

5. Span of Control

Objectives

At the end of this chapter, students should be able to explain the span of control; list and explain factors governing optimum span of control. They should also be able to explain delegated authority, mention the advantages of delegated authority and the limits to delegated authority.

5.1 Introduction

Already, we have made reference to hierarchy of posts whereby certain staff are under the direct responsibility of some superior officers. However, span of controlTM is an aspect of organization and management that puts emphasis on the number of such persons that may be put under a superior officer, if the latter must discharge his supervisory role and managerial functions effectively. If the number of such junior staff is too large, then the TMspan of controlTM is beyond the optimum; supervision would be difficult, access to the superior officer would be inadequate and he would be unable to train the junior staff. The morale of the junior workers will suffer as a result. On the other hand, if the span is too narrow, the TMspan of control would fall below optimum. This may result in over-supervision and under-utilization of the managerial ability of the supervisor. The morale of both the supervisor and the supervised may be adversely affected. Some authorities have put the optimum number between three and six junior staff. But there is nothing sacrosanct about the figure. It varies from situation to situation.

5.2 Factors Governing the Optimum Span of Control

The size of junior staff for supervision is affected by a number of factors:

- (i) **The managerTMs ability to organize:** Where a supervisor has a large capacity and good aptitude for handling people, he may be able to cope with a large span of control. Usually, the size of TMspan of controlTM of a supervisor can be limited by managerial qualities.
- (ii) **The ability and intelligence of the Junior staff:** Where the ability or intelligence of the supervised is low, the span of control must be narrow. But if the junior staff need little or no supervision, then the span can be less controlled.
- (iii) **The nature of work:** The type of work is also an influencing factor. Where, for instance, the job is simple and repetitive the span of control required should be large; examples include copy-typing and card-punching jobs. Not much supervision is required. But where the work is complex and individualistic in nature and much supervision is desired, then the span of control should be narrow – a good example is where the job is analytical in nature and non-routine accounting.

- (iv) **The use of personal assistants:** Where a reasonable amount of delegation can be made to personal assistants, then the burden of a wide span of control is eliminated. Such personal assistants often deal with the day-to-day problems without any recourse to their immediate superior. In this way, the number of contacts by subordinates with their superior officer is drastically reduced. Thus, the latter is able to control a larger span.
- (v) **Efficiency of the organization system:** Where the control system within an organization is efficient, the optimum size or span of control will be positively affected. In accounting and financial controls, the effective use of budgeting standard costing, financial management reports, and the adoption of accounting checks and balances enhance the optimum span of control.

5.3 Delegated Authority

Delegated authority is the process by which a superior assigns some work to a subordinate and the subordinate carries out such specific function that normally belongs to his superior.

Delegation is often a matter of personal preference on the part of the manager. While at one extreme, some will delegate so much work to their subordinates that they virtually abdicate their role as manager, it is far more common to find at the other extreme, managers tending to hang on to everything, refusing to allow their subordinates try their hands at anything managerial. This reluctance is based on the wrong premise that the manager can do everything and do it better than the subordinate; so why delegate duties? This attitude is not very positive and makes subordinates feel that they cannot be trusted. It also results in the failure to develop effective management skills.

Advantages of Delegation of Authority

- (i) **Basic to organizational structure:** The whole concept of organization is founded on delegation. No single chief-executive can do the whole job, not even the Board of Directors.
- (ii) **It saves time and reduces work pressure:** The top management is relieved of pressure of work and saved the time on minor issues. The manager has more time for more important matters. For instance, vice-chancellors, provosts and rectors in higher institutions spend their full time on the administration of their institutions and seldom engage in teaching; so too for the principals of some very large secondary schools.
- (iii) **Even distribution of workload:** Distribution of workload becomes equitable; no one is given more or less than he can reasonably accomplish. Therefore, work is finished more quickly and more efficiently; while bottlenecks are minimized, if not totally eliminated.
- (iv) **Development of skills:** Junior staff are given a meaningful share of managing the organization. A feeling of belonging and responsibility is created and abilities are developed.
- (v) **Training of subordinates for higher offices:** Delegation of authority / is one significant method of training for management succession. It is a method of training someone to replace someone else in the future.

