

The Jones Paper Products Company is a firm of approximately 2,200 employees. Its employees are organized by a national papermakers union that is affiliated with the AFL-CIO. Relations between company management and union have been reasonably good and peaceful. The Jones Company attempts to take a modern, enlightened approach to personnel management, and its personnel department has subsections in employment, training, compensation, labor relations, employee services, and safety. Total personnel in the department is twenty-one.

Joe Roscoe has been employed by the Jones Company for 2 years. He joined the organization immediately after being discharged from the service. His job consists of removing various paper products from a machine, weighing these products, and transporting them to a storage area. At present, Joe works on the shift that begins around midnight and ends at 7:30 A.M. A skeleton crew works this shift, and Joe's supervisor is responsible for a very large area. Joe is on his own a good deal of the time, which is one of the attractive things about the job. In addition, an individual incentive bonus system has been set up, based on the tonnage of paper moved. He has found that he can make bonus and still have time to rest and read magazines occasionally. Sleeping is too risky.

One morning at about 3 o'clock, Joe was struggling with a load of paper, attempting to get it to the weighing scale. For some reason, the load simply would not move. He pushed, shoved, sweated, and swore. suddenly he discovered that one of the metal weights of the scale had jammed against one of the wheels. This irritated him considerably, and he grabbed the metal weight and flung it without looking. It fractured the skull of a fellow employee, who was immediately rushed to a hospital, where he remained for several weeks. Joe, of course, was very upset by the event and went to the hospital with the injured employee. He was very much relieved when the doctors pronounced him out of danger.

As we said, the Jones Company has a safety section. This section consists of the safety director and two assistants. The safety director had been offered a functional type of authority over all personnel in matters affecting safety. He had refused this authority, preferring to work only in a staff capacity. His main thesis was that a man could not be made to act safely; he had to be persuaded, shown, and educated. The safety director did not want the temptation of organizational authority.

Joe's night supervisor filed disciplinary charges against him for the incident described above and recommended discharge. A committee hearing was held, at which the supervisor and Joe both testified. After all the facts were revealed, the safety director was asked for his recommendation. He argued that Joe should not be discharged. He felt that the Jones Paper Products Company was largely at fault in this incident. In the first place, Jones was remiss in not providing adequate supervision on the night shift. Had a supervisor been in

the area, Joe would probably have been more restrained in his actions. Secondly, the Jones management should be fully aware of the effects of an incentive wage plan. The purpose of this plan is to stimulate an increase in employee output. The company wants its employees to respond, and Joe did respond. Naturally he was upset when he found that his progress was hindered by the scale weight. Thus the company incentive wage program was a contributing factor in the incident. Thirdly, Joe has a plant reputation of being a hothead. He is good, steady employee, but he has been known to have a low boiling point. Plant management was aware of this side of his personality as were most of his associates. Management was therefore at fault in coupling a temperamental employee with adverse working conditions. The safety director recommended that some lighter penalty should be given to Joe, that discharge was too severe.

The disciplinary committee listened attentively to the advice of the safety director. They concluded that the seriousness of the incident more than offset any of the extenuating circumstances offered by the him. Joe was fired. The union immediately filed a grievance.

Questions :

1. Do you agree with the safety director's position on the amount of authority he should have? Why or why not?
2. What is the validity of each of the charges made by the safety director? Where does the fault lie in this accident? Why does the director take this particular position?
3. Discuss this case in the context of Scientific and Social system theories (already discussed in the class).