



# INTERVENTION

**D**ECISION making in educational institutions is shifting away from a tradition of unilateral action taken by one group or individual in the system and accepted by most other members. More and more the process is involving the participation of representatives of many of those who will be influenced by a decision. Teacher organizations, whether including only teachers or nearly all members of the profession, are involved in a formal process of negotiation in many systems.

Students, who are the recipients of the services provided by the institution and who have most recently expressed a desire to become involved in a significant manner, have not yet found a satisfactory method of participation. The parents, taxpayers, and employers of those attending the educational institutions are not adequately represented by the board of education in the formal process of negotiation.

The situation is further complicated because of the legal responsibility of other political bodies. This is particularly true in fiscally dependent school districts which must have their school budgets approved. Also individuals who serve in political offices may have real or imagined responsibilities resulting in involvement at different stages of the resolution process. Legislative bodies assume a significant role in setting the limits of topics which may be negotiated, and in establishing the type of organizational relationship within the legal power of local boards.

A different type of negotiation goes on at various governmental levels between representatives of different groups. The decisions of such action may be considered unilateral as far as providing for adequate representation of those affected is concerned.

The development of a process of meaningful representative participation, from the viewpoint of all concerned individuals, which will promote rather than deter a process of allowing an institution to respond, make a change, and yet operate in a reasonably efficient manner has yet to evolve. To a small vocal group of individuals the only hope for improvement is to tear down existing institutions. Such a solution implies that once a process is institutionalized further change will come only by destruction, so, periodically, an institution will have to be destroyed.

# BETWEEN ADMINISTRATORS AND TEACHERS

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A more constructive solution is one involving a willingness to question any existing practice or goal in the light of changing conditions and new evidence, and to follow through with a system to work out a way to retain the good and discard that which no longer serves. In the long run a way must be found to institutionalize change and develop individuals who will be comfortable with change so it will not be necessary to destroy an institution in order to build a better one.

## Middle Management Role

Institutions will be stronger if the knowledge and expertise of all members of the organization can be effectively utilized. However, during the early years of securing greater participation on the part of those affected by the decisions, many tensions and uncertainties will result. The shifting of power between groups and individuals may result in realignment of power within the institution. Such realignment, as might be expected, has been unacceptable to some individuals and has resulted in its misuse by others.

Further complications in this power struggle are presented by the individuals who, while serving in curriculum and supervisory positions, have traditionally viewed themselves as teachers, while at the same time holding varying degrees of authority over teachers. At times the exercise of this authority has been so skillfully done that no friction resulted. At other times these individuals have been very directive with no question as to who makes the decisions.

The degree of effective participation in the new alignment of power and hence responsibility for decision making varies greatly among school systems and among job alike groups within a system. The holder of each type of job believes that no one else can really speak of the needs and problems faced by those holding that job.

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To this very natural feeling is added the struggle for recognition and power between the teachers and the administrative group, whether it includes the superintendent with a few staff members and/or the board of education. This struggle has placed the supervisors, curriculum workers, principals, and others not viewed as regular teachers in the middle. To be sure, a representative of middle management should be included on the superintendent's negotiating team. However, this role alone is not adequate.

The traditional labor position assumed by the AFT does not admit middle management individuals into membership, while the NEA includes them as part of the total group. In the latter case they represent a small segment of any organized group whether local, state, or national, and therefore are fearful that their voice will be drowned out by the large majority who are teachers.

In either case, individuals who are not teachers or members of the superintendent's immediate team find themselves in a very uncomfortable position, without an effective power base. The establishment of their role in a satisfactory manner is a very real concern today. Some members feel that such individuals are basically teachers and while not currently assigned to full time teaching have such a commonality of interest through past service and present concern that they should belong to the teachers group. Many teachers, as well as other individuals, feel that supervisory and curriculum workers, together with principals and others who are not regularly in the classroom, are part of management and that such recognition need not diminish their concern for instruction nor inhibit their working with teachers.

Those in this group could be either part of the superintendent's team or form an independent group not related to either of the other groups. The question to be answered is which one of these alternatives will best serve the needs of building a better educational program for the students. In some systems one alternative has been selected, in other systems a different one has seemed best to meet the local situation.

Since commonly accepted criteria of measuring success resulting from the different organizational patterns have not evolved, the proponents of each alternative can show examples to support their position which appear to work well at the moment. This situation only adds to the confusion and in some national organizations has resulted in an inability to establish a position and mechanism to support all its members. In an organization such as the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, focusing upon the instruction and curriculum work of a school system, including representatives of all types of positions, it is difficult to establish a plan of action to support those needing help at the local level. Indeed there are Association members who feel this is not a suitable goal under any circumstances.

## **Membership Pressure**

When the extreme form of action occurs in which teachers decide not to work—called by whatever name a particular group chooses—members of the curriculum and supervisory staff have a decision to make. Should they support the teachers and walk the picket line, or should they support the administrative staff and help to conduct schools? Who is administratively

responsible for the continuation of the instructional program, the welfare of students, and the protection of the physical plant?

It seems apparent that all members of the educational institution cannot abdicate their responsibility for a time and thereby permit conditions to develop which endanger human life and which may lead to physical plant destruction. While such extreme conditions have not been faced by members of the profession in most school systems, it is well to anticipate such possibilities when attempting to define roles.

The need exists whereby serious differences can be adjudicated while providing for protection of students' rights and safety, as well as protecting against the irresponsible increasing of costs by property destruction. At a time of stress, the middle management group should consider whether it can well serve the long term welfare of all by providing a staff to meet whatever crisis develops. Such a role may very well serve as a temporary measure which permits both sides to continue their discussions and yet avoid some of the extreme situations which can result during a period of protracted disagreement. The teachers organization will view such service as undermining their position. In an NEA-type organization individuals would have to be viewed as holding not only different positions but carrying different levels of responsibility in the system and in their organization.

It will be increasingly difficult for any individual to hold a neutral position if for no other reason than because of membership pressure. While some individuals serving in curriculum and supervisory positions, which are usually included in the school organizational structure between the teachers and the administration, hope to see their members intervene between the administration and the teachers to settle serious differences, it appears to be only a hope.

An important requirement during the negotiating process is a determination of what the facts are on each point under consideration. Time and tempers can be saved during the direct periods of face-to-face negotiation by developing a procedure to handle such differences away from the bargaining table.

A clear determination of the areas of disagreement in curriculum and supervisory matters reduced to writing, together with a list of questions requiring knowledge of the facts, can be assigned by the negotiating team to a fact finding committee of experts. Such a committee would of course include representatives of both sides but should include appropriate members of the middle management group.

In this setting the curriculum and supervisory staff should be represented and can exert real leadership. The expertise of available specialists can be used to build a basis of better understanding between all parties. The committee's credibility will increase, as experience demonstrates that the reports present the truth in theory as well as in practice regardless of whose side is supported.

If the negotiating team has confidence in the fact finding ability of the members of such a committee, the team can stipulate that the facts as presented by them will be accepted without further debate.

This type of service can become a recognized responsibility which over the years could develop a significant role for those serving in middle management positions and will pay dividends in many ways during the period of contract administration. □

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