- (vi) **Avoidance of reference backtracking:** Reference backtracking to a higher level of management for decision making is a symptom of a sick organization. Delegation removes this illness by allowing decisions to be taken at the lowest possible level of the organization.

Limits to Delegated Authority

- (i) **Nature of the work:** By nature, some jobs do not suit delegation; examples are jobs of confidential nature and others that are highly specialized.
- (ii) **Span of control:** In delegating, one must bear in mind that there is a limit to the number of subordinates that may be under the control of the person to whom duties are being delegated. V.A. Gracunas referred to this as the span of supervision or span of responsibility. In his view, no supervisor should supervise directly the work of more than five or at the most, six subordinates whose duties interlock. However, as we said earlier on, in some circumstances, the span of control may go beyond five or six.
- (iii) **Permission to delegate:** In some cases, the person who wishes to delegate duties to another may have to obtain the permission of his own superior officer. This is the case where the duties are highly specialized or confidential as in (i) above. Some authorities even hold the view that it may not be proper for delegated authority to be further delegated below the line.
- (iv) **Ability of the superior to delegate:** The personal ability of the superior, which is an indication of his own span of control, may determine the limit to what he can delegate.
- (v) **Abilities of the subordinates:** The abilities and potentialities of the subordinates will determine the extent of the delegation they are accorded. Such abilities could be in terms of physical and mental capacity to do the work and the experience acquired previously on similar jobs.
- (vi) **Training:** The nature and amount of training facilities made available to the subordinates is a limiting factor for delegation. In some cases, training is a prerequisite for successful delegation.
- (vii) **Proper supervision:** Unless there is room for effective supervision, the superior may lose his unquestionable responsibility on the job so delegated. Therefore, opportunity for supervision and inspection may be a limiting factor to delegation.
- (viii) **Proper communication:** The authority so delegated must be clearly communicated to others within the organization so that the person to whom authority is delegated is not challenged by his colleagues.
- (ix) **Size of organization:** This may spell the limit of delegation. For instance, large organizations with talented subordinates provide better opportunities for delegation than the very small ones with few or no brilliant subordinates.
- (x) **The form and nature of organization:** Where the organization is a pure line organization, delegation is not usually as common as where the organization is a line and staff.

5.4 The Committee System

This is an extension of methods and principles of sharing responsibilities in an organization. By the committee system, decision making is by groups charged with specific duty or duties instead of by individuals. This is a delegation to a group rather than to an individual; although very uncommonly, there may be a one-man committee. In recent years, there has been a considerable tendency towards the use of committees. It is part of an emerging philosophy that people should be consulted on matters which may affect them.

Once a committee is formed, it is essential that its powers be clearly spelt out in writing. In the case of a limited liability company, the definition of a committee's responsibility may appear in the company's Articles of Association. In the alternative, the powers of a committee are stated in the resolution which established the committee.

Advantages of the Committee System

- (i) **Use of expertise:** Advantage can be taken of the knowledge of specialists on the matter before the committee.
- (ii) **Variety of views:** Many points of view are aired on the issue before , the committee.
- (iii) **Greater details:** Issues can be considered in greater detail since committees find and have time to meet on the matter before them.
- (iv) **Economy of time for directors:** Directors are spared more time for taking decisions on broad policy matters.
- (v) **Even distribution of directors' duties:** The duties of a director are spread over many other subordinates. This also has the added advantage of minimizing the tyranny of overbearing executives. Decisions are more democratically arrived at.
- (vi) **Motivation effects:** The system makes members of such committees more committed. It fosters the spirit of co-operation and coordination. Emphasis is on teamwork rather than on sectional line.

Disadvantages of the committee system

Unless care is taken, the system may bear the following adverse effects:

- (i) **Time consuming:** Committee system has been aptly described as a body that "keeps minutes and wastes hours". This is so especially where a committee has to meet many times before reaching a decision.
- (ii) **Weakening of authority:** Decisions of committees may weaken the authority of directors because the committees, rather than the directors, have the responsibility for decisions taken in actual fact. In real terms, a committee's decision cannot be pinned down to a specific person.
- (iii) **A shield for weak management:** A management that shies away from taking important decisions may hide behind the committee system.

