

A FLOW CHART FOR SUPERVISORY TRAINING

*training with an illustrated
ordering of the components
of the supervisory process*

The years 1966-1968 were years of explosive growth for Blue Cross and Blue Shield in Des Moines. To handle the tremendous volume of work generated by Medicare and Medicaid our staff increased by 250%. People who were knowledgeable in work became supervisory literally overnight. They were expected to supervise as if by intuition. The need for better supervisory training became as apparent as our need for more people.

The training needs were viewed as basic. Many of the people with whom we would work had little or no training in supervision. Yet, we felt that the typical off-the-shelf training program would not fit our needs. Our definition of the problem was that separate courses in coaching, counseling, appraisal, goal-setting and so forth never quite jelled as a unity called "Supervision." We needed some framework to tie all the separate processes together in a meaningful manner.

We felt that this framework should serve as more than an outline. To be meaningful, each subject taught in supervisory training should reinforce the framework and, therefore, reinforce previous learning. Finally we adopted the philosophy that supervisors did understand many of the individual concepts of supervision. If we were able to create a situation in which the class virtually taught itself with us serving primarily to assist in structuring and giving substance to many of their existing ideas, the sense of participation would make the acceptance of new ideas more easily internalized. Of course, it is the converting of ideas into systems of action that makes training effective. We could not afford to operate solely at the intellectual level.

A CHART OF THE PROCESS

As we reviewed our needs for this framework against ideas and concepts from other learning situations, the idea of a flow chart seemed the only answer. After all, not only are we systems oriented in our work, but this process called supervision is actually a system of

behavior. The result was a flow chart which we felt summarized the total supervisory process as it dealt with people. (See illustration.)

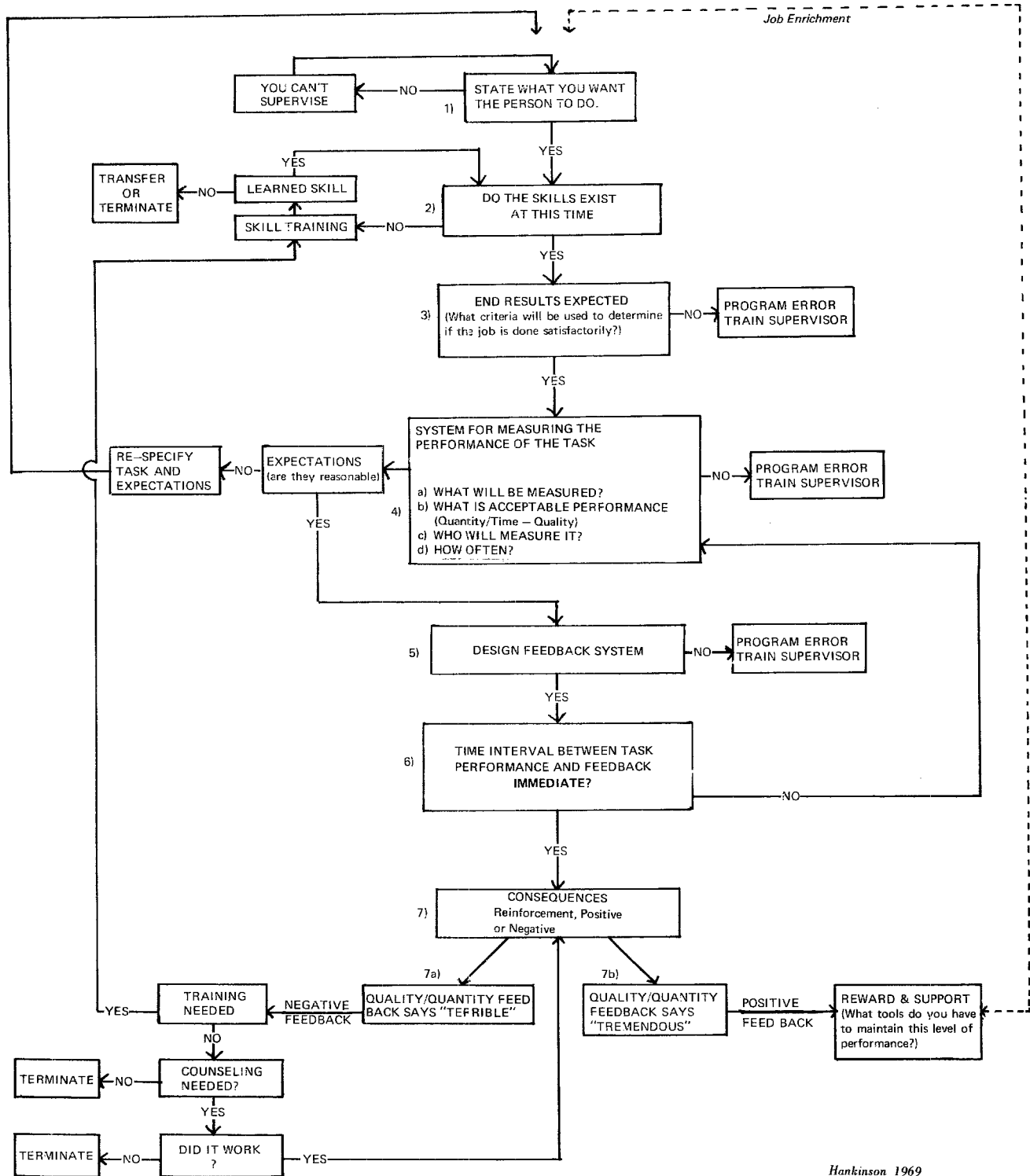
The chart shows the basic processes of getting an individual to complete a task at a given level of performance and, in flow chart fashion, has a decision point with each step. If supervisors in supervising individuals in their unit can answer a question with a YES, they can then go on to the next step. If the answer is NO, the appropriate action is defined.

