As One
CONSULTING

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WHITE PAPER

MANAGING THE FUNNEL

EMPOWERING
SUPERVISORS
FOR SUSTAINABLE
BUSINESS PRACTICES

ABSTRACT

Supervisors are the cornerstone of sustainable operational practices. However, leaders must identify and eliminate non-value activities from their workload to help them excel. Many organizations fail to equip supervisors with the tools and training needed to manage the overwhelming "funnel" of responsibilities effectively. At As One Consulting, we coach supervisors and leaders on how to manage this funnel, prioritize tasks, maximize time on the floor, and implement management systems that enhance their effectiveness.

INTRODUCTION

In today's highly competitive industries, success hinges on customer sensing, millennial innovation, predictive improvement, and a nimble supply chain. On the shop floor, this translates to new products, variants, and initiatives, driven by rapidly changing customer demands for choice, nutrition, and price. Social media provides real-time insights, but preferences shift frequently, from more protein one week to less sugar the next. This creates a "funnel" of constantly changing demands, ideas, and projects, leading to SKU proliferation and daily challenges for operations and HR. Despite these fluctuations, the supervisor remains the constant, key figure in driving execution.

BETWEEN A ROCK AND A HARD PLACE

A supervisor's role has always been about execution. But what does today's "executor" look like? They arrive each day, metaphorically place a funnel over their head, and begin a long day filled with emails, meetings, and administrative tasks. In some operations, failing to meet the funnel's demands can lead to food safety issues, customer dissatisfaction, and safety hazards.

However, today's supervisor is often yesterday's operator, and many organizations haven't provided them with the necessary tools, training, or abilities to manage the funnel effectively. Organizations rarely involve supervisors in planning and tend to view them solely as doers. As a result, the continuous strain on supervisors leads to high turnover and missed opportunities, causing organizations to question their established practices and move away from the strategies that once brought them success.

3 WAYS TO HELP SUPERVISORS MANAGE

STEP 1: PRIORITIZE, RESOURCE, & PUSH BACK

First, the organization must commit to supporting supervisors and ensuring they understand that both what they do and how they do it are critical to the business's success. While many leaders recognize the need to support supervisors, most have only developed computer-based training modules on topics like teamwork, conflict resolution, or interviewing skills. A more effective approach is to help supervisors identify all tasks in the funnel and enable them to prioritize, allocate resources, and even push back when necessary. Without this support, every minor change will seem like a passing trend or a "corporate" directive, leading to ongoing turnover and frustration with performance and strategy execution.

STEP 2: DEFINE WHAT A GOOD DAY IS

Defining what a good supervisor's day should look like is arguably the most critical change. While this may seem simple, it can be more challenging than expected. Questions to address include: How much time should supervisors spend on the floor versus administrative tasks? How many meetings should they attend, and with whom should they interact regularly? How should they balance active versus passive supervision?

One major frustration for supervisors is being pulled off the floor by tasks in the funnel. Many organizations aim for an 80-20 rule, with 20% of a supervisor's day dedicated to administrative tasks.

Once guidelines are set, they should be compared to the actual reality of how supervisors spend their time. In some cases, supervisors spend 80-90% of their day off the floor managing the funnel, revealing a misalignment between their roles and expectations. More often than not, they become taskmasters rather than proactive leaders. Organizational commitment is essential here—supervisors are the foundation of sustainable operations, so identifying and eliminating non-value activities is crucial. For example, one organization found that a supervisor spent an hour daily on a redundant quality spreadsheet. Eliminating this task freed up time for more productive floor work. By aligning expectations for time spent, leaders can reduce the funnel's impact.

STEP 3: HELP THEM ENJOY THEIR ROLE

Setting clear expectations for how supervisors should spend their time is crucial for managing the funnel effectively. Organizations must commit to helping supervisors identify and manage their tasks. Often, supervisors feel obligated to respond to every immediate request, which only adds to the funnel. Instead, they should regularly assess and prioritize tasks within the funnel, providing transparency on how they manage them.

