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# AGRIBUSINESS MANAGEMENT

## HAVE YOU LOOKED IN A MIRROR LATELY?

A few weeks back, I was driving through central Washington. Having a little time to spare, I decided to take a short detour for the purpose of visiting one of our department's past graduates. This young man had been employed by a food-processing firm immediately after graduation two years ago and I had just recently learned of his promotion to the position of "line supervisor." After exchanging greetings, I asked this young man how he was enjoying his new responsibilities supervising the activities of 35 to 75 (mostly women) processing line employees. He immediately pointed to a large framed cartoon hanging on the wall behind his desk. "This cartoon," he explained, "typifies the only real obstacle I have so far confronted in this supervisory position." The cartoon pictured a gentleman sitting at a desk with a very quizzical look on his face. In one hand he invitingly holds a carrot, and in the other he threateningly holds a baseball bat. The message is vividly clear; as a supervisor, he is uncertain whether the carrot or the bat will prove to be the most effective device.

A visual image of that cartoon remained in my mind for several days after my visit with the supervisor. It had truly stimulated my mind.

About ten days following the visit described above, I decided to begin the process of gathering materials on the general subject matter of "employee supervision." Since I did not carry a wealth of subject-related information around in my head, it seemed warranted that I try to educate myself.

This paper represents, in general, the results of my investigations. As it relates to employee supervision, the content may appear somewhat abstract. Yet, as a whole, I hope it provides an expanded view of a supervisor's role, function, and style. I'm sure you will be able to supplement much of the abstract with your own practical experiences.

Upon first thought, the subject did not appear too complex or difficult to approach. After all, the act of management is often defined as "getting things done through people." If this is the case, employee supervision must be rated as one of the high priority functions of every agribusiness manager. And most managers would judge their own performance in this area by reviewing the interactions between themselves and their subordinates. Supervision, therefore, is viewed as the functional relationship between all employees of a firm.

But have you looked in a mirror lately? What you saw is important not only to yourself but also to those with whom you come in contact. More importantly, your image in the mirror is likely to be a more deterministic factor than any other from the standpoint of successful employee supervision. Why? Because, in researching the subject of employee supervision, it becomes quite apparent that it is only by obtaining an accurate image of our own behavior that we can become effective in modifying the immediate behavior of others. More simply stated, the supervisor is what his self-image allows him to be.

## **Immediacy and Accuracy**

A degree of immediacy and accuracy are involved in this proposed mirror-image supervision. For example, if you reprimand one of your employees for loafing on the job, the immediate reaction may be for him to return to a more rigorous pace of work. Yet how accurate was this reaction? If after you depart, the employee returns to his lackadaisical ways, his reaction was false and the process of employee supervision has failed. Before we become more thoroughly embroiled in a discussion of alternative supervision "styles," let's take a moment to once again glance at that mirror.

The mirror image will appear in the form of your own personal answers to a short series of questions. Check that square which you feel most closely approximates what exists in your business organization. Please be honest in your answers and don't belabor a question or look for any hidden meaning. Simply answer each question with your first reaction. Then add up the checks in each column and place the totals in the spaces provided at the end.

Using the survey on pages 3 & 4, each manager-supervisor is likely to display individual characteristics, which fall into all three alternative columns. Yet it is also likely that a majority will fall in one column, providing for the manager a partial description of his own supervisory style. For example, if most of the checks fall in Alternative I column, an authoritative supervisor is indicated. Alternative II column is indicative of a manipulative supervisor, and the final column suggests a participative supervisor.

Let's now look at each alternative supervisory style in a little more detail. Regardless of your particular style, its suitability to the business environment is purely a function of the particular situation being confronted. However, once you recognize and understand your own supervisory style, you can improve it, change it, or select those motivational

programs best suited to your abilities and needs of the firm.

## **The Authoritative Supervisor**

The authoritative supervisor depends heavily upon his own administrative power to get the job done. He exerts a form of pressure on his subordinates and believes that what his employees accomplish is directly related to the type and amount of supervisory pressure placed upon them.