The process is:

1. Obviously, the first step in securing action is to tell a subordinate exactly what is expected. If a supervisor cannot or will not do that, he cannot supervise.
2. The next step is the instilling of belief in the subordinate that he can do the job. In today's business, few people have done the exact job that the supervisor wants them to do. Yet, all people come with assets and remedial limitations. The trick is to capitalize on the assets that are related to job performance and to use these to build the subordinate's confidence that he can do the job. If the subordinate's available assets are not sufficient for immediate job performance and yet his limitations are remedial, then skill training is the answer. The question then becomes, did the subordinate learn the skill or not? If not, and training was thorough, there is no alternative but to remove the person from the job.
3. If there is evidence that the subordinate can do the job, either with or without training, the next step is to define what is measured to determine job success. At this point we are not talking about how much will be done, but simply what end results of the job are the ones that will be measured when we set goals. Until this is defined, we cannot realistically set goals. If the supervisor cannot define expected end results, he needs more training.
4. Now we come to that portion of the process where, unfortunately, many

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The Process of Supervision



people begin — work standards. But we define it more clearly than just setting standards. We reaffirm what end result will be measured as well as what is acceptable performance. And we expect a supervisor to specify who will measure it and how often. If expected end results cannot be measured, we have a problem in supervision or job design. On the other hand, we still must be concerned that the expectations or goals set are reasonable. A new employee may accept goals that are unreasonable and the supervisor must be aware of this.

5. A system must be designed with which data on performance will be fed back to the performer. Without this feedback, information is of no value at all. We stress very strongly that graphic communication is the most valuable system of all because it quickly communicates fluctuations in performance in a meaningful manner. Again, if this cannot be designed into the work system, we have a problem.

6. The concept of feedback becomes really acute at this point as we stress the concept of IMMEDIATE feedback. If information is to be of value, then it must be contiguous with the event that caused the feedback. If this is not immediate, we must look at the systems designed in step 4 in order to remove time lag.

7. Obviously, performance must have consequences, whether they are positive or negative. Otherwise, there is no reason for performance.

(a) If feedback says "terrible," then the supervisor must determine the reason. The first area to investigate is training. Is there a lack of skill that we have missed? If the answer is yes, then retraining is necessary. If that is not the solution, then we may be dealing with a counseling or attitude problem. At this point we are dealing with obvious alternatives: one choice is eliminated at each decision point until the subordinate is either terminated or dealing once more with the conse-

quences of his performance.

(b) If feedback says "tremendous," then rewards or supportive mechanisms should be applied. This point is an excellent place to introduce the concept of job enrichment as a reinforcer. Frederick Herzberg, in his book, *Work and the Nature of Man*, indicates that the enrichment of jobs has greater motivational effect over a longer period of time than do our traditional reinforcers of praise, ascribed status, money, etc. Therefore, the supervisor who is going to achieve excellence in the long run must not only be introduced to the concept of job enrichment but must understand its relationship to the process of work itself.

