



## LINE AND STAFF ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

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### ABSTRACT

This paper examined line and staff organizational structure in Nigeria. The line organization is the simplest organizational structure. It is the "doing" organization, in that the work of all organizational units is directly involved in producing and marketing the organization's goods and services. There are direct vertical links between the different levels of the scalar chain. The paper is of the opinion that line authority makes a manager to instruct subordinates on what to do. Here, authority flows vertically down through the structure. This is said to be a direct relationship between superior and subordinate officers, and also each subordinate is made responsible to only one person. The paper noticed that except in situations where there is delegated authority and assignment of responsibility for some specific functions, there naturally exist no formal relationship between the personal assistant or aid and other staff members. The paper also noted that there should spelt rules and duties of the line and the staff personnel's in the organization to avoid conflict among them. Also recommended by the paper is that a general overseer should be appointed to coordinate and integrate the operations and functions of both the line managers and those arts.

**Keywords:** line, staff organizational structure, line authority, line-staff authority



## INTRODUCTION

The line organization is the simplest organizational structure. It is the "doing" organization, in that the work of all organizational units is directly involved in producing and marketing the organization's goods and services. There are direct vertical links between the different levels of the scalar chain. Since there is a clear authority structure, this form of organization promotes greater decision-making and is simple in form to understand (Montana, et al. 2006). The aim of any business is to maximize profit. In order to do this there must be division and specialization of labour. This implies that different people come together in order to create a product that has value to consumers. Hence, the activities of different people involved in a business must be coordinated. So there is a need for an organizational structure that brings this coordination about. People in an organization must know first is what their activity is and where it fits into the product as a whole. Second is what their roles is, what responsibilities they have and to whom they are answerable (Blacksacademy, 2005). Line and staff organisation is a combination of line organisation and functional organisation. It is a type of organisation in which there are two sets of officers for administration, viz., Line officers who have the authority and command over the subordinates and are responsible for the accomplishment of the results. Eg marketing executive and Staff officers or specialists who advice, guide and council to the line officers to help them to discharge their functions efficiently. Eg. Personal Secretary Health institutions in general and tertiary health institutions in particular provide practical examples of line and staff employees' relationship in formal organizations. How this relationship is managed impact directly on the organization's performance in terms of realization of its set goal and objectives. Industrial dynamics presented by tertiary health institutions make them one of the most appropriate organizations for the analysis of line and staff relationship (Bassey et al., 2011). Staffs refers to employees in an organization who function towards providing conducive environment and assistance to line employees to work most effectively in order to accomplish the primary objectives of an organization. Staff perform advising role to line employees in order of authority within the organization. Like technicians, artisans, social workers, psychologists, clerical and engineers are all staff personnel (Bassey et al., 2011). Conflict has to do with behaviour by persons or groups purposefully designed to inhibit the attainment of goals by another person or group. Conflicting parties have incompatible goals, and that conflict may have positive or negative consequences. Meena and Bairwa (2013), attested that many of the difficulties and frictions encountered in the daily life of an organization are due to line and staff problems. To them, misconceptions, distrust, conflict of personalities, disunity and duplication of effort arising from line and staff conflict inflict upon organizational ability to operate efficiently and effectively maximizing its goal and objectives. (Malton, 2006) classical study of line and staff conflict maintains that power struggle plays a significant role in the process of adjustment to changes in organization arising from complex working relationship in line and staff organizations. (Blau and Scott, 1962) reviewing (Malton, 2006) study, identified diversity of front of conflicts in complex organizations to include; intra-staff conflicts which prevail among staff officers of various specialties; intra. An important principle of organization as well as



management is that authority should equal responsibility. This principle is known as the parity of authority and responsibility and ensures that work will be performed with a minimum amount of frustration on the part of personnel. By not delegating authority equal to responsibility, a manager will create employee dissatisfaction and generally waste energies and resources (Montana, et al., 2006).

In line organisation, there is unity of command, but there is no specialization, while In functional organisation, there is extreme specialisation, but there is no unity of command. Thus, to overcome the defects and to take advantage of the merits of both line organisation and functional organisation, line and staff organisation has been evolved. Line and staff organisation is the usual form of organisation found in modern enterprise.