Obviously, if the supervisor is to exert pressure, he must have the authority to do so delegated to him. He may, in turn, delegate both authority and responsibility to others. However, in the case of an authoritative supervisor, he generally only delegates responsibility for tasks or activities and is very reluctant to delegate authority for decision-making. This reluctance is linked to his fear of losing his own position in the administrative pyramid and, thereby, also sacrificing his ability to secure proper responses from those he supervises.

The authoritative supervisor may yield his power through very subtle means or through the more obvious threats of ridicule, job security, or wage cuts. His success at securing the desired response from his employees sometimes depends on the length of his shadow. If the authoritative supervisor uses his power with skill, knowledge, honesty, and humanitarianism he can be reasonably successful. We are all, no doubt, aware of military drill sergeants, football coaches, and perhaps even a few shop foremen who are classic examples of this phenomenon.

If there exists a degree of respect and trust between the worker and the supervisor, job frustrations are usually held to an acceptable level. However, the authoritative supervisor needs to continually question himself as to whether he is using his pressure tactics to accomplish organizational objectives or simply appease his own ego needs. If your survey mirror-image results suggest that your actions

## Supervision Survey<sup>1</sup>

<b>Leadership Qualities</b>	<b>Alternatives I</b>		<b>II</b>		<b>III</b>	
1. Your confidence in your subordinates:	Little	<input type="checkbox"/>	Condescending	<input type="checkbox"/>	Complete	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Subordinates feel they can talk freely to their supervisors:	Not Much	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sometimes	<input type="checkbox"/>	Nearly Always	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. There is a conscious effort to seek and use subordinates' ideas:	Sometimes	<input type="checkbox"/>	Whenever Desired	<input type="checkbox"/>	Nearly Always	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Subordinates do shoulder responsibility and are self-directing:	Very Seldom	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sometimes	<input type="checkbox"/>	Nearly Always	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Subordinates must be watched constantly to insure proper work responses:	Most of the Time	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sometimes	<input type="checkbox"/>	Very Seldom	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Employees are inherently lazy and careless about work:	Mostly	<input type="checkbox"/>	Somewhat	<input type="checkbox"/>	Seldom	<input type="checkbox"/>

### **Motivation Questions**

1. Predominant use is made of such motivators as fear, threats, punishments:	Often	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sometimes	<input type="checkbox"/>	Almost Never	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Employees are allowed to help set their own individual work goals:	Never	<input type="checkbox"/>	Very Seldom	<input type="checkbox"/>	Often	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Employees work mostly for money rather than achievement:	Nearly Always	<input type="checkbox"/>	Mostly	<input type="checkbox"/>	Seldom	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Responsibility for reaching or setting organizational objectives is felt:	Mostly at Top	<input type="checkbox"/>	Top and Middle	<input type="checkbox"/>	At All Levels	<input type="checkbox"/>

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted by John K. Trocke from work done by Rensis Likert, University of Michigan.

### Communication Questions

- |  |             |                          |                          |                          |                        |                          |
|--|-------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Information on how the organization is doing given to subordinates:     | Very Little | <input type="checkbox"/> | Little                   | <input type="checkbox"/> | A Great Deal           | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. What is the direction of most information flow within the organization: | Downward    | <input type="checkbox"/> | Mostly Downward          | <input type="checkbox"/> | Up, Down, and Sideways | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. Downward communication is received with:                                | Suspicion   | <input type="checkbox"/> | Caution                  | <input type="checkbox"/> | Openness               | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. Upward communication is:  | Often Wrong | <input type="checkbox"/> | Censored for The Manager | <input type="checkbox"/> | Accurate               | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. Upward communication from subordinates is sought:                       | Hardly Ever | <input type="checkbox"/> | Whenever Convenient      | <input type="checkbox"/> | Nearly Always          | <input type="checkbox"/> |

