

# Relationship between Job Role and Identity Change - A Survey Research

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## Abstract

People's personalities and identities are very malleable and can be influenced by factors such as the environment they live and work in, different roles as well as different expectations that society puts on them. This might lead them to change the way they behave, by how they're expected to behave and how they would behave when their roles are changed. The study aims at exploring how job role changes have led to changes in identities, in the form of how they deal with themselves as well as others, such as while managing teams, decision making, conflicts and managing other people or how they behave in their personal lives. A survey was conducted on individuals from the corporate sector who have more than ten years of working experience and recently have a job role change. The survey consists of a 13-item questionnaire. The survey was completed by 171 individuals. In statistical analysis, descriptive statistical methods were used. It was found out that job role changes led to changes in some aspects of their identities like decision-making skills, and personality traits and these changes have changed them for the better. Some aspects do not change after changes in job roles like their relationship with family members and friendship at the workplace. Results showed that individual differences play an important role as it depends on person to person how they cope with and respond to the changes at the workplace.

*Keywords: Role Change, Identity, Corporate, Organization, Behavior, Job Titles, Positions*

## Introduction

When junior associates in a law firm are promoted to senior associates, their roles change.

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As junior associates, they could be asked to handle more pro bono cases as compared to corporate clients of the firm. Once promoted to senior associates they could be given important clients which contribute a large amount of revenue to the law firm. Within all this, there's not just a change of roles, but changes in behavior as well which is due to a change in identity. Professor Herminia Ibarra (2018) of the London Business School, claims that work transitions, even thrilling ones you've selected, can bring up a lot of unanticipated emotions. Changing jobs from one that is well-known and has aided in the formation of your personality presents a variety of obstacles. According to Ibarra, it's critical to realize how these changes are affecting someone but to keep moving forward, they need to use this new role as an opportunity to reinvent themselves.

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This is what this paper also seeks to examine; once roles and titles change, can our identities be changed as well?

### **Roles, Titles, Identities, Organisations**

Oxford dictionary defines roles as “The function or position that someone has or is expected to have in an organization, in society, or a relationship”. But it also depends on the context. A role is a set of different things that contain specific tasks, duties, and behaviors that help the organization reach a particular common goal. All the roles are assigned to people. Even different roles can be assigned to two people who have the same designation in the company. If there are two managers, their roles for them could be different. These roles help in specifying what tasks and duties a person has, and how they can contribute to the organization with the same. Roles can be based on the behavioral expectations of a person. In an organization, role change can be abrupt as well as gradual. Roles are important as they help shape the structure of how an organization functions in the long run. The word “roles” is a verb. This indicates that the person must perform the behavior or functions of that role to achieve specific expectations. A CEO of a company, for example, is required to treat his employees in a certain way. But he can't act the same way around the company's board of directors. This is where the importance of context comes into play. Being a CEO entails a set of responsibilities as well that must be fulfilled for the company to stay afloat.

Titles in a corporate setup are given to people so that the responsibilities, roles, and duties of that person are clear. They also help in differentiating the hierarchy within an organization. Examples of titles could be CEO, COO, CIO, and so on. Titles are nouns, and within these nouns include the “verbs”, which are our roles and responsibilities. These titles form an important part of an employee's identity. What is an identity? Self-meanings, in a way, are our identities. Because of roles, our identities can develop. Identity changes can occur in people's daily lives and can be due to severe life transitions. Identity defines one's uniqueness. It can include a person's ethnicity, gender, culture, race as well as occupation. Identities can include personal

identity, as well as group identity. Group identity means tying yourself to an institution-possibly an organization you work for. Personal identity can include behaviors, beliefs, values, etc. as well. Within these verbs and nouns, lies our identity. This paper aims to find out once these verbs and nouns change, whether that leads to an identity change as well.

An organization as defined by the Oxford dictionary is “A group of people who form a business, club, etc. together to achieve a particular aim to work for a business.” Organizations are of various types – sole proprietorship, private, partnership, and public an entrepreneur assembles certain factors like labor, capital, land, etc to create a production output. Individuals have different roles and responsibilities in the whole process. Despite having different roles and responsibilities, they share the same goal of business, which is given by the company. This is what an organization is. The division of roles and responsibilities in a properly structured manner, to achieve that certain goal. The organization has personnel who help run it daily, as each person has different kinds of functions to fulfill. The responsibilities are fixed, and so is the authority who gives out the orders. It's more of a blueprint to achieve the common business goal.

