

When Supervisor and Principal Work Together

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LEADERSHIP problems, notably resistance to change at the principal-supervisor level, generally occur because the attitude balance in the principal-supervisor relationship has been disturbed. As educators, we frequently see disturbances as we work with principals and supervisors.

In order to determine imbalances in principal-supervisor relationships, we must first closely define a balanced relationship. The optimum balance is one of mutual respect. A mutual respect balance exists when each is respected and is encouraged to practice and pursue the satisfactions of his position until that pursuit infringes on the right of the other to do the same. Inherent in this relationship are such factors as an awareness of role definition, leadership skills, status, intellectual honesty, communication skills, empathy and other personality dynamics.

Role Perception

As we strive toward mutual respect, a close examination of the current views of the perceived role of the principal and supervisor as seen by the supervisor and principal is a critical need in any analysis of the working relationships of these two related positions. To what degree does congruence or incongruence exist? Research and theory dealing with the nature of human behavior in social settings illustrate that an individual's personal philosophy, his way of looking at the world and people around him, determines his success as a change agent. In effect, the quality of human relations determines the productivity level of people more than any other single factor.

Optimum relationships can be developed when one is as fully conscious of his own basic commitments or assumptions as he is of the basic commitments or assumptions held by others. The supervisor's and the principal's perceived view can function as a hidden source of disagreement and friction or it can serve as a catalytic agent which brings about change. Inaccurate sensory data can

greatly impair the effectiveness of an entire staff while accurate sensory data can accelerate positive human behavior.

There are many ways in which we might approach the mutual respect philosophy. Determining the leadership style employed by both the supervisor and the principal as they work together is but one of the many possibilities. What part does status, authority, personal philosophy and process vs. product orientations play in directing the principal's behavior as he interacts with the supervisor? This same question can be asked of the supervisor as he interacts with the principal.

Leadership Style

A study¹ conducted in one midwestern state was concerned with the leadership style of elementary principals and elementary supervisors. Basically, this research was an attempt to answer the question, how do elementary principals and elementary supervisors view their respective role and the role of the other in four dimensions of interpersonal relations. As defined by Seeman,² these four dimensions of interpersonal relations leading to role conflict are deeply rooted in American life and contribute much to the complex leadership patterns found in our democratic society.

The four dimensions of role behavior are: (a) the status dimension (success ideology vs. equality ideology), (b) the authority dimension (dependence vs. independence), (c) the personal dimension (friendship obligation vs. institutional obligation), and (d) the means-ends dimension (product vs. process). The extremes of this bi-polar arrangement parallel the Guba-Getzels Model,³ which provides an excellent interpretation of distinct types of leadership style: the "idiographic" style, which stresses the personal needs and dispositions within the individual and the "nomothetic" style which is characterized by a role and role-expectations orientation. The "transactional" style is characterized by behavior which is neither idiographic nor nomothetic but which rests on a continuum somewhere between both extremes.

Leaders who report themselves as relatively high in ambivalence—that is, who sense the dual demands of their position—or who are seen by others as transactional, tend to be rated as more effective leaders. With this viewpoint, it becomes obvious that the role of the principal or supervisor is one filled with moments of apprehension. Both roles are very complex and therefore most difficult in resolving the conflict of people orientation vs. things orientation, person vs. product, humanism vs. technocratic. While each position demands that either

¹ Nicholas J. Vigilante. "A Role Perception Study of Elementary Principals and Elementary Supervisors in the State of Ohio." Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation. Columbus, Ohio: The Ohio State University, 1964.

² Melvin Seeman. *Social Status and Leadership*. Bureau of Educational Research and Service. Monograph No. 35. Columbus, Ohio: The Ohio State University, 1960.

³ J. W. Getzels and E. C. Guba. "Social Behavior and the Administrative Process." *The School Review* 65:423-41; Winter 1957.

nomothetic or idiographic leadership is required for the moment, there are situations in which the transactional behavior is expected.

Supervisors as Seen by Principals

As a result of the study, the role of the elementary supervisor as perceived by the principal for each dimension was characterized in the following manner:

1. For the status dimension, the elementary principal expects the elementary supervisor to identify with his peers; identification with subordinates, the desire to "go along" with the group, to be considered as "just a member of the group," is reflected rather than identification with authority or increased status. The primary objective is to keep the subordinates happy and contented within a highly individualistic relationship.

Consider, for example, the supervisor's position with regard to joint professional staff meetings with principals. The principal might view the supervisor as one who rotates the job of chairmanship, and who solicits ideas from the group membership when planning the agenda for the meeting rather than the one who presides over the group after his planning the agenda for the meeting. The principal's view of the supervisor seems to be decidedly equality rather than success oriented.

2. For the authority dimension, the elementary principal expects the elementary supervisor to display actions that he takes on the authority of others and actions he takes on his own authority. His behavior stresses goal accomplishment. Yet also, he is expected to make provisions for individual need fulfillment.

A conspicuous example of this dimension is found in the degree of initiative taken in improving the instruction. Principals expect supervisors to receive authority from a superior prior to initiating any experimental program as well as to instituting some experimental programs in various schools to gather evidence in support of his ideas before presenting them to his superior. The value of dependence and independence is a source of considerable ambivalence. This tendency appears more apparent in medium size communities, with school populations between 5 and 10 thousand pupils.

3. For the personal dimension, the elementary principal expects the elementary supervisor to display behavior which expresses a loyalty to the organization—living by the book—as well as behavior which is the result of personal friendships and social and personal contacts.

A possible example between institutional dedication and personal friendship might be illustrated using the following situation. When a principal, whom the supervisor likes and admires, has violated a board policy, the elementary principal expects the supervisor to follow the procedures that he has used before in similar situations, regardless of his personal feelings. At the same time, the principal expects the supervisor to ignore the situation as long as no one makes a complaint. Such a conflict in standards of judgment accentuates the difficulty of either role.

4. For the means-ends dimension, the elementary principal expects the elementary supervisor to take actions which are prompted by the requirements of immediate problems and the actions which are prompted by the desire to improve the future operations of the organization.

This dimension might be characterized by the following example. In the process of working on curriculum development, principals expect supervisors to attend to specific problems that affect the teachers as well as to work on the development of a scope and sequence program based upon the trends of education. This dual focus is an attempt to find a balance between the emphasis on group process and group product.

In summary, there is no doubt in my mind that those of us who are working in the field of human relationships and trying to understand the basic orderliness of that phenomenon are engaged in a most complicated and crucial endeavor. This can best be accelerated in an atmosphere where mutual respect is in evidence. If we are thoughtfully working to understand our relationships as co-workers, then we are working toward ends which will be more productive to the children who are involved in the programs which are developed as a result of this relationship. It becomes clear that we must not only be interested in *what* people do, but the *why* of their behavior.

The principal and supervisor must seriously consider analyzing and revising their own behavior according to the principles they advocate for the other person. Each must adopt the analysis of his behavior as an object of exacting, continuous study. ☛

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