## **Conceptual Review**

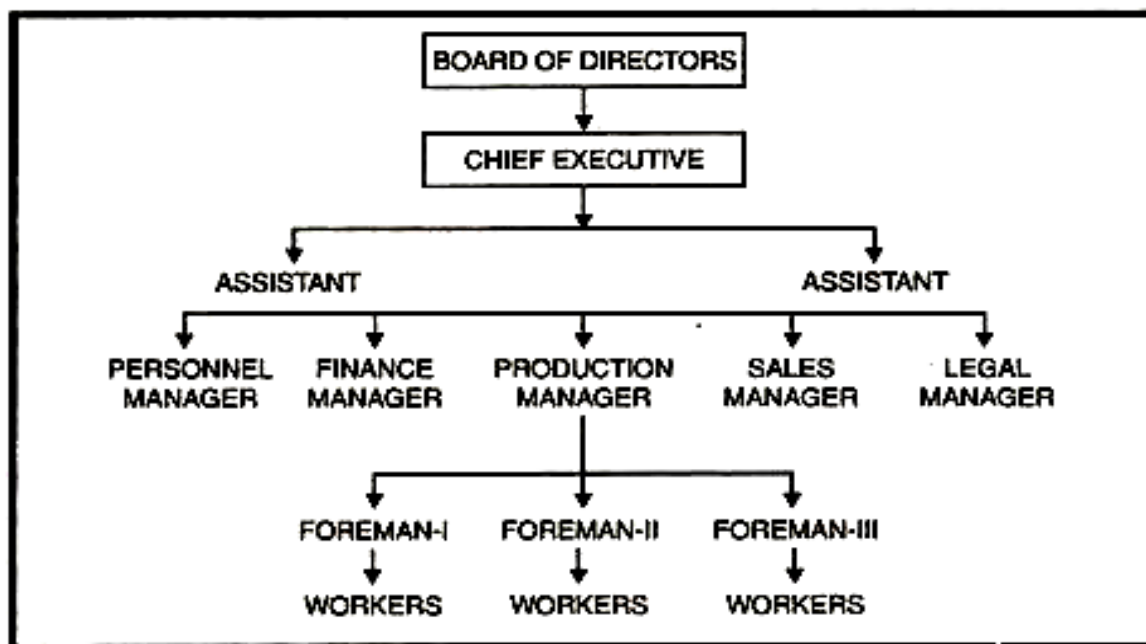
### **Line and Staff Organization**

There are numerous ways to structure jobs within an organization, but two of the most basic forms include simple line structures and line-and-staff structures. Boomer, (2000) submitted that in a line organization, top management has complete control, and the chain of command is clear and simple. Examples of line organizations are small businesses in which the top manager, often the owner, is positioned at the top of the organizational structure and has clear "lines" of distinction between him and his subordinates. A line-staff organization is a structure that distributes work responsibilities from upper management to lower-level employees. A line-staff organization is more flexible than a line structure. Instead of one professional leading the entire company alone, they appoint qualified supervisors to manage associates, which maintains the authority of the leadership. They also hire industry experts to complement the work of the line managers. Medium-sized and large corporations often use line-staff formats to stabilize the chain of command with large organizational membership. The managers establish standards for the quality of the work and deadlines for employees to finish their tasks, and they communicate their expectations to the team. It's the team's responsibility to meet those expectations in the assigned time. The line-and-staff organization combines the line organization with staff departments that support and advise line departments. Line and staff organisation is a combination of line organisation and functional organisation for the achievement of one purpose. Most medium and large-sized firms exhibit line-and-staff organizational structures. The distinguishing characteristic between simple line organizations and line-and-staff organizations is the multiple layers of management within line-and-staff organizations

It is a type of organisation in which there are two sets of officers for administration, viz., Line officers who have the authority and command over the subordinates and are responsible for the accomplishment of the results. Eg marketing executive; and Staff officers or specialists who advice, guide and give counsel to the line officers to help them to discharge their functions efficiently. Eg. Personal Secretary

When staff specialists are added to a line organization to "advise; "serve;" or "support" the line in some manner, we have a line and staff organization. These specialists contribute to the effectiveness and efficiency of the organization. Their authority is generally limited to making recommendation to the line organization. Several advantages and disadvantages are present within a line-and-staff organization. An advantage of a line-and-staff organization is the availability of technical specialists. Staff experts in specific areas are incorporated into the formal chain of command. A disadvantage of a line-and-staff organization is conflict between line and staff personnel. However, such conflict can be reduced by having staff specialists obtain some line experience, which will tend to make them better understand the problems facing the line managers they support. Such functions as human resources management and research and development are typical staff functions (Montana, et al., 2006).