### **How Promotions Work**

When an organization has to hire a person, it's taken into account whether the KSAOs (Knowledge, Skills, Abilities, and Other Characteristics) of the job fit properly with those of the person. When the person gets hired, they have to complete certain tasks that contribute to the long-term goal of the organization; the KRAs (Key Result Areas). They're also specified to the employees so that they're aware of what they're signing up for. Once hired, individuals strive for promotion. The amount of excitement and dedication displayed by one's employees is one of the driving aspects of a very successful organization. What motivates these employees, though? Money, title change, additional responsibilities, and more so the appreciation for hard work is just as vital. Promotion is possibly the most tangible way for an organization to thank an employee for their

hard work. When an employer advances an employee up the organizational hierarchy, this is referred to as a job promotion. A promotion often permits a person to advance to a higher position within the company, with increased responsibilities and authority. Usually, on average, a person gets promoted within 3 years of working at the same place.

Different types of promotions could happen, with the first one being the 'Horizontal Promotion'. In this type of promotion, the employee gets a lot of benefits like an increase in salary without actually changing a lot of their roles and responsibilities. The only reason for being rewarded is their ability to excel at their tasks better than other employees. The next type of promotion is the 'Vertical Promotion', which is the traditional promotion that everybody is aware of. It includes increasing the salaries and the benefits of the employees along with the titles and roles and responsibilities. The third type of promotion is the 'Dry Promotion', which is when the roles and responsibilities of the employees increase without it reflected in either their title or the benefits that the company has to offer. The fourth type of promotion is 'Open/Closed promotion'. Open promotion is when the position that is up for grabs is open to all employees, whereas a closed promotion would be one where the position that is up for grabs is limited to several people who have been shortlisted by the company.

An example of normal employees being promoted to managers could be a relevant example of figuring out how promotions work. They start growing into the role of being a team leader. These roles include developing strategies to reach a common goal, providing any training required to the team members, communicating with the members, and so on. After performing these tasks, certain expectations start developing to demonstrate behaviors that are expected from the team leader. A team leader is expected to take proper accountability for whatever business they conduct. They're also expected to go a little above and beyond and engage in behavior that isn't a part of their job description. They're also expected to treat everybody fairly, as well as treat everybody

respectfully. These expectations are built upon them because of their supervisors, peers, senior-level employees, and employees working under them directly. This causes a shift in behavior inside the company, which occurs due to a shift in roles and responsibilities. At some point, people start letting their job titles define their identities and self-image. People want others to recognize them for who they are, and for what they're doing.

### **Literature review**

Burke (2006) conducted a study to find out whether the identities of a person influence how a role is played out or not and whether the discrepancies between the meaning of the identities and the meanings of the roles lead to a change or not. He studied this in the context of spousal identity, and what roles husbands and wives have when they're married to each other. The findings reveal that when there is a disparity between the meaning of the spousal identity and the meanings of spousal role performance, the discrepancy has a negative influence on the meanings of spousal role performance in the next year that follows, which results in a reduction in the discrepancy. If an individual does more housework in one year than the meanings of the spousal identity standards suggest, he or she will do less the following year. If the person does not engage in as much as expected, the traditionally feminine spousal role behavior grows the following year. Hence, slowly and steadily, identities tend to change according to the situations and the roles to be performed.

Amiot, Terry, and McKimmie (2012) conducted a study during a merger between two hospitals. One survey was conducted 12 months before the merger, and the other one was conducted 12 months after the merger. The survey let the participants express their opinions about how they felt about the merger. The negative effects of the merger were most pronounced for employees of the low-status company throughout the merger, according to social identity theory and previous merger research: Higher identity danger, weaker identification with the newly amalgamated organization, and lower views of a common ingroup identity were all reported by these individuals. Members of the lower-status

premerger group also saw fewer parallels between the two organizations before the merger. Identification with the new amalgamated organization and views of a common ingroup identity decreased over time, according to the changes in the identification measures. These results may be due to a self-anchoring effect.