### Directions Questions

- |  |                         |                          |                             |                          |                    |                          |
|--|-------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. How well does the manager really know his subordinates:         | Not Well                | <input type="checkbox"/> | Somewhat                    | <input type="checkbox"/> | Well Informed      | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. Where does the knowledge used in making decisions come from:    | Top Management          | <input type="checkbox"/> | Middle and Upper Management | <input type="checkbox"/> | From All Levels    | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. Is there a conscious method for involving workers in decisions: | Almost Never            | <input type="checkbox"/> | When Convenient             | <input type="checkbox"/> | Fully Involved     | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. Is an evaluation of subordinates' performance made:             | When Something Is Wrong | <input type="checkbox"/> | When Needed for Prodding    | <input type="checkbox"/> | On a Regular Basis | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. Is goal-setting used to contribute to employee motivation:      | Seldom                  | <input type="checkbox"/> | When Useful To Manager      | <input type="checkbox"/> | Involves Everyone  | <input type="checkbox"/> |

### TOTAL CHECKS

#### Alternatives:

**I** \_\_\_\_\_

**II** \_\_\_\_\_

**III** \_\_\_\_\_

more closely approximate those of an authoritative supervisor, consider the following advantages and disadvantages associated with this supervisory style:

#### Advantages

1. Maximum employee control, coordination, orderliness, and conformity.
2. Simple to administer and comprehend. It's easier to direct both punishment and rewards than it is to train, explain, and encourage a deeper job involvement.
3. It creates more immediate results.
4. It can be used to supervise large numbers of people at the same time.
5. It works well to secure rapid and specific changes in action.
6. It is satisfying to the egos of the supervisors.

#### Disadvantages

1. There is a risk of serious and increasing employee resistance.
2. It can only control and change actions while leaving attitudes or beliefs unaffected.
3. When the pressure is lifted or removed, employee accomplishment may cease or diminish.
4. The true potential of some subordinates may never be realized.

In spite of its shortcomings and natural deficiencies, the authoritative style of supervision is probably the most common. It is most common, in my opinion, because until other supervisory styles are learned, the authoritative pattern is perhaps most effective.

### **The Manipulative Supervisor**

If the bulk of your survey checks fall in the Alternative II column, you would properly classify as a manipulative supervisor. This supervisory style is based on one's use of the employees' psychological needs as the means for benefiting the organization. This supervisor's motives are rarely known; he takes advantage of any noticeable employee weakness, and he considers himself to be a sly manipulator of men and their emotions. This type of supervisor is characterized by the person who is always thinking, "make the employees think its their own idea," or "convince the employees that I'm very sincere." He may even go so far as to strategically play one person against another with little regard for the effect this may have on the other workers.

For obvious reasons, this particular supervisory style is filled with substantial risks. If the supervisor is particularly adept, he may prove successful and secure the desired result from most workers most of the time. If he is less adept, however, and his motives are discovered, employee reaction may be most unpleasant. Few employees will be pleased to discover that their emotions have been manipulated. In my own opinion, this supervisory style is the least desirable and probably the least effective. By virtue of its contents, one might be advised to rely on this style only if he were to supervise a rather unsophisticated group of workers for a very limited period of time.

### **The Participative Supervisor**

The participatory style is characterized by a supervisor who relies almost fully on leadership, guidance, and natural incentive in attempting to obtain the desired results from his employees.

The participatory supervisor has as his major objective the closure of the gap between what an employee is capable of doing and what he is willing to do. For each of the persons he supervises, the following two simple questions are asked:

1. Shall I continue to employ this person?
2. How can I help this person do the job assigned to him?

The answer to the first question, of course, must be based on the supervisor's judgment as to: (1) whether the employee is suited to the job or can be trained to perform the job, and (2) whether he is or can be adapted to the team efforts of other workers. If the answer to this first question is no, then there is little that can be done except to try and find a suitable replacement.

It's in finding an answer to this second question that causes participative supervisors to become the most demanding of the three alternative styles. If done well, this style cannot only bring out the best in the ones being supervised; it can also be a most satisfying experience for the supervisor, himself.