Figure 1: diagram of a line and staff organizational structure



### Features of Line and Staff Organization

1. There are two types of staff first is Staff Assistants- Personal Assistant to Managing Director, Secretary to Marketing Manager second is Staff Supervisor- Operation Control Manager, Quality Controller and PRO.
2. Line and Staff Organization is a compromise of line organization.
3. It is more complex than line concern and Division of work and specialization takes place in line and staff organization.



4. The whole organization is divided into different functional areas to which staff specialists are attached. Efficiency can be achieved through the features of specialization
5. Powers of command remains with and staff the line executive serves only as counsellors.
6. There are two lines of authority which flow at one time in a concern that is Line Authority and Staff Authority.

### **Why Persons in Staff Position can Only Advice**

Thus staff officers are not directly involved in the execution of the business but only evaluates what they collate. Staff employees assist the line professionals in achieving organizational goals. The staff managers are experts in the industry, providing recommendations to line managers on how to lead their departments to success. They also hold a higher rank over all personnel, including lower-level line members and staff members. The staff employees support their line counterparts with handling their occupational responsibilities. For instance, in a department store, the staff manager might be a quality assurance coordinator who evaluates the visual displays of the merchandise and suggests ways to position the products to better appeal to customers. The staff personnel could include an employee who keeps the sales floor neat and organized and tracks the number of purchases made in one day.

### **Line-staff Authority**

Authority within a line-and-staff organization can be differentiated. Cursev and Ermer (2002) posited that there are three types of authority that are present in line and staff organization: line, staff, and functional. Line authority is the right to carry out assignments and exact performance from other individuals.

### **Line Authority**

Line authority flows down the chain of command. For example, line authority gives a production supervisor the right to direct an employee to operate a particular machine, and it gives the vice president of finance the right to request a certain report from a department head. Therefore, line authority gives an individual a certain degree of power relating to the performance of an organizational task. Two important clarifications should be considered, however, when discussing line authority: (1) line authority does not ensure effective performance, and (2) line authority is not restricted to line personnel. The head of a staff department has line authority over his or her employees by virtue of authority relationships between the department head and his or her directly-reporting employees.

### **Staff Authority**

Staff authority is the right to advise or counsel those with line authority. For example, human resource department employees help other departments by selecting and developing a qualified workforce. A quality control manager aids a production manager by determining the acceptable quality level of products or services at a manufacturing company, initiating quality programs, and



carrying out statistical analysis to ensure compliance with quality standards. Therefore, staff authority gives staff personnel the right to offer advice in an effort to improve line operations.

### **Functional Authority**

Functional authority is referred to as limited line authority. It gives a staff person power over a particular function, such as safety or accounting. Usually, functional authority is given to specific staff personnel with expertise in a certain area (Damaris 2000). For example, members of an accounting department might have authority to request documents they need to prepare financial reports, or a human resource manager might have authority to ensure that all departments are complying with equal employment opportunity laws. Functional authority is a special type of authority for staff personnel, which must be designated by top management.

### **Line-and-Staff Positions**

A wide variety of positions exist within a line-and-staff organization. wide variety of positions exist within a line-and-staff organization. Some positions are primary to the company's mission, whereas others are secondary—in the form of support and indirect contribution. Although positions within a line-and-staff organization can be differentiated in several ways, the simplest approach classifies them as being either line or staff. A line position is directly involved in the day-to-day operations of the organization, such as producing or selling a product or service. Line positions are occupied by line personnel and line managers. Eyagbe and Suru, (2002) submitted that line personnel carry out the primary activities of a business and are considered essential to the basic functioning of the organization. Some positions are primary to the company's mission, whereas others are secondary in the form of support and indirect contribution. Although positions within a line-and-staff organization can be differentiated in several ways, the simplest approach classifies them as being either line or staff. A line position is directly involved in the day-to-day operations of the organization, such as producing or selling a product or service. Line positions are occupied by line personnel and line managers. Line personnel carry out the primary activities of a business and are considered essential to the basic functioning of the organization. Line managers make the majority of the decisions and direct line personnel to achieve company goals. An example of a line manager is a marketing executive. Line managers make the majority of the decisions and direct line personnel to achieve company goals. An example of a line manager is a marketing executive. Although a marketing executive does not actually produce the product or service, he or she directly contributes to the firm's overall objectives through market forecasting and generating product or service demand. Therefore, line positions, whether they are personnel or managers, engage in activities that are functionally and directly related to the principal workflow of an organization.