Carter (2017) conducted a study about how self-perceptions of identity change can relate to depression in terms of person, role, and social identity. It was tested through a survey, in which there were 12 items in total. There were 4 items for how the participant saw themselves as a unique person (moral, attractive), role player (friend, daughter), or group member (college identity, church identity). He found out that the identity change for person and role identities was positive. The participants felt that their own identities and role identities were very high. For instance, they felt like they were very moral, or they were good students. Most of the participants also experienced a shift in their identities in the past six months of taking the survey, but it was more of a positive shift for them because of their varied experiences. When a person believes that the nature of their recent experience of identity change in a person, role, or social identity is progressive, they are less depressed. But the overall data shows that the more severe one's reported recent identity change in person, role, or social identity, the higher one's level of depression is.

Professor Gregorson and Lehman (2021) of MIT Sloan talk about how organizational change can disrupt a sense of self. According to them, managers tend to focus on task change during a transition more than role change. Task change is something that a lot of employees are used to changing what their job content is, and how they need to shift it. They tend to do it consciously because it's what's required from their jobs. But, when people are going through a major transition at work, the role adjustment to be made is much harder for those people, as they're already conforming to the previously existing roles. Changing roles is something they've never thought of. So, changing roles would mean that they'd have to change their behavior and, in a way, change their identity.

## **Rationale**

People begin to own these roles and incorporate them into their identities, not realizing that they don't own the role but only the tasks, duties, and responsibilities that come with it. They may also not own anything at all. Something about all of these contributes to the formation of a kind of self-image, and people begin to identify with this self-image. When this kind of dilution occurs, it leads to a lack of differentiation between the person they are and the part they are doing, resulting in incongruencies within themselves. In their mental hierarchy, this begins to build a subconscious cycle.

Because of this subconscious loop, they are sometimes locked in the cycle even when they are promoted or their superiors change. For example, a manager may be closely working with a Vice President (VP) within a function, with no hierarchical layer between the Manager and the VP. When the VP asks the manager to help manage certain things required for any task, the manager sometimes assumes the role of a VP within their mental hierarchy. When a person's mental hierarchy shifts, it can affect their day-to-day conduct, decision-making skills, people management, and dispute resolution. One more example could be that of a supervisor in school and the Vice Principal. In the Vice Principal's absence, the supervisor assumes that role. This gets embedded in their mental hierarchy as well. Then once it shifts again, it affects the daily life behavior of the supervisor as well. The objective of this study is to dig further into these layers and determine whether identity change occurs as a result of any role change. And how does this show up in the performing of roles for a person?

## **Method**

### **Objectives**

To study how job role changes have led to changes in identities, in the form of how they deal with themselves as well as others, such as while managing teams, decision making, conflicts and managing other people or how they behave in their personal lives.

### **Hypotheses**

Alternate Hypothesis (H1): Job role change at the workplace leads to identity change

(changes in personality, skills, behavior, relationship with family and at the workplace).

Null Hypothesis (H0): There will not be any change in identity after the changes in job role at the workplace.

### **Participants**

For this study, a total number of 171 participants were given the survey. The participants were all Indian, no matter where they resided- whether they lived in India or abroad. The eligibility to participate in this survey required at least 10 years of job experience in a corporate setup. By corporate setup, it means any organization. There was no preference for which industry the employees worked in, or what was the function of that industry. There was no preference when it came to gender, all genders could attempt the survey.

### **Tools**

A 13-item survey questionnaire was invented having questions related to personality traits, skills, behavior, relationship with family, and friendships at the workplace. The items were

rated on a 5-point Likert scale with 5 corresponding to when a person strongly agrees to an item and 1 when a person strongly disagrees.

### **Procedure**

All the participants were given the survey online. The survey was made in a google form format, in which each item was required to fill by the participant. The participants were made aware that their responses will be kept strictly confidential. The research design was a randomized measures design. The data that was collected was analyzed using descriptive forms of statistical measure.

### **Result**

Data was collected from 171 adults for this study. The individuals who worked in the corporate sector and recently had job role changes were asked to fill the survey related to how this role change has led to changes in their identities, in the form of how they deal with themselves as well as others, such as while managing teams, decision making, conflicts and managing other people or how they behave in their personal lives.

