



PERSONNEL NOTES #3

POSITION MANAGEMENT AND THE SUPERVISOR



Position Management is a systematic way of looking at your organization and the process of assigning duties and responsibilities to positions and the structuring of those positions that will best serve mission needs by providing optimum balance between economy, efficiency, use of skills, attraction and retention of workforce, employee motivation, and employee development.

The following information is intended to help you identify strength and weaknesses and to take steps to make your organization more economical, effective and efficient.

POSITION MANAGEMENT is concerned with such questions as:

1. How many employees are needed to accomplish the work?
2. Whether or not particular positions are needed?
3. How the positions (work) should be organized?
4. What duties and responsibilities should be assigned to individual positions?

The aim of POSITION MANAGEMENT is to arrange work in a way that will serve mission needs most effectively and economically, considering such things as:

- The Mission. Can we get the job done? Can we get it done on time?
- Work Simplification. Are we using the best methods and work flow?
- The Labor Market. Can we get the people we need?
- Employee Utilization. Are employees using their full capabilities?
- Motivation. Do employees want to do their best work?
- Career Opportunities. Does the organization structure provide advancement opportunities?
- Availability of Funds and Position Ceiling.
- Socially Oriented Programs. It is important to have programs for the handicapped and the socially disadvantaged.

POSITION MANAGEMENT can help reduce: bottlenecks; red tape; high employee turnover; recruiting problems; disciplinary problems; high error rates; grievances; employee cliques; and unmanageable backlogs. Some organizational weaknesses to be avoided include:

1. EXCESSIVE LAYERING—too many levels in the chain of command.

A. THE PROBLEM

1. Ideas have difficulty moving since they must be evaluated and restated by each supervisor.

2. Top management often is unaware of how decisions have been made at lower levels. Controversy on important issues does not reach the boss attention.

3. Lower-level supervisors and employees are too restricted in what they can do and become frustrated.

B. QUESTIONS TO ASK

1. Are there more supervisors than are actually needed to plan and guide the work?

2. Has authority been delegated as far down the line as it should be?

2. UNNECESSARY POSITIONS—for example, Assistant Chief jobs that are not really needed.

A. THE PROBLEM

1. Full Assistants, or Deputies, add another level to the chain of command.

2. This creates delays in decision-making and increases the likelihood of duplication of effort.

3. Unnecessary Staff Assistant positions tend to cause staff-line conflicts.

B. QUESTIONS TO ASK

1. Does the supervisory workload call for two people at the top?

2. Is the supervisor absent much of the time and must binding decisions be made in his absence?

3. Would some Staff Assistant functions be handled better as part of the line organization?

3. **FRAGMENTATION**—where the organization is unnecessarily split into many segments.

A. THE PROBLEM

1. Small units can become so specialized that they restrict the employee's potential contribution.
2. Communications between units are restricted and action slows down.
3. The question of who is responsible cuts down cooperative effort.
4. Fluctuation of workload becomes hard to handle.

B. QUESTIONS TO ASK

1. Are all of these units necessary?
2. Do they restrict the development of employee skills?
3. Would you like to be so restricted?

4. **NARROW SPAN OF CONTROL**—more supervision than is necessary.

A. THE PROBLEM

1. Narrow span of control can stifle initiative and dampen individual responsibility for work quality.
2. It often means excessive overhead expense.

B. GUIDELINES TO USE

1. Segments, where possible, should have four or more technical positions including the supervisor—frequently many more.
2. A proper span of control might be 10, 20, or even 50 depending on the work to be done, the kinds of people supervised and the controls available.
3. Generally, a horizontal "flat" organization is preferable to a tall structure with many echelons.

Now let's consider job design problems.

Case No. 1—IS JOB DILUTION DRIVING COSTS UP?

	Hours per week
Employee A, GS-11— Analysis	30
Preparation	10
Employee B, GS-11— Analysis	15
Preparation	5
Preliminary review	20
Employee C, GS-7— Preliminary review	20
Mailing	10
Filing	10

A. THE PROBLEM

1. Spreading high-level duties thinly among several positions increases the number of senior positions and the personnel costs go up.
2. Some skills are scarce and hard to recruit. You should use them in the most efficient way.
3. The underutilized employee becomes dissatisfied and his or her skills deteriorate.
4. An imbalance between the number of senior and junior positions limits recruiting possibilities and advancement opportunities.

B. QUESTIONS TO ASK

1. Can high-level duties be consolidated?
2. Can low-level tasks be shredded out, providing job opportunities for the disadvantaged job applicant?
3. Are you providing for employee advancement?

Case No. 2—ARE YOU OVERSPECIALIZED?

Office Situation

Employee A—Files one type of document

Employee B—Files another type of document

Employee C—Assembles precedent cases from files

Shop Situation

Employee X—Lays out work

Employee Y—Drills holes

Employee Z—Inspects finished parts

A. THE PROBLEM

1. Breaking down work assignments into very small units can destroy employee interest and create poor attitudes.
2. Poor attitudes invite dissatisfaction, grievances, and other problems which are time-consuming and which hurt production.
3. Narrow assignments limit flexibility. If "C" or "Z" were absent, who would be able to fill in?

B. QUESTIONS TO ASK

1. Is work designed to attract and motivate capable employees?
2. Can duties be arranged to give more variety and improve job interest?
3. Can highly-routine duties that have no challenge be eliminated or automated?

After reviewing the preceding guidelines—HOW DOES YOUR ORGANIZATION SHAPE UP? Is there some work being performed that doesn't really need to be done? If so, suggest action to eliminate it. Can positions be combined without harming mission accomplishment? Has your organization's structure kept pace with mission changes? Can we avoid unnecessary spreading of high-level duties? Are all vacant positions needed? Can some be restructured at lower grades? Are work methods and processes as efficient as they should be? Can career ladders be developed? Is the work arranged to help provide employees with a sense of accomplishment? Can Deputy and Assistant positions be eliminated that are not really needed? Is the organization split into many small segments?

FOR ASSISTANCE WITH SPECIFIC PROBLEMS, CONSULT YOUR PERSONNEL OFFICE

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