What Causes Poor Performance?
In several field studies and a major laboratory study, Mitchell and Kalb found that supervisors with experience in the task they were supervising tended to attribute poor performance to the environment. Inexperienced supervisors, on the other hand, blamed the individual subordinate for the difficulty. In general, explanations involving internal causes were more common than those pointing to external causes.

While these researchers stress the need for broader research than their study of proofreaders, bankers, and military personnel, they note that their results have some important practical implications for all supervisors. Their findings suggest that experience may make the supervisor more aware of external causes of poor performance, such as a disruptive environment. Such information may lead to more accurate diagnoses of causes of poor performance, which consequently may lead to appropriate actions for improvement.

Administrators Are Key to Effective Supervision
Taking a dim view of current supervision, V. L. Schonberger notes "an overall dissatisfaction with the inefficiency and lack of usefulness of present supervisory practices." He advocates a more analytical approach stressing awareness of teaching behavior and urges supervisors and administrators to support one another. As specific examples of a more personal and productive approach to supervision for instructional improvement he cites Cogan, Seriogiovanni, and Weller.

Schonberger says the administrator is the key to bringing about the required change and must act as the catalyst. Specifically, supervision must be thought of in terms of collaboration and consultation. The administrator is advised to encourage interpersonal contacts, collective goal setting, and open lines of communication between teachers and supervisors.

A Systems Approach to Supervision
Stressing that classroom-based instructional programs for supervision are inadequate, Dennis Borinstein advocates a systems approach designed to maintain interpersonal skills on the job. The training program described by Borinstein uses custom-designed videotapes and practice sessions.

Steps involved in the process include meeting with representatives of the group participating in the training, identifying critical skills, working through skill modules using videotapes that include role plays of effective use of the chosen skills, and skill practice sessions.

Borinstein's program is based on five principles that are crucial for success:
- Maintain self-esteem while maintaining standards
- Be specific about behavior
- Manage the consequences of behavior
- Communicate effectively
- Organize for results

The training program and principles must be adapted to meet every organization's problems and situations. Borinstein notes that his approach leads to improvement for supervisors as well as subordinates.


