

business ensues.”<sup>12</sup> Both Urwick and Fayol are simply saying that in certain instances, one can and should shortcut the scalar chain as long as one does not do so in a secretive or deceitful manner.

### Span of Management

#### SPAN OF MANAGEMENT

Number of subordinates a manager can effectively manage; also called *span of control*.

The **span of management** (also called the *span of control*) refers to the number of subordinates a manager can effectively manage. Although the British World War I general Sir Ian Hamilton is usually credited for developing the concept of a limited span of control, related examples abound throughout history. Hamilton argued that a narrow span of management (with no more than six subordinates reporting to a manager) would enable the manager to get the job accomplished in the course of a normal working day.<sup>13</sup>

In 1933, V. A. Graicunas published a classic paper that analyzed subordinate-superior relationships in terms of a mathematical formula.<sup>14</sup> This formula was based on the theory that the complexities of managing increase geometrically as the number of subordinates increases arithmetically.

Based on his personal experience and the works of Hamilton and Graicunas, Lyndall Urwick first stated the concept of span of management as a management principle in 1938: “No superior can supervise directly the work of more than five, or at the most, six subordinates whose work interlocks.”<sup>15</sup>

Since the publication of Graicunas’s and Urwick’s works, the upper limit of five or six subordinates has been continuously criticized as being too restrictive. Many practitioners and scholars contend there are situations in which more than five or six subordinates can be effectively supervised. Their beliefs have been substantiated by considerable empirical evidence showing that the limit of five or six subordinates has been successfully exceeded in many situations.<sup>16</sup> Urwick has suggested these exceptions can be explained by the fact that senior workers often function as unofficial managers or leaders.<sup>17</sup>

In view of recent evidence, the span of management concept has been revised to state that the number of people who should report directly to any one person should be based on the complexity, variety, and proximity of the jobs, the quality of the people filling the jobs, and the ability of the manager.

While much effort is given to ensuring that a manager’s span of management is not too great, the opposite situation is often overlooked. All too frequently in organizations, situations develop in which only one employee reports to a particular manager. While this situation might very well be justified under certain circumstances, it often results in an inefficient and “top-heavy” organization. The pros and cons of flat organizations (wide spans of management, few levels) versus tall organizations (narrow spans of management, many levels) are discussed at length in the next chapter. Figure 9–4 summarizes the factors affecting the manager’s span of management.

*Downsizing*, or the laying off of large numbers of managerial and other employees, is a phenomenon that has characterized many American organizations in the 1990s. Generally, downsizing has been caused by increased global competition and the growing number of mergers and acquisitions. One result of downsizing is the tendency of organizations to reduce the number of managerial levels and widen the spans of management.<sup>18</sup> Many people believe that the tendency to reduce managerial levels and widen spans of management is the wave of the future and not merely a temporary reaction. Management Illustration 9–2 looks at the human and managerial costs of downsizing.