There exist several major contributing factors to the successful use of participatory supervision. For example, the supervisor must agree with each of the following propositions:

1. Administrative power flows both upward and downward in an organization.
2. Most people share the common desire to do the right thing.
3. In general, people have a greater ability than they are presently displaying.
4. A supervisor must serve his subordinates and is primarily responsible for their success or failure.
5. The supervisor should help rather than force his subordinates to achieve.

6. Maximum achievement will be reached when authority, responsibility, and accountability are shared by both the supervisor and employee.

It should be obvious from this list of factors that participative supervision is demanding of both time and effort. In fact, if time is of critical importance, the supervisor might wish to convert to the authoritative style. However, if time is available and the supervisor is willing to devote the effort, participative supervision should be implemented. To do so, the following guidelines will be helpful:

1. Both supervisor and worker should develop the desire and ability to recognize problems.
2. The worker may even take the responsibility for considering alternative solutions along with the assistance of the supervisor.
3. The supervisor and the worker consider the consequences of alternative solutions.
4. The worker selects a solution that the supervisor can accept.
5. The worker tries to implement the solution with the supervisor supporting him in every way.
6. The worker finds the solution acceptable and adopts it or he finds it unacceptable and rejects it.

### **Delegation of Authority**

As the above items would suggest, the participative style does rest largely on the willingness of the supervisor to transfer to the worker a significant degree of authority. The worker then grows and builds upon his successes in finding solutions to problems while the supervisor develops a greater confidence in the worker and tends to delegate even more responsibility and authority as the worker displays his ability

to handle it. Quite obviously, delegating authority does not guarantee success. The supervisor must be assured that the worker: (1) has the ability, (2) is willing to accept the authority, and (3) is trained to use it properly.

The following questions are designed to assist the participative supervisor in deciding when, what, and to whom authority may safely be delegated:

1. What do I (the supervisor) now perform that my workers now appear able to do as well or better than I?
2. Are my workers able to make some of the decisions, within the framework of this job that I am now making?
3. What are the risks associated with allowing worker involvement in decision making?
4. Am I ready to share responsibility and authority with those working under me?
5. As those working for me grow in their abilities, what training is needed for them to continue to do their best work?

### **A Shift in Supervisory Style**

The shift from an authoritative style of supervision to a participative style takes time as you attempt to train your employees to recognize your new image, to master the steps in the change yourself, and to allow your workers to respond to their new work style. Any attempt to change supervisory style should be gradual, not an abrupt about-face. Workers should be allowed adequate time to adjust their work habits to the new style of supervision. If this gradual shift is not taken with a proper amount of forethought, the results could be so chaotic that you will need to abandon the adventure within a week of its inception.

For example, if your answers to most of the five questions listed above were negative, then you may be so firmly imbedded as an authoritative supervisor that you should not even attempt a shift in style. Such an attempt might result in your becoming a manipulative supervisor and have disastrous results. Hence, if you judge yourself to be deeply entrenched as an authoritative supervisor, my recommendation would be to try and add a touch of humanitarianism, honesty, and understanding to your present style and be satisfied with a slightly lower performance rate in the long run.

Remember the essence of some of my opening remarks. You are what others perceive you to be. You must look in a mirror to develop a true understanding of your supervisory abilities. The most accurate way to assess what you see in the mirror is to answer the following questions:

1. Am I truly aware of the needs of my employees?
2. Do my employees come to me for help and assistance?
3. Do I listen to the employees' requests?
4. Do I actually try to solve employees' problems?
5. Do I respect employees as human beings?

### **Summary**

This paper begins with a brief survey designed to provide, for the reader, a mirror image of his or her own supervisory style. Depending on the survey results, the reader may find that he most closely approximates an authoritative, a manipulative, or a participative supervisor. Each supervisory style is then described more fully and the advantages and disadvantages of each are considered. The authoritative style is shown to be effective

with large numbers of employees for short periods of time. The manipulative style is filled with limitations, often the unhappy result of an authoritative supervisor making an unsuccessful attempt to shift to the participative style. The participative style is characterized by the supervisor's attempt to fill the gap between what an employee is

capable of doing and what he is willing to do. While obviously the most preferred of the supervisory styles, it is also the most difficult to learn and practice successfully.

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