**Table1***Frequency and percentage of responses to survey questions*

Items	Responses					
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	No response <sup>a</sup>
1. Did you find yourself going back to the old responsibilities you had?	26 (15.2%)	50 (29.2%)	34 (19.9%)	53 (31%)	8 (4.7%)	-
2. Did you feel a sort of discomfort after finding out you were promoted because of bigger responsibilities?	45 (26.3%)	80 (46.8%)	8 (4.7%)	32 (18.7%)	5 (2.9%)	1
3. Were you more comfortable working on your own?	6 (3.5%)	40 (23.4%)	35 (20.5%)	49 (28.7%)	41 (24%)	-
4. Were you more comfortable leading a team?	2 (1.2%)	9 (5.3%)	19 (11.1%)	58 (33.9%)	83 (48.5%)	-
5. Do you think the promotion or change in job roles has changed you for the better?	0	6 (3.5%)	6 (3.5%)	63 (36.8%)	96 (56.1%)	-
6. Do you think the promotion or change in job roles has changed you for the worse?	83 (48.5%)	74 (43.5%)	7 (4.1%)	7 (4.1%)	0	-

7.	Are there any traits that you now have, after a change in job roles? If yes, are they a part of you in your daily life?	3 (1.8%)	10 (5.8%)	28 (16.4%)	100 (58.5%)	29 (17%)	1
8.	Are you more assertive after a change in job roles?	0	10 (5.8%)	30 (17.5%)	84 (49.1%)	47 (27.5%)	-
9.	Did you need support when your job roles changed?	6 (3.5%)	21 (12.3%)	31 (18.1%)	88 (51.5%)	25 (14.6%)	-
10.	Were your decision-making skills affected after the change in job roles or promotion?	17 (9.9%)	38 (22.2%)	14 (8.2%)	75 (43.9%)	27 (15.8%)	-
11.	Did the change in job roles affect your behavior with your family in any way?	34 (19.9%)	55 (32.2%)	25 (14.6%)	44 (25.7%)	12 (7%)	1
12.	Did the change in job roles affect your friendships in the corporation?	24 (14%)	56 (32.7%)	20 (11.7%)	56 (32.7%)	15 (8.8%)	-
13.	When a superior asked for your help, were you able to segregate your actual tasks and roles from the additional help required by a supervisor?	1 (0.6%)	19 (11.1%)	21 (12.3%)	96 (56.1%)	32 (18.7%)	2

Note. Percentages are presented in parentheses. <sup>a</sup> No responses include the frequency of individuals who have not responded to that item.

The survey consists of 13 questions related to the decision-making skills, personality, behavior, and relationship with parents and friends after job role changes. The frequency and percentage of responses on the Likert scale are given in Table 1.

