

DEFINITION AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE PERSONNEL FUNCTION

There is a constant vagueness regarding terms used in the field of personnel. To avoid confusion and uncertainty some of these concepts will be clarified and the field of responsibility of the personnel function will be defined.

Personnel Management can be viewed as a set of activities focusing the coordination of human resources in the organisation.

It can be said that Personnel Management, at its best, is the art and science of correct selection, methodical development and effective utilisation of the labour force. Thus the primary function of the Personnel Department of an organisation is to contribute an essential service to the general efficiency of the organisation by obtaining and retaining an effective labour force.

The development of personnel management goes back to the early years of the present century. One of the first recorded attempts at studying human behaviour in the work situation were the Hawthorne experiments, which were carried out at the works of the Western Electric Company, in Hawthorne, Illinois towards the beginning of the 1920's. These tests were carried out by Elton Mayo and his associates. It is not necessary, for the purpose of this course, to go into detail regarding the tests. It is sufficient to state that they were tests exploring the influence of environment on human behaviour in the work situation.

The subject of works management has been receiving increased attention in recent years. The two world wars have taught industry that there is a need for conserving the use of men, labour and machinery. A great deal of research has been undertaken regarding the science of management, and it is now possible to adopt standard methods for the loading

of machines and the supply of materials. These scientific methods provide for precise results, provided that the machines are well serviced and that the materials are suitable for the specific job. This is where the element of human endeavour is involved.

The servicing of the machines, the selection of the correct material, the supervision of loading and routing, are all the responsibility of human beings. Even in a highly computerised world, the responsibility for the development of the programmes necessary for computer operation is still in the hands of men or women. It is not possible to plan for human beings in the same manner as one can plan the operation of machines and materials.

When one is installing machinery in a factory, care is taken to install machinery of a similar type, because it is then possible to obtain identical results from similar machines. It may be known, for example, that if there are four identical machines, and one machine can produce four hundred articles per day then the total output should be 1 600 articles per day. It is known that if a "rush" order is received which requires an output of 2000 articles in a single day, then it will be necessary for the machines to work extra hours to produce more. Thus if the potentiality of the machinery is known, it is possible to estimate the output and to plan accordingly. That is assuming that the workers in attendance at the machines act in exactly the same way. Unfortunately, this is not the case; no two persons are identical and as such they do not act the same way in a given set of circumstances. In this example, it is possible that the machine operatives would have objected to working overtime, or for various reasons, such as tiredness, would not be able to give their full attention to the job during the extended working period. This would result in spoilt or defective work. Therefore, the necessity has arisen for someone to look after the personnel side of the organisation, with the object of anticipating the result of human activity with as much certainty as possible.