Staff positions serve the organization by indirectly supporting line functions. Staff positions consist of staff personnel and staff managers. Staff personnel use their technical expertise to assist



line personnel and aid top management in various business activities. Staff managers provide support, advice, and knowledge to other individuals in the chain of command.

Although staff managers are not part of the chain of command related to direct production of products or services, they do have authority over personnel. An example of a staff manager is a legal adviser. He or she does not actively engage in profit-making activities, but does provide legal support to those who do. Therefore, staff positions, whether personnel or managers, engage in activities that are supportive to line personnel.

### **Line-and-Staff Conflict**

Due to different positions and types of authority within a line-and-staff organization, conflict between line and staff personnel is almost inevitable. Although minimal conflict due to differences in viewpoints is natural, conflict on the part of line and staff personnel can disrupt an entire organization (Loyald, 2000). There are many reasons for conflict. Poor human relations, overlapping authority and responsibility, and misuse of staff personnel by top management are all primary reasons for feelings of resentment between line and staff personnel. This resentment can result in various departments viewing the organization from a narrow stance instead of looking at the organization as a whole.

Fortunately, there are several ways to minimize conflict. One way is to integrate line and staff personnel into a work team. The success of the work team depends on how well each group can work together in efforts to increase productivity and performance. Another solution is to ensure that the areas of responsibility and authority of both line and staff personnel are clearly defined. With clearly defined lines of authority and responsibility, each group may better understand their role in the organization. A third way to minimize conflict is to hold both line and staff personnel accountable for the results of their own activities. In other words, line personnel should not be entirely responsible for poor performance resulting from staff personnel advice.

Line-and-staff organizations combine the direct flow of authority present within a line organization with staff departments that offer support and advice. A clear chain of command is a consistent characteristic among line-and-staff organizational structures. Problems of conflict may arise, but organizations that clearly delineate responsibility can help minimize such conflict.

### **Merits of Line and Staff Organization**

In this context, there are certain benefits to be derived from the knowledge of line and staff organizational analysis. According to Omolaja, (2011), the benefits includes:

- **Encourages independence in the workplace:** Professionals in staff roles can be self-sufficient in the work environment. Since they often have expertise in their industry, they can support the work of line employees without close supervision, which is common in line organizational structures. The independence can enable staff employees to be more



productive, allowing them to increase their confidence in their roles and lead their line counterparts in the right direction.

- **Provides Expertise to Occupational Tasks:** Another advantage of the line-staff organization is the presence of experts in the company. Line employees can handle their workloads under the qualified advisement of professionals with industry knowledge. The expertise can enhance the business's operations. An example of a staff professional is a human resources manager. They may understand employment law, organizational budgeting and company policies more than any other employee in the organization. They can advise line managers on best practices for communicating with line personnel, addressing their needs and recruiting new employees to the department. Their guidance enables the line supervisors to adopt a better management style. Public relations practitioners represent another example of staff managers. They're experts at building relationships with the media and preserving a company's reputation. They can work with the marketing division, a group of line employees, and recommend ways to attract positive publicity and improve the company's standing with the public. Their advice improves the promotional strategies the line employees release.
- **Relief to line of executives-** In a line and staff organization, the advice and counselling which is provided to the line executives divides the work between the two. The line executive can concentrate on the execution of plans and they get relieved of dividing their attention to many areas.
- **Expert advice-** The line and staff organization facilitates expert advice to the line executive at the time of need. The planning and investigation which is related to different matters can be done by the staff specialist and line officers can concentrate on execution of plans.
- **Benefit of Specialization-** Line and staff through division of whole concern into two types of authority divides the enterprise into parts and functional areas. This way every officer or official can concentrate in its own area.
- **Better co-ordination-** Line and staff organization through specialization is able to provide better decision making and concentration remains in few hands. This feature helps in bringing co- ordination in work as every official is concentrating in their own area.
- **Benefits of Research and Development-** Through the advice of specialized staff, the line executives, and the line executives get time to execute plans by taking productive decisions which are helpful for a concern. This gives a wide scope to the line executive to bring innovations and go for research work in those areas. This is possible due to the presence of staff specialists.
- **Training-** Due to the presence of staff specialists and their expert advice serves as ground for training to line officials. Line executives can give due concentration to their decision making. This in itself is a training ground for them.