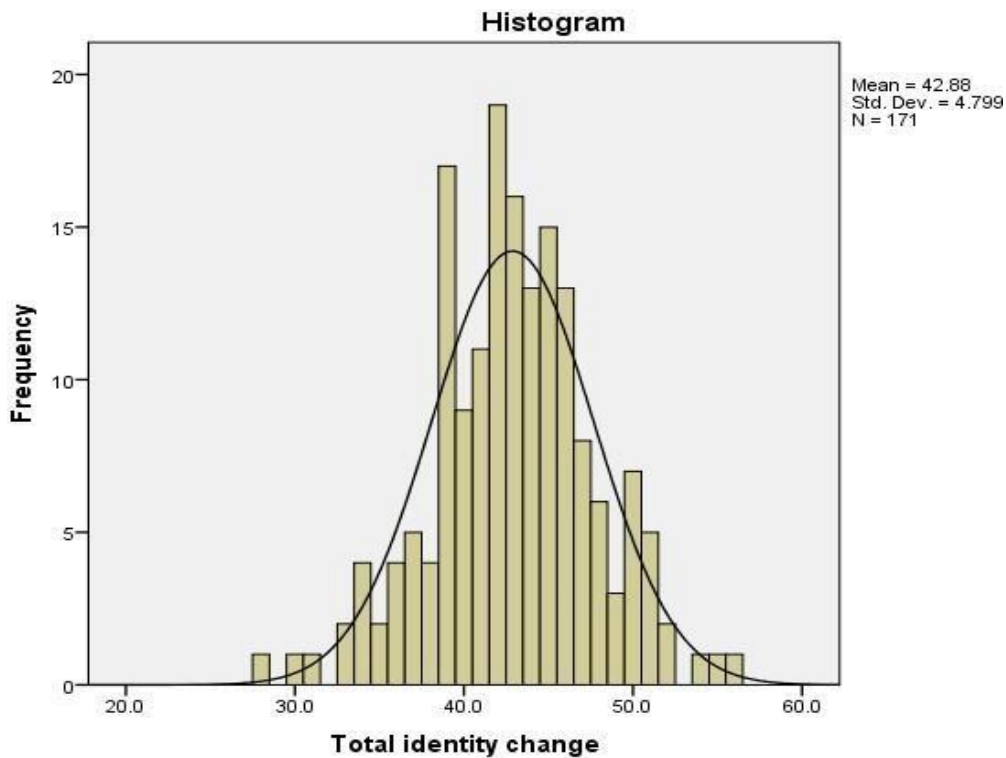
**Table 2**

*Descriptive statistics of total identity change*

	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Median	Mode	SD	Skewness	Std error Skewness
Total Identity Change	171	28	56	42.877	43	42	4.7985	-.114	0.186

Note. SD= Standard Deviation; Min.= Minimum value; Max.= Maximum value

The descriptive statistics of total identity change after job role change are given in Table 2. The total score on the survey ranges from 28-56, with a mean value of 42.877 (SD= 4.7985), a mode value of 42, and a median value of 43. The skewness is -.114 and its standard error is 0.186.



The above graph shows the histogram or the responses given by participants as well as a probability curve drawn on it. Since the skewness is negative i.e., -.114 and its standard error is 0.186 which is between -1.95 and 1.95. It means we failed to prove that skewness exists. As the mean, median, and mode are also approximately similar, we can say that the curve is normally distributed.



## Discussion

The purpose of the study is to find out how role change has led to changes in their identities, in the form of how they deal with themselves as well as others, such as while managing teams, decision making, conflicts and managing other people or how they behave in their personal lives.

A role is a collection of activities that includes particular responsibilities, actions, and behaviors that aid an organization in achieving a particular objective. People are assigned different roles. Even two individuals with the same designation within the company can be given entirely different roles. The roles of the two managers may differ if there are two. These roles assist in defining a person's tasks and responsibilities as well as how they can contribute to the organization.

Identity is the personality, beliefs, and behavior that characterize a person or a group. Chreim et al. (2007) defined professional identity as associated with the performance of a professional role and is defined by an individual as a member of a profession. The close relationship between how people view themselves and the work they do as professionals is a crucial component of professional identity.

Ibarra (2018) contended that changing jobs, even ones that you've chosen to be exciting, can cause a range of unexpected emotions. There are many challenges involved when switching to a new position from one that was well-known and aided in defining your identity. Ibarra argues that it's critical to acknowledge how these changes are affecting you while continuing to move forward and even seizing the chance to reinvent yourself in your new position.

From the above statistical analysis, and the results obtained, it can be seen that 31% of the individuals agree that they find themselves going back to their old responsibilities. It means that they find themselves more comfortable with the old responsibilities and thus resist the change. Currie et al. (2012) found that professionals find ways to avoid new work practices when they are faced with the possibility of ones that conflict with their established professional identities. 80% of the

individuals disagree when they were asked whether they felt any sort of discomfort after a job role change because of bigger responsibilities.

56.1% of individuals strongly agree that changes in job roles have changed them for the better while only 4.1% agree that it has changed them for the worse. On the other hand, 48.5% strongly disagree with the same. Kyratsis et al. (2017) in their research showed that professionals who believe their new work is valuable may change who they are in tandem with changes to their work. Professionals may be required to adopt new work practices where they initially do not see the value and where the required new practices are not well aligned with their identity as they face job role changes in organizations.

It can be seen that 43.9% of individuals agree that job role changes affect their decision-making skills. This means that when anyone has a change in their job role, decision-making also gets affected. Pratt et al. (2006) conducted a study on medical professionals and found that people gradually change their professional identities over time as a result of learning new work skills because their views of themselves change.

