

The Dilemma of Authority in Supervisory Behavior

SHIRLEY MARKOWITZ*

Some system of authority is essential for organizational survival. Supervisors daily face the dilemma of authority. As middle-management personnel, they have two commitments: (a) to the achievement and survival concerns of educational organizations, and (b) to human concerns that revolve around the feelings, worth, and independence of human beings.

The supervisor in the educational system is plagued by ambiguities. His or her position in the authority structure is ill-defined and quite often vulnerable. There is a lack of clarity in the definition of his or her role and a lack of agreement on the functions associated with supervision.

Alfonso, Firth, and Neville suggest that supervisors are often caught in a "power limbo."

In all too many cases, supervisors have spoken with little authority. Unsure of their own esteem and organizational status, they have too often spoken timidly and behaved conservatively. They have been reactors, consultants, and instructional counselors almost exclusively, rather than intervention agents seeking to influence teachers directly. They have responded, rather than initiated. The structure has often placed them in a "power limbo"—neither line nor staff, neither administration nor faculty, but somewhere in between, with uncertain and greatly varying degrees of power and authority. Such status-and-legitimacy confusion breeds weak and ineffective supervision.²

² Robert J. Alfonso, Gerald R. Firth, and Richard F. Neville. *Instructional Supervision*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1975. p. 342.

* Shirley Markowitz, *Instructor of Elementary and Special Education, Cleveland State University, Ohio*

SERGIOVANNI and Starratt pose a fundamental question that is basic to the ends, means, and outcomes of education: Should schools use people to accomplish organizational ends or should people use schools to accomplish human ends? They ask the reader to recall, "the countless times he found no reason or no record of origin for a particular policy, act, or way of behaving in the schools of his experience."¹

The frustration of many encounters with what appeared to be bureaucratic "mindlessness" motivated me to study the bureaucratic-professional interface of authority in supervisory behavior and to locate meaning for my own feelings about authority in general.

¹ Thomas J. Sergiovanni and Robert J. Starratt. *Emerging Patterns of Supervision: Human Perspectives*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1971. p. 36.

Authority and Accountability

The above-mentioned authors regard supervisory behavior as functioning within a three-dimensional matrix of intervention, interpersonal, and milieu components in which the location of supervisory behavior, within an organizational framework of authority and accountability, is placed in a new perspective. The authority of competence is perceived as operating in tandem with formal authority, to increase the power of supervision.

They define instructional supervision as: "Behavior officially designated by the organization that directly affects teacher behavior in such a way as to facilitate pupil learning and achieve the goals of the organization."³

The attainment of these objectives in supervision does not imply that technical competency and respect for human values are mutually exclusive. Both are professional imperatives. Accountability is perceived as a two-way process in the significant administrative structure in which supervisory activity occurs and may be measured by the congruence between supervisory behavior and the skills that the educational organization supports.

No supervisor can work as an agent of change in the improvement, support, and study of instructional behavior unless the organization to which he or she is responsible holds itself accountable for creating a support system in which effective instructional supervision is highly valued, given appropriate status, and is rewarded within the formal organizational structure.⁴

The supervisor, in turn, is held accountable for an active utilization of intervention components (planning, strategizing, participation, modification, and support) as they are applied to the interpersonal (reference, esteem, status) and milieu components (expectation, perception, suitability) in relation to the overall goals of the entire school system.⁵

³ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 340.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 207-31.

Advance of Bureaucracy

Max Weber believed that, "the decisive reason for the advance of bureaucratic organization has always been its purely technical superiority over other forms of organization."⁶

His formulation of three types of authority provides a framework for the examination of authority and power in bureaucratic structures:

Traditional. This authority base is legitimized by the belief in the sanctity of tradition. On this base, a given person or caste of people, usually on the basis of heredity, is preordained to rule over the others. . . . This is particularly visible in patriarchal family business and in paternalistic schools.

Charismatic. This authority base rests on a profession of faith which considers the pronouncements of a given leader to be inspired by supernatural powers. . . . In contemporary organization, the innovator, the champion of new educational and social movements, may be able to tap the charismatic power base. Charismatic movements eventually evolve into traditional or bureaucratic management systems.

