

BOOK REVIEW

Supervisor : Man and Leader by K. G. Agrawal, National Labour Institute, New Delhi, 1988.

Although not completely neglected, the supervisor in industry has not received as much attention from social science researchers in India, as obtained by the workers he supervises, or managers to whom he reports. Partly this gap is sought to be bridged by Dr. K. G. Agrawal in his study of the supervisors in two public utility services in Delhi—the electric supply and city transport.

The book opens with an introductory chapter, where the author briefly reviews some of the theories on supervision and examines the functions and roles of the supervisor in the work place. He correctly notes that today's supervisor has lost his previous position in the workplace, where, a few decades back, he occupied some sort of a commanding position with some powers of hire and fire over the workers recruited by him, often from his known circles and the native place. But today, with the employers taking over the authority of direct recruitment and selection and with other institutional, technological and ideological changes in the workplace, he has been turned just into a "man in the middle",—someone between the powerful employers on the one hand and the growingly assertive and right-conscious workers backed by the strength of the union on the other. A buffer between the management and the subordinates, he is exposed to pressures from both the management and the staff.

With this background as an introduction, the author in this book attempts to study the role of the supervisor in his workplace and in that context, brings him into the focus also as a family man and as, an individual,—the roles which have direct influence on his behaviour in the workplace. His data-base for the study has been obtained from only two organisations, viz. Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC) and Delhi Electric Supply Undertaking (DESU). From this point of view, the findings may be taken more as results of selected case-studies.

In the beginning of his study, the author explores the identity and self-concept of a sample of groups of supervisors — technical

as well as non-technical. He finds evidence of identity-crisis as human beings as well as the employee among the respondents partly because of the lack of consistency between their self-ideal and their current roles and partly because of the impact of the mass-media. He maintains that identity-crisis may not always point towards loss of balance. But he does not clarify the extent to which, the identity-crisis has affected his respondents' role at the workplace.

In the following chapter, the author examines the psychosomatic problems of supervisors and finds that the psychosomatic problem variables have high inter-correlations in most cases.

The author also studies the union-participation of the supervisors and finds that membership of union leads to higher job-dissatisfaction compared to the non-members.

While studying the role of the family life and social life outside the workplace on the supervisor's role at work, the author finds, like some other observers who studied the same topic in India before him that the work-life and role are considerably affected by the family life and social life. However, comparing the two organisations covered by the author, it is reported that although supervisors at DTC as well as DESU both have the same amount of overall satisfaction in life, "DESU group seems to be more happy in life than DTC group" (p.30). This appears to be contradictory to the author's assertion in the next page (p.31) on the basis of his statistical results that DTC group finds life and work to be more interesting, worthwhile and rewarding.

In some of the chapters which follow, Dr. Agrawal studies commitment and turnout of the supervisors, their job satisfaction and also the leadership style. He finds that grievance handling can predict job-satisfaction very efficiently and life-satisfaction has also been found to be highly correlated with job satisfaction. He also finds that "job satisfaction emerges as the principal factor of work and family life of supervisors with satisfaction with industrial relations and grievance handling as its components." It is interesting to note that financial

rewards have also clustered to form this factor along with growth, challenge and autonomy. On this basis Dr. Agrawal empirically contradicts, like many other researchers in India and abroad, Herzberg's dual factor theory.

On the basis of his study, Dr. Agrawal holds that five factors are basic to the effective role performance of supervisors viz., job satisfaction, energy, social relations, union perception and family life. This is an important observation having practical message for industrial management. Although, some of these variables' roles in supervisory performance have been noted earlier by other observers as well, it is useful that Dr. Agrawal has found further empirical support to their findings in two public utility undertakings in India. However, the main fault of the book lies in the failure of Dr. Agrawal to fully explore a significant point of the theme that he himself noted in Chapter I of his book - viz., the change in the supervisor's position in the workplace from someone with authority to one just playing the role of a buffer. It appears that the study has not considered in its survey-design how this change and the perception of the same by the supervisor has affected his performance, role as well as his behaviour in the workplace.

On the whole, in spite of some shortcomings, the small monograph by Dr. Agrawal represents a valuable addition to the management literature in India as it provides interesting factual information about the supervisor's role and the factors which shape the same.

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Decision Support Systems by R. Jayashankar, Tata Mc Graw Hill, 1989. Hard Bound, Price Rs. 135.00.

This book is essentially a tour of several currently popular software packages which can potentially be used by non-computer professionals for meeting their information processing requirements. After a very brief introduction to the concept of a Decision Support System, the book moves on to introduce microcomputers and some assorted information aimed at clarifying issues for the first-time user of personal computers. Following this are the chapters focussing on avail-

able software products. Interactive Financial Planning System (IFPS) is covered in some detail while PC Focus, Oracle and Ingres are briefly touched upon. This is followed by a series of chapters discussing very recent developments like Expert Systems, the concept of an Information Centre, Executive Support Systems and Group Decision Support Systems (GDSS).

There are very few Indian books on Information Systems and this well produced book is certainly welcome. It brings together several topics not usually found in a single book, and may be found useful by executives wanting to gain a broad overview of personal computing using PCs. The book has attempted to cover many topics and this is perhaps responsible for some of its shortcomings. For example, the chapters focussing on theoretical issues like the components of a DSS, Expert Systems, Information Centre, GDSS, etc., do not fit in well with the major focus of the book. While the case based approach using IFPS is welcome, it is doubtful if too many readers can profit from the exposition because of lack of availability of the software. Despite their limitations, Lotus and Dbase would have been much more effective as vehicles for communicating the ideas. The utility of the chapter on PC Focus, Ingres and Oracle is similarly questionable. Further, these have not yet attained the status of 'end user languages'.

There are several places where the book appears to be merely an uncritical compilation of irrelevant information. The section on selection of DSS giving details of several products and other details like their vendors, etc., appears totally irrelevant to Indian users (for example the 800 'hot line for user support, which applies only to users in US and Canada). The table of expert systems also seems to be a case in point.

The book could serve as supplementary reading material for participants in management development programs on computers and information systems. Organizations conducting these programs usually have the necessary software, and the book can perhaps serve as a reference.

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