- **Balanced decisions-** The factor of specialization which is achieved by line staff helps in bringing co- ordination. This relationship automatically ends up the line official to take better and balanced decision.
- **Unity of action-** Unity of action is a result of unified control. Control and its affectivity take place when co- ordination is present in the concern. In the line and staff authority all the officials have got independence to make decisions. This serves as effective control in the whole enterprise.
- **Allows greater focus on core responsibilities:** The flexibility of a line-staff organization can decrease the workload of line employees. In a traditional organizational structure, leaders may depend on line professionals to apply industry knowledge to their work while satisfying the company's core needs. Yet, a line-staff structure alleviates the need to do both. Instead, the staff employees share the responsibility of gathering information about the field, which allows line members to focus on attaining the company's purpose. For instance, the purpose of a law firm is to provide legal counsel to clients. The lawyers represent the line, since they're the professionals who research the cases and present their arguments in the courts. Thanks to the addition of staff, the lawyers have legal aides to assess the quality of their arguments and help them improve them. The lawyers can concentrate on their core tasks.

#### **Demerits of Line and Staff Organization**

- **Lack of understanding-** In a line and staff organization, there are two authorities flowing at one time. This results in the confusion between the two. As a result, the workers are not able to understand as to who is their commanding authority. Hence the problem of understanding can be a hurdle in effective running.
- **Lack of sound advice-** The line official get used to the expertise advice of the staff. At times the staff specialist also provides wrong decisions which the line executive has to consider. This can affect the efficient running of the enterprise (Fatter, 2001).
- **Line and staff conflicts-** Line and staff are two authorities which are flowing at the same time. The factors of designations, status influence sentiments which are related to their relation, can pose a distress on the minds of the employees. This leads to minimizing of co- ordination which hampers a concern's working.
- **Misuses the expertise of staff members:** Another disadvantage of a line-staff organization is misusing the expertise of staff professionals. Companies may hire industry experts to complete the work of line employees and not give field advice, which can defeat the purpose of the line-staff structure. During the recruitment process, organizational leaders can discuss details of the position and hire professionals accordingly.
- **Causes authority to overlap:** A drawback of a line-staff organization is the possibility that personnel would be unable to differentiate between the authority of staff supervisors and line supervisors. The overlapping leadership can cause confusion in task assignments



and work expectations. To remedy the disadvantage, businesses can inform lower-level employees of the identity of their direct managers. They can also advise staff managers to provide recommendations only to their line counterparts, allowing the line managers to direct entry-level staff without interference.

- **Costs money to fund two types of employees:** Paying the salaries of both line and staff professionals can be a costly endeavour. Managerial positions often garner higher wages, which requires more money to attract qualified candidates. Likewise, staff employees may request greater salaries due to their industry knowledge. The more employees companies hire, the more funds they may need to allocate toward salaries and benefits packages. If reserving funds is a priority for your organization, it may be beneficial to hire one staff member at a time to experience the benefits of a line-staff structure without committing a bulk of your financial resources.
- **Costly:** In line and staff concern, the concerns have to maintain the high remuneration of staff specialist. This proves to be costly for a concern with limited finance.
- **Assumption of authority:** The power of concern is with the line official but the staffs dislikes it as they are the one more in mental work.
- **Staffs steal the show:** In a line and staff concern, the higher returns are considered to be a product of staff advice and counselling.

### **Conflict and Unhealthy Competition**

In the contemporary organizations, the conflict, friction and unhealthy competition that often erupt between line managers and their staff counterparts can be attributed to a number of factors including the following (Omolaja, 2011):

1. The staff managers usually consider themselves as experts and specialists and hence, they feel that their opinions and contributions must be accepted, respected and implemented by line managers. Line managers tend to jetsam the suggestions and advice from the staff manager even though such ideas might be very useful just because the staff mangers in most cases claim the superiority of knowledge and experts when compared to their line counterparts.
2. Sometimes, the line managers may claim that their staff counterparts contribute no value to their product, rather, they are considered as meddlesome individuals who are just interested in the responsibilities of the line mangers.
3. Line managers are usually people of some matured age with a lot of experience and expertise. Hence, they do not morally take to the advice and suggestions from the staff mangers who are usually of lower ages and perhaps experience apparently for the age differentials.
4. Line mangers and their staff counterparts usually compete among themselves to be rewarded for good performance and also to shift blame over one another for unacceptable performance. This always lead to friction and conflict among them.



