

portion of these benefits was diverted to the payment of the final expenses of the deceased wage earner.

The observations drawn from this study do not necessarily apply to the majority of deaths of wage earners insured under the Federal program, since they reflect experience only in

families in which the insured wage earner's death gave rise to monthly survivor benefits. About two-thirds of all deaths of insured workers give rise to only lump-sum payments and not to the immediate award of monthly benefits. Since the level of the average monthly wage is consid-

erably higher in survivorship benefit cases than it is in lump-sum death payment cases, it is very probable that the wage earners whose deaths give rise to lump-sum death payments have more limited insurance protection than does the group used in this study.

The "Why" Survey of the Bureau of Old-Age and Survivors Insurance

By Roy E. Touchet*

THE "WHY" SURVEY, as it came to be called, was an economy campaign in which all employees of the Bureau of Old-Age and Survivors Insurance were asked to take part during the first 6 months of 1943. In July 1942 the Bureau had 10,000 employees. Needs of war agencies and industries and calls to the armed services began to make progressively heavy inroads on personnel. Five months later, in November 1942, there were only 9,200 employees, though the Bureau had more work to do. Obviously, if old-age and survivors insurance was to be effectively administered during wartime, something had to be done.

An ingenious but less patriotic and far-sighted management might well, even then, have been satisfied with finding ways to recruit more people. A new, direct method of recruitment did raise the total number of employees on duty by February 1943 to 9,800. They were needed at least until economies and short cuts could be designed and put into operation. But since the labor market was getting tighter, full reliance was not placed on the new recruitment methods. There was also the clear duty to contribute directly to the war effort by freeing as many employees as possible to war industries and war agencies. The Bureau wanted only the number necessary to serve present and future beneficiaries efficiently and adequately and to meet the immediate needs of the program. Out of these conditions the "why" survey came into being.

The Bureau recognized the approaching need for economy of manpower even before labor shortages became serious. More than a year

earlier it had drawn a statement of policy objectives to be attained, only to learn that substantial economies, particularly in an already economical administration, cannot be achieved so simply. It knew now that it was essential that an economy program be planned effectively and managed energetically; that it must be complete so as to miss nothing and to be fair to all; and that, as in any other work project, definite time schedules for completion should be set, to make results certain.

The Bureau is a large organization. It would have been impracticable to set a force of industrial engineers or administrative analysts to work applying their streamlining techniques to its numerous and complex operations. There was not time, even if a sufficient number of analysts had been available. Yet the techniques of the engineer or analyst provided the only way to obtain the economies needed. Somehow, as many of the Bureau's employees as possible would have to apply those techniques, even though there was too little time to make a sufficient number proficient in them. Even without such knowledge, however, most employees have some ideas about how their work can be done more efficiently or more economically, and it was therefore decided that all employees must have a part in this program.

The Methods Employed

Because nearly 10,000 employees were involved, an employee suggestion system was considered a necessary part of the survey. But it could not be merely an undirected appeal for suggestions. Most suggestion systems fail because the efforts of the employees are not focused on any

particular operations at any particular time; a flood of hurriedly conceived suggestions comes in shortly after the opening announcement of a campaign and then stops. The Bureau realized that a flow of suggestions could not be sustained unless, during the entire period of special effort, a directed program for employee study of designated operations was laid down.

More than an employee suggestion system was wanted and needed. Too often, supervisory employees, who should be the most prolific source of job improvement, are content with obtaining enthusiastic participation from nonsupervisory employees. This is the easy way—one which obviates the necessity of thinking, or at least very hard thinking, on the part of the supervisor. In this instance the number of supervisors was small enough to permit getting over to them, in writing, some knowledge of the techniques of the engineers and analysts. Provision was made for that, too.

One of the prime tools of the engineer or analyst is the now widely known job break-down. For practical purposes, the survey compromised with this technique by furnishing the job break-downs to supervisors instead of having them go through the process themselves. All functions of the Bureau were broken down into 57 separate activities, each of which was further broken down into either steps of performance or other analytical data which showed the content of the activity. Forms were provided for each activity which showed these steps or data, where they were performed, and the man-days per year required to perform them. Spaces were left on the forms for the supervisors to fill in certain information, such as the reasons for performance and recommendations for changes or improvement.

Supervisors also filled out a blank companion form for each activity,

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showing the administrative or operating policies applied in carrying out the operations and how they affected or controlled the operations. Both forms were filled out after the supervisor had studied, considered, adopted, or rejected employee suggestions relating to each activity. The adopted employee suggestions were made a part of the supervisor's recommendations on the forms. Of course, the supervisor filled out the forms only for the activities or parts of activities carried on under his supervision.