USING THE CHART

"So what's new?" The answer is simply "nothing."¹ What we have accomplished is a flow chart with check and decision points throughout the process. It serves to organize the existing knowledge of supervisors into a totally usable pattern. It further serves to support and reinforce all the following points of the course.

In using this flow chart as a teaching tool, we expect the supervisors in our classes to develop this system themselves. I have used this technique with unit supervisors, managers and college students in university situations and have never failed to have a group work this out themselves. My interaction is as a devil's advocate, prodder and organizer.

After the class participants supply the components for themselves, we pass out the printed version and frankly admit that we've led discussion in such a manner that they constructed a concept

1. Many ideas are the result of inputs from previous learning experiences. Some of the basic thought on behavior change in this approach came from a BIR seminar, "The Management of Behavior Change," at the University of Michigan.

which we had already prepared. It proves our stated philosophy that the purpose of the training is not necessarily to give new knowledge, but only to let them more effectively use that which they already possess.

Some of the basic areas covered in our supervisory development classes are Learning Theory as it applies to the management or supervisory process, Job Instruction Training, Counseling, Feedback Systems for Evaluation and Development and Work Oriented Appraisal. Each area is tied in with the flow chart as we develop these skills into a behavior system.

The supervisor's role is a dual one. The prime accountability is seeing that the workers, the "doers," get the work done. The secondary role is the development of subordinates. This is the role we stress because supervisors have already had it made quite clear that the work must be done. What frequently has not been stressed is that the supervisor's success is in direct proportion to the increasing growth of competence of his people. To develop people successfully requires knowledge of the process by which people learn jobs.

THE LEARNING PROCESS

In teaching the learning process we use a straight forward Stimulus, Organism, Response, Reinforcement approach. The concept is cemented with a basic example such as learning a simple exercise and analyzing the components of the learning process during the exercise. From this point on, all examples used are within the framework of the supervisory process.

The need for understanding the process by which people learn is reinforced by the flow chart itself. We stress the similarity between the learning process and the supervisory process. The first portion of the chart is devoted almost entirely to job definition or stimulus presentation in order to produce the appropriate response in the most effective manner. Stimulus not only induces action but defines action. If the stimu-

lus is tightly defined and feedback mechanisms are carefully designed in advance, the response, in this case, the act of doing the job, will be acceptable much sooner. Stimulus for us, obviously, is task definition. Response is doing the task.

Finally, we are able to look at supervisory reward and punishment prerogatives in terms of reinforcement of behavior. Obviously, reinforcement can be either positive or negative. What is not so obvious is that reinforcement is also developmental. By reinforcing the supervisory process with knowledge of the learning process through the medium of the flow chart, the supervisor achieves a more workable understanding of the normal reward-punishment system as well as developmental reinforcers.

By looking at the supervisory process as a complex learning situation we are able to cover several areas of extreme importance. One area is stressing that real learning does not take place until there have been sufficient pairings of stimulus and response with proper reinforcement to convince the learner that he can do the task. Too many times the supervisor will stop training on a job or a job activity as soon as the learner shows just basic understanding or "can do." This is unfortunate because the "will do" attitude cannot occur until the learner convinces himself, through repeated correct responses, that he can do the task with ease.

Another area which benefits from the flow chart approach to supervisory development is the separation of the concepts of skill, or academic learning and emotional, or attitude learning. Job training is obviously academic. The need for counseling is the result of emotional learning or attitude formation that, although learned as the result of the same S.O.R.R. process, is unstructured and therefore frequently irrational.

Let's take a brief look at a few of the supervisory subjects that are covered after supervisors become familiar with the learning process and see how the

flow chart is supportive of specific topics just as it was of the general concept of learning.

