LINE AND STAFF AUTHORITY

In an organization, the line authority flows from top to bottom and the staff authority is exercised by the specialists over the line managers who advise them on important matters. These specialists stand ready with their specialty to serve line mangers as and when their services are called for, to collect information and to give help which will enable the line officials to carry out their activities better. The staff officers do not have any power of command in the organization as they are employed to provide expert advice to the line officers. The 'line' maintains discipline and stability; the 'staff' provides expert information. The line gets out the production, the staffs carries on the research, planning, scheduling, establishing of standards and recording of performance. The authority by which the staff performs these functions is delegated by the line and the performance must be acceptable to the line before action is taken. The following figure depicts the line and staff authority:

Types of Staff

The staff position established as a measure of support for the line managers may take the following forms:

Personal Staff: Here the staff official is attached as a personal assistant or adviser to the line manager. For example, Assistant to managing director.

Specialized Staff: Such staff acts as the fountainhead of expertise in specialized areas like R & D, personnel, accounting etc.

General Staff: This category of staff consists of a set of experts in different areas who are meant to advise and assist the top management on matters called for expertise. For example, Financial advisor, technical advisor etc.

Features of line and staff organization

Under this system, there are line officers who have authority and command over the subordinates and are accountable for the tasks entrusted to them. The staff officers are specialists who offer expert advice to the line officers to perform their tasks efficiently.

Under this system, the staff officers prepare the plans and give advice to the line officers and the line officers execute the plan with the help of workers.

The line and staff organization is based on the principle of specialization.

Advantages

- It brings expert knowledge to bear upon management and operating problems. Thus, the line managers get the benefit of specialized knowledge of staff specialists at various levels.

- The expert advice and guidance given by the staff officers to the line officers benefit the entire organization.

- As the staff officers look after the detailed analysis of each important managerial activity, it relieves the line managers of the botheration of concentrating on specialized functions.

- Staff specialists help the line managers in taking better decisions by providing expert advice. Therefore, there will be sound managerial decisions under this system.

- It makes possible the principle of undivided responsibility and authority, and at the same time permits staff specialization. Thus, the organization takes advantage of functional organization while maintaining the unity of command.

- It is based upon planned specialization.

- Line and staff organization has greater flexibility, in the sense that new specialized activities can be added to the line activities without disturbing the line procedure.

Disadvantages

- Unless the duties and responsibilities of the staff members are clearly indicated by charts and manuals, there may be considerable confusion throughout the organization as to the functions and positions of staff members with relation to the line supervisors.

- There is generally a conflict between the line and staff executives. The line managers feel that staff specialists do not always give right type of advice, and staff officials generally complain that their advice is not properly attended to.

- Line managers sometimes may resent the activities of staff members, feeling that prestige and influence of line managers suffer from the presence of the specialists.

- The staff experts may be ineffective because they do not get the authority to implement their recommendations.

- This type of organization requires the appointment of large number of staff officers or experts in addition to the line officers. As a result, this system becomes quite expensive.

- Although expert information and advice are available, they reach the workers through the officers and thus run the risk of misunderstanding and misinterpretation.
- Since staff managers are not accountable for the results, they may not be performing their duties well.

- Line mangers deal with problems in a more practical manner. But staff officials who are specialists in their fields tend to be more theoretical. This may hamper coordination in the organization.