- (iv) **Decisions may be dilatory:** Committees may not report back on a specified date. Committees may indulge in endless arguments, especially when members have been lobbied seriously by outside bodies.
- (v) **Pressure from individual committee members:** A committee may be dominated by an overbearing member who influences decisions in a manner out of proportion to his membership of the committee.
- (vi) **Political manipulation:** Committee ship could defeat democratic aims by the influence of powerful lobbyists, overbearing members and trading between factions.

Classification of Committees

- (i) **Executive committee:** This is a powerful committee with full authority to act, govern or administer, e.g. the board of directors in a company and the cabinet or executive council in a government.
- (ii) **Standing committee:** This is formed for a routine, function, e.g. budget or finance committee; appointment and promotion committee (for recruitment and promotion of staff).
- (iii) **Ad hoc committee:** This is formed as occasions warrant for a specific task; and it ceases to function once that task is completed, e.g. an endowment committee – on the launching of an endowment fund for an organization or a superannuation scheme committee – to advise on the inauguration of superannuation scheme. Such committees are usually short-lived.
- (iv) **Joint consultative committees:** This committee facilitates the co-ordination of the activities of two or more bodies – e.g. employers and employees joint consultative committee is to facilitate agreement between employers and employees' representatives on the conditions of service, salaries and annual leaves.
- (v) **Subcommittee:** This committee is formed from the members of a parent committee in order to go into greater deliberations on the matter before the parent committee. A subcommittee makes its findings or recommendations available to its parent committee, which takes a final decision and responsibility for the subcommittee's findings.

Summary

- * Span of control is about the optimal number of junior officers under a supervisor. This is a function of many factors:
 - (i) manager's ability
 - (ii) nature of work
 - (iii) quality of the subordinates
 - (iv) efficiency of the organization's system
- There are many positive effects to span of control, e.g. promotion of better communication and understanding, among others.

- â€¢ Delegated authority is also an essential aspect of an organization and it assists in management succession plan within the establishment and an even distribution of workload.
- â€¢ Committee system allows decision making by groups charged with specific duties or issues to resolve. It allows a variety of views, saves time and motivates members. Committees may be executive, standing or ad hoc.

Revision Questions

Essay Questions

1. What is delegated authority?
2. Give a list of five forms of committee system, their functions and importance in an organization.
3. What are the limits to delegation of authority?
4. Give three advantages and three disadvantages of the committee system.
5. Mention and explain briefly five factors governing the â€˜optimum span of controlâ€™.

Objective Questions

1. That aspect of Management that places emphasis on the number of staff that should optimally be under a superior officer for effective supervision is referred to as
 - A. span of control
 - B. span of officers
 - C. delegation of duties
 - D. limited delegation
2. The correct number of the junior staff under a supervisor is known as
 - A. correct size
 - B. optimum span
 - C. right organization structure
 - D. equitable structure
3. One of these is irrelevant as factors determining optimum span of control
 - A. managerâ€™s ability to organize
 - B. intelligence of those being supervised
 - C. the grade of those being supervised
 - D. efficiency of the organization system
4. Delegation of authority is the process by which a supervisor
 - A. assigns some work to a subordinate
 - B. makes some dictation to his secretary in the office
 - C. sends some information to his boss
 - D. gives directives to his colleagues
5. These are the advantages of delegated authority except
 - A. savings

- B. fundamental to organization structure
 - C. training and development of talents
 - D. swollen-headedness by supervisors
6. There are limitation to delegated authority except
- A. some jobs cannot be delegated
 - B. limited size of subordinates
 - C. very few number of talented juniors in a large organization
 - D. proper supervision
7. The method by which decision is made by groups charged with specific duties is known as
- A. delegation system
 - B. committee system
 - C. responsibility system
 - D. judicial system
8. One of these is a disadvantage of the committee system
- A. time consuming
 - B. using specialists knowledge
 - C. greater details
 - D. variety of views
9. One of these is an advantage of the committee system
- A. delay in decision-making
 - B. management shies away from responsibility
 - C. sense of commitment by committee
 - D. domination by an overbearing committee member
10. One of these is NOT a popular form of committee system in a business organization
- A. Executive committee
 - B. Electoral committee
 - C. Standing committee
 - D. Ad hoc committee

Project

Take a critical look at your home and state instances of delegation of power by your father/guardian to any other member of the home.

Write a brief note on the distribution of duties among some members of your class as shared out by your class tutor for the smooth running of your class.