Legal. This authority base is legitimized by a formalistic belief in the supremacy of norms and laws. In legal systems, compliance occurs as a result of a body of impersonal and universal principles and rules rather than of loyalty to the traditional or charismatic leader. Legal authority forms the basis for the ideal bureaucratic organization.⁷

Sergiovanni and Starratt summarize Weber's lengthy description of an ideal bureaucrat:

Weber's ideal bureaucracy is characterized as follows: (a) the use of a division of labor and of specific allocation of responsibility; (b) reliance on fairly exact hierarchal levels of graded authority; (c) administrative thought and action based on written policies, rules, and

⁶ Max Weber. "Bureaucracy." In: Hans Gert and C. Wright Mills. *From Max Weber*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1946. p. 214.

⁷ Max Weber. *Theory of Social and Economic Organization*. Translated by A. M. Henderson and Talcott Parsons. Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1947.

regulations; (d) an impersonal, universalistic application of the bureaucratic environment to all inhabitants; and (e) the development and longevity of administrative careers.⁸

They discuss a fourth source of organizational authority based on professional norms and skills. Although professional authority is described as being similar to legal authority, "in that both are legitimized by codes, rules, and norms, this similarity is the major cause of conflict between the two."⁹

Dysfunctions occur in Weber's ideal bureaucracy when "reliability," through rules, results in uniform and programmed decision making.

... This in turn decreases the search for alternatives to problems and results in more rigid behavior on the part of supervisors. The entire system also provides the supervisor with a potent weapon which permits him to escape personal accountability for his actions.¹⁰

The authors suggest that newer forms of authority, based on professional competence, have emerged to challenge the "tyranny of bureaucratic rules." They distinguish bases of formal authority (hierarchical, legitimacy, position, and office) from sources of functional authority (professional competence, experience, and human relations skills) and conceive of authority as:

... a broad basis for actions not directed at anyone or another individual. Power, on the other hand, is derived from authority and administratively is directed at winning individual or group compliance on behalf of organizational superiors.¹¹

The Authority of Competence

Peabody summarized the work of Weber, Urwick, Simon, Bennis, and Presthus in identifying four broad categories of authority:

- (a) Authority of legitimacy; (b) authority

⁸ Sergiovanni and Starratt, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

of position, including the sanctions inherent in position; (c) authority of competence, including both technical skills and experience; and (d) authority of person, including leadership and human relations skills.¹²

He examined and compared perceptions of the bases for authority in three public service organizations: a police department, a welfare office, and an elementary school. He concluded that, "teachers seem to value authority of competence over authority of person, position, or legitimacy."¹³

An article entitled, "Authority, Conflict, and Teacher Effectiveness," by William G. Spady, has implications for instructional supervisory behavior, because it defines, with a good deal of precision, legitimate modes and models of authority that are constructed out of professional ability and legitimate human concerns for the improvement of instruction, communication, and leadership, rather than control functions that depend on the mere occupancy of a position that the institution attempts to invest with legitimacy.¹⁴

A parallel idea is expressed in *Instructional Supervision* by Alfonso, Firth, and Neville:

Unless there is a behavioral commitment to these purposes [human ingenuity and creative input], the school may become a place where "rules" are played out and authentic human concern is a stated, rather than a real goal.¹⁵

Spady describes a role model of expert authority, which is dependent on "demonstrated competence and technical resources of individuals, regardless of their formal status or characteristics."¹⁶

An important point in Spady's article is that, in legitimizing bureaucratic authority,

¹² Robert L. Peabody. "Perceptions of Organizational Authority: A Comparative Analysis." *Administrative Science Quarterly* 6: 467; March 1962.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ William G. Spady. "Authority, Conflict, and Teacher Effectiveness." *Educational Researcher* 2: 4-10; January 1973.

¹⁵ Alfonso, Firth, and Neville, *op. cit.*, p. 151.

