

Line and staff authority

# Key Difference – Line Authority vs Staff Authority

- The key difference between line authority and staff authority is that **line authority reflects superior-subordinate relationships characterized by the power of decision making** whereas staff authority refers to the right to advice on improving the effectiveness for line employees in performing their duties. Authority is related to decision-making power, which is a key aspect in any type of organization.
- Line authority and staff authority conforms to two types of employees; line staff and staff personnel. The role of line staff and staff personnel are different from one another; thus, the authority levels vary as well.

- **What is Line Authority?**
- Line authority is the type of authority that reflects superior-subordinate relationships.
- This is the most fundamental authority in an organization characterized by power of decision making.
- Line authority is the predominant component used in companies with a line organizational structure where direct lines of authority flow from top management, and the lines of responsibility flow in the opposite direction.

- **What is Line Authority?**
- Line authority is a top-down approach to management where the decisions are made by the top management and communicated to the lower level staff in a hierarchy (a system in which employees are ranked according to relative status).
- Line managers are assigned to manage teams that operate with the intention of achieving an intended result.
- Organizations with line authority allow better exertion of unified control.

- Line authority is a less complicated way of allocating responsibility since every employee is clear regarding his or her position and clear lines of authority and responsibility is allocated to them.
- However, since this is a top down approach, it often results in one-way communication.
- Decisions are taken by the top management and complaints and suggestions of lower level staff may not be communicated back to the top authority.
- Lower level staff are closer to the customers. Thus, their experience and suggestions should be incorporated in decision-making.

- **What is Staff Authority?**
- **Staff authority refers to the right to advice on improving the effectiveness for line employees in performing their duties.**
- Staff personnel are generally independent employees who do not report to line managers, and they can be external staff who are temporarily employed to perform a particular task.
- These are highly specialized individuals, thus are employed for their expert knowledge and the ability to add value to the company.

- **What is Staff Authority?**
- Staff personnel may not be employed by all types of organizations.
- Since they are highly specialized, the cost of recruiting them is higher. Thus, they may not be affordable for small organizations.
- However, the larger the organization, the greater the need and ability to employ staff personnel since there is a need for expertise in diversified areas.
- Thus, the size of the organization is a significant factor in determining whether staff personnel should be employed.

- Staff personnel may work part time for the organization, providing their expertise. Some of them may even provide the organization with an advisory role rather than engaging in business operations.
- Staff managers complement the work of line managers since line managers can focus more time on routine activities and related decision making when specialized work is carried out by staff personnel.
- However, staff authority is not granted the power to take decisions that will affect the company as a whole, only for the specific area that they are responsible for.

- It is vital that both line and staff personnel work closely in collaboration to ensure efficiency of operations.
- However, in practice, conflicts between line and staff personnel can be seen due to sometimes overlapping duties which intern reduces the effectiveness of both.