to reach those objectives.
- **Resources:** Time, equipment, people, etc. that may put constraints on the action. These have to be considered as you set targets and develop your strategies.
- **Implementation:** Getting it all done, including the assignment and direction of personnel, to carry out the intended action.

Typically, the goals you set for yourself (or that are set for you) will be a part of the company's overall objectives. They will be targets to reach in the near future. They will focus your department's output, quality of workmanship, and allowable expenses.

Since part of what supervisors do is to accomplish work through the efforts of others, they must schedule and prioritize. They must organize resources to make sure plans reach their goals: that people are at work on time, that resources aren't wasted, that machines are in good repair and able to give their expected daily output, and that services will be of the highest quality to ensure customer satisfaction.

Your work targets will be achieved through short-range planning. If you share the goals with your team it will help them set their own goals, and to work toward collective success.

Employees have confidence in someone who is willing and able to plan their work well. Nothing breaks down morale like continual crises. Check your own habits and be honest in recognizing whether you are too busy to worry about anything but today. If you are, chances are you spend your time fighting fires that could be avoided by planning a week or even a month ahead of time.

Employees appreciate some routine and structure as opposed to constant change. They like going home at night fairly certain of what they will do tomorrow and that the tasks will be ones they feel able to do. If you show them you can schedule the work smoothly, employees will feel more like pitching in when the occasional emergency comes up.

Planning to Plan

"Failing to plan is like planning to fail."

Once we begin using a planner, we sometimes have a tendency to only make note of meetings we must attend or other activities that must be completed, without allotting the time required. For example, if you are attending a meeting that will take up two hours of your time, block out that two hours. If you need to travel a half hour each way in order to attend, block travel time too. Then you have a more realistic sense of how much time has been used and how much time you have remaining. As well, tasks that will take more than 30 minutes of your time should be scheduled in your planner.

Setting Goals

Going After Your Dreams

You've got to identify where you want to go, and then decide you are interested enough to take the actions necessary to get there. This is the part many people miss: they have dreams, but don't know how to turn them into reality.

The steps between dreaming and achieving involve setting goals and taking action.

What areas of life do you want to set goals in?

Some specific dreams might include:

- Move into a senior management role.
- Finish my supervisor's certificate.
- Learn how to cook authentic Italian cuisine.
- Live and work in Italy for two years.

Now, clearly some of these are achievable in the short term while others will take longer. Some will obviously take more work than others. So where do we start? By setting goals! Each objective should be broken down into several small, achievable goals that will help you get where you want to go. Good goals should have SPIRIT!

The SPIRIT Acronym

Specific

Be specific about what you want or don't want to achieve. The result should be tangible and measurable. "Be a great supervisor" is pretty ambiguous; "Achieve a top rating in the Supervisory category on my next performance review" is specific.

Prizes

Reward yourself at different points in the goal, particularly if it's long-term. If your goal is to reorganize your office, for example, you might purchase a piece of artwork after you get the clutter cleaned out.

Individual

The goal must be something that you want to do. If your manager wants you to reorganize your office, but the layout works for you, you're not going to want to work towards the goal.

Review

Review your progress periodically. Does the goal make sense? Are you stuck? Do you need to adjust certain parts of it?

Inspiring

Frame the goal positively. Make it fun to accomplish. You could make a poster of the end result, frame it, and post it on the wall.

Time-Bound

Give yourself a deadline for achieving the goal. Even better, split the goal into small parts and give yourself a deadline for each item.

Use the space below to create a SPIRIT goal for yourself.

Further Reading:

- ✓ *Bennis, Warren. On Becoming A Leader (4th Edition). Perseus Publishing, 2009.*
- ✓ *Blanchard, Kenneth H., Paul Hersey, and Dewey F. Johnson. Management of Organizational Behavior (9th Edition). Prentice Hall, 2007.*