The above results also show that 49.1% of individuals agree that they become more assertive after a job role change. 58.5% of the individuals agree that they also experienced change in personality traits after change in their job role and these traits are now part of their daily life. Wu (2016) found that the amount of time required, and the stress of the job can alter personality over time. Work design is typically thought of as a motivating factor to influence employees' work behavior or as a strategy to promote occupational health. 56.1% of individuals agree that they can manage the balance between their actual tasks and additional help asked from their supervisor. Brown (2015) found that in times of stress, ambiguity, and tension people try to reconstruct their work identities to maintain consistency and get a sense of the situation.

There are a few items on which responses do not give a clear result like approximately the same percentage of individuals strongly agree

when asked if they prefer to work in a team (28.7%) and alone (33.9%). When asked if they feel that changes in job roles impact their relationship with family, the maximum percentage disagrees with that.

The survey has a total of 13 questions. The score can range from 13 to 75 because the lowest score for response is 1 (Strongly disagree) and the highest score is 5 (strongly agree). Their average will be 39. The total score obtained by participants ranges from 28-56. The mean of the scores is 42.877 which is higher than the average ideal mean i.e. 39. This means job role changes in corporate setup did lead to changes in identity.

From the results, it can be concluded that job role changes did impact the identity, but it does not change every aspect of identity. Individual differences do play an important role as it depends on person to person how they cope with and respond to the changes in their job role.

### **Limitations**

The fact that this study was conducted through google forms is a limitation in itself. The experimenter isn't there to monitor the non-verbal behavior of the respondents, which can be of huge help to find out how the participant is perceiving the questions. The responses can also be biased in a socially desirable manner, which means that the respondents would've marked some options which they feel are appropriate in society's opinion. The study is also limited to the Indian context only, which means the results don't have any external validity globally. There's a huge cultural difference between people of Indian and Asian descent, as compared to those in the West. This study is also low on ecological validity because, in the new covid-19 era, a lot of people are working from home. So, the results of this study might not apply a few years from now when things get back to normal and people are traveling for work every day.

### **Implications**

The above results showed that there is an identity change but the job role changes at the workplace do not change every aspect related to identity. It depends on individuals on how they respond to and cope with these changes.

A maximum percentage of individuals agree that changes in job roles have changed them for the better. Moreover, many individuals also agree that they need support when job roles changed. So, corporations can provide training, mentoring, coaching, and counselling during the entire transition process. The management can also provide enough time for the employees to understand their new responsibilities. The organizations should incorporate the changes slowly so that the employees can make a proper balance between old responsibilities and new responsibilities and thus ensure a smooth transition.

### **Conclusion**

This study explored if roles change leads to identity change. The participants were all Indians, residing in different parts of the world. The results indicate that job role change can lead to changes in identity, but it does not impact every aspect. Maximum individuals feel job role change did change them for the better. Job role change leads to the addition of some traits in their personality which are now part of their daily life. The changes in their role also impacted their skills for example they are more assertive now and have better decision-making skills. They can manage their actual task and additional responsibilities in a better way after a job role change. But individuals also feel that it has not impacted their behavior in the family. The responses to a few items did not give a clear result. This indicates that individual differences play an important role in how a person copes and responds to these changes.

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## Appendices

### Role Changes and Identity Change Survey Questionnaire

5-point Likert scale

Strongly disagree=1

Disagree=2

Neutral= 3

Agree=4

Strongly agree=5

1. Did you find yourself going back to the old responsibilities you had?
2. Did you feel a sort of discomfort after finding out you were promoted because of bigger responsibilities?
3. Were you more comfortable working on your own?
4. Were you more comfortable leading a team?
5. Do you think the promotion or change in job roles has changed you for the better?
6. Do you think the promotion or change in job roles has changed you for the worse?
7. Are there any traits that you now have, after a change in job roles? If yes, are they a part of you in your daily life?
8. Are you more assertive after a change in job roles?
9. Did you need support when your job roles changed?
10. Were your decision-making skills affected after the change in job roles or promotion?
11. Did the change in job roles affect your behavior with your family in any way?
12. Did the change in job roles affect your friendships in the corporation?
13. When a superior asked for your help, were you able to segregate your actual tasks and roles from the additional help required by a supervisor?