

## Span of control

**Definition:** Span of control refers to the number of subordinates under the manager's direct control.

A span of control is a concept that describes the number of people that are managed by someone. It is a chain of command notion where the numbers of subordinates are properly identified to understand a manager's reach.

### Factors affecting span of control

These are the factors affecting span of control:

**1) Geographical dispersion,** if the branches of a business are widely dispersed, then the manager will find it difficult to supervise each of them; as such the span of control will be smaller.

**2) Capability of employees:** if employees are highly capable, need little supervision, and can be left on their own, e.g., **Theory Y** type of people, they need not be supervised closely as they are motivated and take initiative to work; as such, the span of control may be broader.

**3) Capability of managers,** an experienced manager with good understanding of the tasks, good knowledge of the workers and good relationships with the workers, will be able to supervise more workers

**4) Value-add of the manager:** a manager that is adding value by training and developing new skills in the workers will need a narrower span of control than one who is focused only on performance management (this is the reverse of the capability of workers point above)

**5) Similarity of task:** if the tasks that the subordinates are performing are similar, then the span of control can be wider, as the manager can supervise them all at the same time.

**6) Volume of other tasks:** if the manager has other responsibilities, such as membership of committees, involvement in other projects, liaising with stakeholders, the number of direct reports will need to be smaller

**7) Required administrative tasks:** if the manager is required to have regular face-to-face meetings, complete appraisal and development plans, discuss remuneration benefits, write job descriptions and employment contracts, explain employment policy changes, and other administrative task:, span of control may be reduced.

**8) Business process streamlining,** effectiveness, and efficiency can reduce the span of control.

## **Span of control is of two types:**

### **1. Narrow span of control:**

Narrow Span of control means a single manager or supervisor oversees few subordinates. This gives rise to a tall organizational structure.

#### **Advantages:**

- Close supervision
- Close control of subordinates
- Fast communication

#### **Disadvantages:**

- Too much control
- Many levels of management
- High costs
- Excessive distance between lowest level and highest level

### **2. Wide span of control:**

Wide span of control means a single manager or supervisor oversees a large number of subordinates. This gives rise to a flat organizational structure.

#### **Advantages:**

- More Delegation of Authority
- Development of Managers
- Clear policies

#### **Disadvantages:**

- Overloaded supervisors
- Danger of superiors loss of control
- Requirement of highly trained managerial personnel
- Block in decision making