¹⁶ Spady, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

Teaching and Social Behavior: An Organizational Theory of Instruction

by Phillip C. Schlechty, University of North Carolina

Written for Social Foundations, Sociology of Education, and Organizational Development courses, this book analyzes the social organization of schools and classrooms. The text examines the effect of social organization on relationships among teachers, students, and administrators. March 1976, paperbound, est. 360 pp.

**RECOMMENDED
READING**

Instructional Supervision: A Behavior System

by Robert J. Alfonso, Kent State University, Gerald R. Firth, University of Georgia, and Richard F. Neville, University of Maryland at Baltimore

This text is designed to give students in administration and curriculum courses an introduction to the supervision of instruction in elementary and secondary schools. The concept of instructional supervisory behavior is integrated with research findings from the behavioral sciences. 1975, 371 pp.

Teaching Strategies for Ethnic Studies

by James A. Banks, University of Washington

Focusing on key issues and trends in the teaching of ethnic studies, this book can be used in elementary or secondary methods, curriculum or ethnic studies courses. It discusses in depth specific American ethnic groups and exemplary concepts in teaching strategies. 1975, paperbound, 502 pp.

Allyn and Bacon, Inc.
College Division, Dept. 893,
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supervisors must be able to gain voluntary and automatic compliance, because they are perceived as having credibility with respect to criteria that will not work to the disadvantage of those who comply.

He also writes that supervisors must have some influence on negative sanctions and positive rewards within the system, and they must work for achievement goals by confronting the expectations of those to whom they are responsible with a clear notion of how to go about meeting them.

Exercise of Power

French and Raven describe five bases for power which can be exercised in supervisory behavior:

(a) Reward power, based on P's perception that O has the ability to mediate rewards for him; (b) coercive power, based on P's perception that O has the ability to mediate punishments for him; (c) legitimate power, based on the perception by P that O has a legitimate right to prescribe behavior for him; (d) referent power, based on P's identification with O; (e) expert power based on the perception that O has some special knowledge or expertise.¹⁷

Bachman, Bowers, and Marcus correlated these five bases of supervisory power to organizational effectiveness and individual satisfaction in five organizational settings. They found that the most important reason for complying with the wishes of superiors was response to legitimate power and expert power, and expert power and referent power were strongly correlated with worker satisfaction.¹⁸

Additional research based on the French and Raven formulation indicates that, "supervisory behavior which relies on functional authority and on expert and referent power bases will have positive effects on the human organization of the school."¹⁹

¹⁷ J. R. P. French, Jr., and B. Raven. "The Bases of Social Power." In: D. Cartright and A. F. Zander, editors. *Group Dynamics: Research and Theory*. Second edition. Evanston, Illinois: Row, Peterson, 1960. p. 612.

¹⁸ Sergiovanni and Starratt, *op. cit.*, pp. 44-45.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

Obedience to Authority

Stanley Milgram's book, *Obedience to Authority*, is a frightening reminder of what happens to people who become locked into a structure in which they do not see themselves as acting on their own. They see themselves as the intermediate link in the execution of another person's wishes and feel far removed from the consequences of that action. Milgram refers to the classic conflict between a conservative philosophy that argues that the very fabric of society is threatened by disobedience and the humanist view that the moral judgment of the individual must override authority when the two are in conflict.

He developed a laboratory experiment involving electric shock which provided a systematic way to measure obedience. Shocks ranging from 15 volts to 450 volts were administered in 15 volt increments by a "teacher" to a "learner" in compliance with instructions from the experimenter, who was regarded by the "teachers" as a figure of legitimate authority. The experiment was conducted with 40 different subjects at Yale University and, later, in Bridgeport, Connecticut. Forty-eight percent of the subjects in Bridgeport administered maximum shock, compared to sixty-five percent at Yale. Apparently, the "teachers" in Milgram's experiment did not have the skills or inner resources to disengage themselves from the experiment, despite their obvious discomfort at the increasing pain inflicted on the protesting "learners." They continued to administer shocks, either because of their conceptions of obligation and duty, or because they thought they were involved in an experiment in which no real harm would be done. Milgram concluded that:

Ordinary people, simply doing their jobs, and without any particular hostility on their part, can become agents in a terribly destructive process. . . . Relatively few people have the resources needed to resist authority.²⁰

²⁰ Stanley Milgram. *Obedience to Authority*. New York: Harper & Row Publishers, Inc., 1974. p. 6.