Implementing a Short Interval Control (SIC) methodology can significantly improve daily productivity. During interactions with supervisors, leadership should focus on key priorities, such as throughput, product quality, asset care, shop floor morale, and, most importantly, safety. Although this requires significant effort, when leadership dedicates time to supporting supervisors in these areas, it not only aligns supervisors with organizational priorities but also keeps them motivated to achieve results.
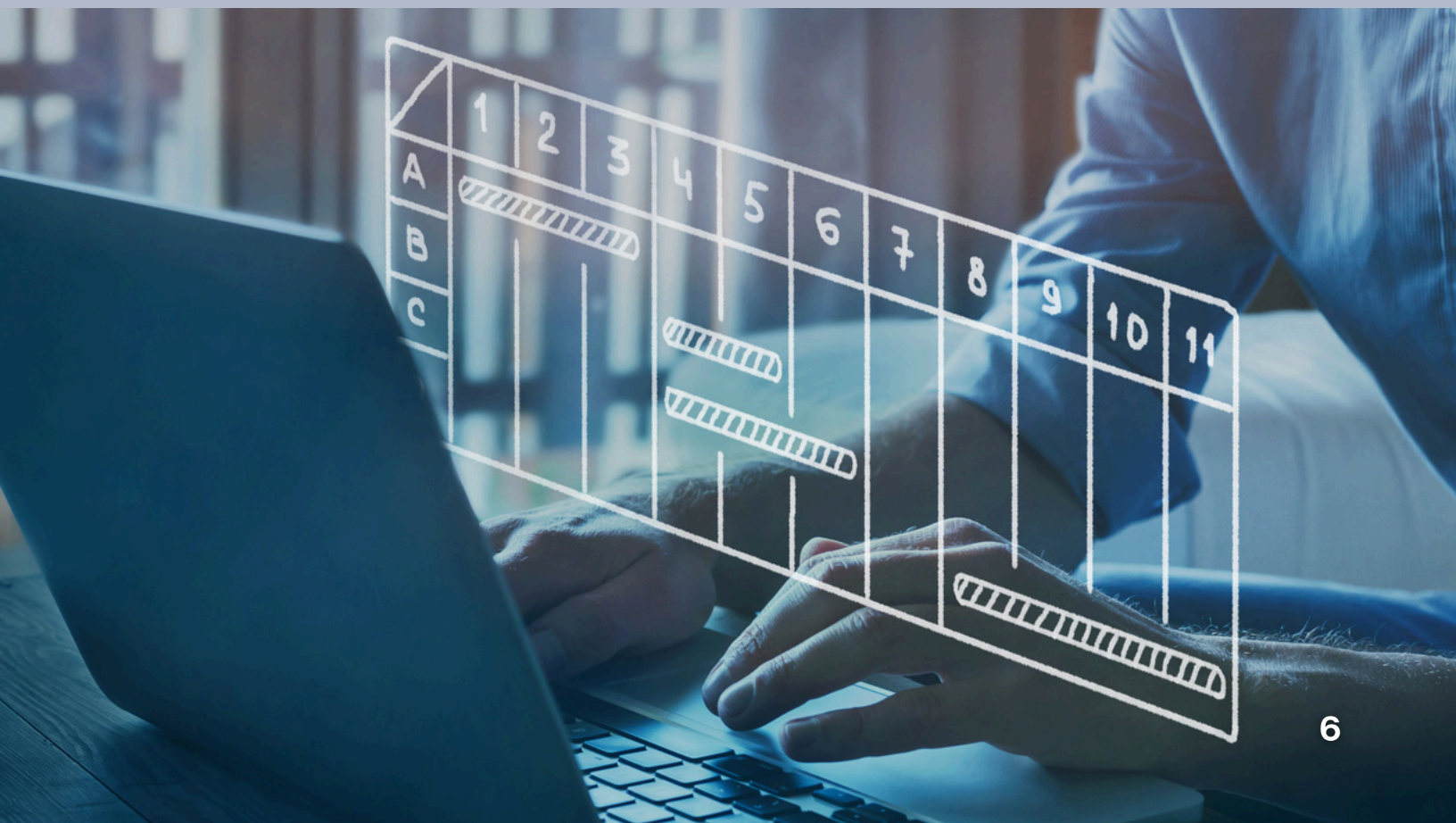
CONCLUSION

If organizations don't help their supervisors manage the funnel, they will continue to see turnover in personnel and a lower level of execution against business strategies. The funnel will never go away, but when an organization learns how to manage it, its supervisors will be more nimble, better informed, and execute to a higher level of business performance. Organizations can start by making a commitment to their supervisors to set expectations and then help identify and manage tasks that take supervisors away from their end goal.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Chris Gregory, SVP Food, Beverage and Manufacturing, has more than 20 years of management consulting experience. Specializing in business performance management, process improvement material yield and throughput, Chris has managed and executed complex, transformational programs that account for more than $200 million of cost and revenue improvement. His areas of expertise include operational strategy and restructuring, operational excellence, asset care and reliability and operational due diligence.