## **Measures Adopted For Implementing a Line-Staff Organizational Structure**

In building a line-staff organization in a company, the following ways are considered as seen by Andrews and Zarmes (2006):

### **Appoint qualified staff members:**

The qualifications of your staff employees can influence the quality of the support they give your line members. Contemplate the goals you have for your organization and the tasks line professionals fulfil. It might be helpful to seek industry experts who can handle some of the line employee's current responsibilities while suggesting ways to enhance the company's functions. For example, if a line member processes customers' orders in the warehouse and performs safety audits, then you might hire a safety specialist to check the safety of the warehouse and implement policies to avoid workplace injuries.

Depending on the size of your organization, consider recruiting multiple staff members to provide expertise to every area of the company. For instance, you can appoint a human resources representative, public relations manager and quality assurance coordinator in the same company, especially since they have different areas of expertise, all of which can help your business grow.

### **Establish a clear line of authority**

Once you've hired staff employees, the second step is to establish a clear line of authority between the staff and line managers and the rest of your company's personnel. It's essential that lower-level employees understand who they report to, which can maintain cohesive communication and prevent interpersonal conflict (Ford, 2010). Making the authority clear can also be beneficial if you have multiple managers in one division. Explain to the personnel which manager delegates tasks and which manager helps personnel carry out their tasks. As work projects begin, consider reinforcing the chain of command to give clarification.

### **Encourage collaboration between line and staff employees**

A method to prevent conflict in the workplace is to convince line and staff professionals to work together. You can remind them they share a goal, which is to fulfil the purpose of the organization. Although each position contributes to the mission differently, their willingness to collaborate can enable them to handle their responsibilities effectively. Consider creating team-building exercises to encourage line and staff employees to build productive work connections. You can also define their work tasks more clearly so the employees understand their positions don't interfere with the other.

### **Ways of avoiding conflicts among the line and staff managers**

The ways of avoiding conflict in a line staff organizational structure as opined by Caitan (2000) includes:



1. The duties, responsibilities and areas of possible jurisdiction are specified for each position holder.
2. Accountability and responsibility mechanisms are clearly established and specified.
3. Individuals and groups within the organization are made to be aware what is expected of them and what is expected of the others perhaps through appropriate program of education and training of employees.
4. Positions are rotated and/or shifted among the line and staff office holders.

## **Conclusion**

From the discussion so far, it would be observed that line authority makes a manager to instruct subordinates on what to do. Here, authority flows vertically down through the structure. This is said to be a direct relationship between superior and subordinate officers, and also each subordinate is made responsible to only one person (i.e. unity of command). Again, a staff relationship subsists from the appointment of personal aids to senior members of staff. Such category of staff, however, usually have little or no direct authority in their own right except as an extension of their superior. This implies that except in situations where there is delegated authority and assignment of responsibility for some specific functions, there naturally exist no formal relationship between the personal assistant or aid and other staff members. Functional relationships refer to relationship which subsists between people in advisory or specialist positions and between the managers and their subordinates. The specialist renders a common service to all divisions of the firm but has no direct authority over the people making use of the services. The specialist, however, has a line relationship with his own superior as well as the subordinate staff working with him. Meanwhile, lateral relationships are the ones which subsist between people on the same level along the ladder of responsibility in the hierarchical structure of the enterprise but in different divisions or departments. Although such relationships may be formally defined in practice, they are of the informal type which are usually based on contact and consultation, and are necessary for the maintenance of coordination control and effective corporate performance in the organization.

## **Suggestions**

From the above discussions, the following suggestions are given:

1. There should spelt rules and duties of the line and the staff personnel's in the organization to avoid conflict among them.
2. A general overseer should be appointed to coordinate and integrate the operations and functions of both the line managers and those arts.
3. There should be regular of the line and staff personnel on their different functions and ways of complementing each other.



4. The staff officers should not force the line officers to take their advice, hence they are not directly involved in the execution stage.
5. For a better productivity and cooperation, the positions should be rotated to acquaint every solid knowledge on the various operations of the organization.

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