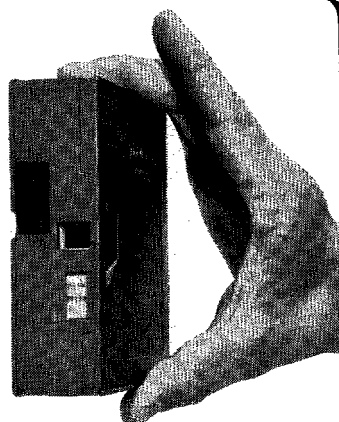
THE SELECTION INTERVIEW

The selection of an employee is not de-

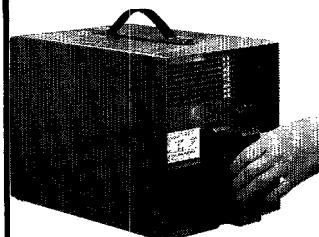
finied on our flow chart. Yet the flow chart plays a very important role in selection. The selection process is one of matching a person's assets and remedial limitations with the job requirements. Obviously, the new employee will be more successful if the match is accurate.

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By emphasizing that the selection of the employee is the entry point in a total system rather than a separate task by itself, the supervisor is more likely to consider all assets and limitations of the candidate throughout the job process rather than to be only concerned with matching assets and job requirements in order to fill a current vacancy.

JOB INSTRUCTION TRAINING

In today's sophisticated world of employee development we take O.J.T. or Job Instruction Training for granted. The flow chart places job instruction training in its two proper locations, initial training and remedial or developmental training. It further emphasizes the need for continuing training until the person not only can do the task but will do it. The first few attempts at a task are painful. Only when the person agrees with the trainer that proficiency is achieved can we be assured that "will do" exists.

FEEDBACK SYSTEMS FOR EVALUATION AND DEVELOPMENT

Reinforcement obviously is a necessary component of both the learning process and the supervisory process. Unfortunately, most supervisors overlook the fact that reinforcement exists at two levels. The level most commonly considered is reward or punishment. Equally important is the reinforcement of feedback. Feedback is nothing but information answering the important question "how am I doing?" Well designed feedback or information systems have value as intermediate rewards as the person progresses

toward an agreed upon goal at which time other reward mechanisms can be used. The flow chart constantly forces the supervisor's attention on building feedback systems which give performance data that is immediate, relevant, continuous and graphic. Information given in this manner constitutes a supplementary reward system.

In addition to collecting information for purposes of feedback, the supervisor is also collecting objective data on performance in order to evaluate the need for reward, development or punishment.

REWARD SYSTEMS

Rewards are assumed to be the consequence of good performance. Effective supervision calls for an understanding of the corporate reward systems and philosophy. The supervisory flow chart automatically leads us to a discussion of rewards and job enrichment for better job performance.

COUNSELING

Counseling deals with changing attitudes resulting from inappropriate or irrational emotional learning. Effective counseling is a difficult skill to teach. Furthermore, many supervisors are all too willing to place the blame for poor performance on a "bad attitude."

To reduce the need for intensive counseling training which may not be needed, it is first necessary to remove unnecessary counseling situations. This is done by making the supervisor understand that counseling is the last step in the development process. The flow chart reinforces this.

As mentioned above, many failures of performance are the result of insufficient time in skill training. Therefore, we emphasize the need to thoroughly explore the possible need for retraining on a portion of the total job in order to overcome lack of confidence in portions of the task. The supervisor's job in training is more than just finding the things a person can't do; it is finding the things that a person does not do with confidence. Once this avenue is explored, the supervisor can attempt counseling for performance improvement. The flow chart serves to emphasize this proper order.

These examples represent a few of the specific topics in which we find that the flow chart is beneficial in the instruction process. However, the prime area of value for the chart lies not in support of specific topics but in ordering the components of the supervisory process. The process of supervision is an orderly one, although it frequently appears to be anything but that. Knowledge of supervisory skills is necessary but not enough. To supervise effectively requires using the right skills at the right time. This is the purpose of the flow chart approach, to assure that order is maintained.

Is it successful? We think so. We feel so strongly about the correctness of our approach that we've begun to use it in management development also. Management requires the same order of thought as supervision. The difference is in level and time span. Management is "getting things done through people." This is the purpose of the chart, regardless of the level at which it is used.

EARLY RELEASE FOR VOC-ED SERVICEMEN

The U. S. Office of Education has notified States directors of vocational education to look for an upswing in the number of enrollment applications from servicemen still on active duty.

The Department of Defense has informed the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare that servicemen who have been accepted for enrollment in a

full-time vocational course beginning up to three months before scheduled discharge will be considered for early release.

The early release provision applies only to recognized vocational-technical education schools and courses of at least three months duration. It does not apply to correspondence courses.