Shared Authority vs. Delegated Authority

Kimball Wiles writes that "shared authority is not as familiar a concept as delegated authority."²¹ Although supervisors cannot escape responsibility to their supervisors, they can exercise authority as they see best if they feel it will get better results, and this involves making decisions on whether to delegate or share authority on the basis of how the work of the staff will be affected.

Persons to whom authority is delegated assume responsibility for its use but not for the decision on how it will be used. They are responsible to their official leader, but not to anyone beyond him. The arguments of the lesser Nazis in the trials following World War II illustrate the refusal to accept responsibility for decisions concerning the use of authority. On the other hand, persons with whom authority is shared assume responsibility for decisions concerning its use as well as for the execution of decisions. All persons who accept a share in deciding how authority will be used become responsible to each other and to persons outside the group for the utilization of the authority.²²

Anthropogogical Authority

Kenneth Benne proposes a new model for a more "rational situational determination" of educational process, which he calls "anthropogogical authority," in which men and women of all ages engage in "mutual renewal and reconstruction of persons-in-cultures," learn to accept conflict as part of the reality of contemporary life and education, and "focus processes of joint learning upon the very issues which are involved in the conflicts." He suggests that we deal with these issues through collaboration, dialogue, and commitment.

Benne bases a working definition of authority on a general condition of human development in which the individual or group "fulfilling some purpose, project, or

²¹ Kimball Wiles. *Supervision for Better Schools*. Third edition. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1967. pp. 181-83.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 181.

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need, requires guidance or direction from a source outside himself or itself."²³

The ultimate bearer of educational authority is a community life in which its subjects are seeking fuller and more valid membership. Actual bearers and subjects of this authority must together build a proximate set of mutual relationships in which the aim is the development of skills, knowledges, values, and commitments which will enable the subjects to function more fully and adequately as participants in a wider community life which lies beyond the proximate educational associations.²⁴

A Necessary Requirement

Some system of authority is a necessary requirement for organizational survival. The formal organization of the school is just beginning to be studied and evaluated against the changing patterns of community organization, needs, and values.

²³ Kenneth D. Benne. "Authority in Education." *Harvard Educational Review* 40: 385-410; August 1970.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 401.

Supervisors face the dilemma of being middle-management personnel committed, on one hand, to the achievement and survival concerns of educational organization and, on the other, to authentic human concerns that revolve around the feelings, worth, and independence of human beings.

We need to study the nature of authority and alienation in our society, their effect on human behavior, and ways in which those who assume authority can promote self-actualization as opposed to submission and alienation.

Erich Fromm defines the alienated person as one who has no sense of "I"—one who has transferred the functions of feeling and thought to external objects and institutions. Such a person is dominated by fragmented, technical, institutional behavior and becomes alienated from his or her own actions and from the total human act.²⁵

Brauner and Burns write that organization and order are necessary disciplines that provide the springboard to creativity but issue a warning on the overextension of authority.

When men insist on more order than can be proven necessary, then they are asking for mere conformity. . . . Instead of pouring their energy into creative activities they must hack away at the crabgrass of conformity just to secure a small patch of dirt on which to rest from exhaustion. . . . The extension of order must be made to justify itself at each step and to retreat where justification cannot be found.²⁶

The legitimate authority of instructional supervisory behavior should function to provide an enlightened process of human interaction, a greater awareness of ways in which people learn and change, and, finally, it should improve the quality of life within the system and within the greater society. □

²⁵ Erich Fromm. "The Sick Individual and the Sick Society." In: William F. O'Neill, editor. *Selected Educational Heresies*. Glenview, Illinois: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1969. pp. 125-35.

²⁶ Charles J. Brauner and Hobert W. Burns. "Creativity and Conformity." In: *Problems in Education and Philosophy*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1965. pp. 125-29.

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