To have supervisors at each organizational level prepare a separate set of forms would have resulted in considerable duplication and the elimination of the desired pooling of ideas which would come from joint study and discussion between subordinate supervisors and their superiors. So, in conformity with the Bureau's own organizational pattern, section chiefs were designated as "key" supervisors in the survey, responsible for executing the forms with the assistance of their subordinate supervisors and employees, as well as for enlisting the enthusiastic cooperation of all employees under their charge.

The same conditions which necessitated the survey set a limit of not more than 6 months for obtaining the results desired. Since there were 57 activities, about 10 were scheduled for action each month. In selecting the activities for each month, 2 major and 2 minor activities for each large organizational unit of the Bureau were picked when possible, so that all units would be about equally active during the entire period.

Publicity necessary to get acceptance of the program and to sustain the interest in it took several conventional forms. Two new posters each month reached the eyes of all employees—a "general" poster and one which directed attention to the particular activities under study during the month. Each month, too, the Bureau Director sent a letter to all employees giving the number of suggestions received and any other available information about the progress of the survey.

Each suggestion received, after coming up the supervisory line, was acknowledged by a personal letter to the employee, signed by the Director. Since, in many cases, it was

not possible to know the action to be taken on the suggestion, no report was made at that time. With each first suggestion, a celluloid pin with the words "Are you On the Alert to Suggest Improvement" was sent to the employee with the request that he wear it to stimulate others to follow his example.

Just before the survey began, it was learned that the Job Methods Training course of the War Manpower Commission's Training Within Industry program was about ready for use. This course answered the Bureau's needs for special training more completely than the proposed training by means of written communication. However, every supervisor could not take the JMT course at the outset of the survey period. Both methods would have to be used.

The Bureau made immediate efforts to obtain the privilege of using JMT. At first the prospects were discouraging, because war industries, of course, had priority. But a few vacant chairs were discovered in the Training Within Industry's early institutes for training trainers, and the Bureau was able to have some of its supervisors start their training. JMT had become part of the "why" survey.

The wholehearted cooperation of the Social Security Board played no small part in the success of the survey. The Executive Director took an important role by establishing "bench marks" or objectives for the Bureau in terms of number of jobs that must be eliminated, and he and the Board also aided by deciding upon proposed economies which involved important policy questions. The Executive Director, for example, approved the elimination of a county and field office area record of beneficiaries, the curtailment of the program for keeping substantive statistics and many other economies. A review of the evidence required of claimants to prove their age, and the extent of investigations conducted for detecting ineligibility of beneficiaries because they had returned to work were among the items passed upon by the Board.

To reach these "bench marks"—and they had to be reached earlier than originally planned because of budgetary pressures—Division heads and Bureau executives were spurred to accomplishment. Some of the

major economies and improvements came from these sources, although the same suggestions often came also from employees in the ranks. Whether the employee suggestions covering such improvements or eliminations would have been adopted without the added executive pressure cannot of course be determined.

The Results Obtained

The "why" survey became a composite of an employee suggestion system; application of the techniques of engineers and administrative analysts by all supervisors; JMT and the resulting proposals for improvement in methods; and the over-all application of the Executive Director's bench marks. During 6 months of the survey, 6,600 suggestions were received from 2,400 employees. Although the majority of the suggestions could not be utilized, about 1,800, coming from some 1,000 employees, were adopted—a record of which any organization can be proud.

The suggestions adopted ran the gamut of the Bureau's affairs. One proposed deviations from standard Government practice in use of certain abbreviations in addressing mail. Another suggested the use of stuffers to be inserted with lump-sum benefit checks instead of separate mailing of an individual letter to the beneficiary. One proposed the abolition of the suggester's own organizational unit, the Editorial Unit of the Bureau's Analysis Division.

No effort has been or will be made to determine the exact value of each individual suggestion or the sum total of the savings accomplished by the survey. It is sufficient for practical purposes to know that at the start of the survey the Bureau had 9,800 employees and that work loads have increased. Now it has about 8,300 employees. Moreover, no abnormal backlogs of work are piling up by reason of the decrease in employees. With the streamlined procedure, the present staff is able to maintain, during this wartime period, the necessary services for establishing and protecting the rights of present and potential beneficiaries of the program. The "why" survey is over, but improvements and economies will continue to be instituted with the help of all employees who have shown so much aptitude for inventing them.