

"COLD WAR" BETWEEN SUPERVISORS AND TEACHERS?

Teachers' ratings of the effectiveness of supervisors are strongly influenced by supervisors' interpersonal skills.

According to Arthur Blumberg (1980), instructional supervisors believe that what they do has high value, but the teachers with whom they work find instructional supervision to be of little value. To what extent does the phrase "private cold war" characterize the working relationship between teachers and supervisors? Is the gap between their views as wide as "cold war" implies? How might instructional supervisors become more effective? These are among the key questions we addressed in a recent study of science supervisors in New York State.

Instruments for studying these issues were developed during our research over the past several years. We asked 143 science supervisors and 258 of their teachers to express their views on supervisory effectiveness by rating 26 formal and nonformal supervisory activities. Examples of formal activities included curriculum work, inservice workshops, and observation of classroom teaching. Nonformal activities included helping a teacher with a personal problem, facilitating interpersonal relationships among staff, and protecting staff from undesired criticism.

We also asked them to rate the "group membership" status of the supervisors in order to compare their views on the quality of supervisors' relationships with teachers. For this survey, we used a modification of the "Person-Group Relationship Scale" (Felsen and Blumberg, 1973 a, b, c). From the two surveys, we were especially interested in exploring the relationship that might exist between group membership status and the supervisors' perceived effectiveness.

Our findings support the contention that supervisors and teachers hold different views regarding super-

WILLIAM C. RITZ AND
JANE G. CASHELL

visory effectiveness and the supervisor's group membership status.

From our data, four factors influencing effectiveness emerged: instructional/intervening, interpersonal/supporting, management/planning, and socializing. Two additional factors regarding group membership were identified: attraction (how much the supervisor is attracted to membership with the faculty) and acceptance (how much the faculty accepts the supervisor as a member). These latter factors seem to correspond closely to the two dimensions of group membership described by Jackson (1959). When we computed an analysis of variance on all six factors, we found that teachers' and supervisors' views differed significantly on four of them: instructional/intervening, interpersonal/supporting, socializing, and acceptance.

With regard to the first factor, instructional/intervening activities (such as inservice workshops and co-teaching), supervisors rated themselves more successful than teachers rated them. On the second factor, interpersonal/supporting activities (such as helping teachers with personal problems, informal communications, and mediating conflict), teachers again rated supervisors as less effective than the supervisors rated themselves. However, regarding the third factor, socializing activities (involving teachers in social events or supporting faculty social events), the supervisors rated themselves much less effective than teachers rated them. Finally, on the fourth factor, acceptance in the faculty group (in terms of how truthful, argumentative, or friendly supervisors could be), the teachers gave the supervisors significantly lower ratings than the supervisors gave themselves as a group.

The second part of this study focused on trying to understand better the dynamics of effective super-

vision: What are the elements that make supervision in science effective? We hypothesized that supervisors who develop a relationship of "psychological membership" (having a high degree of attraction and acceptance) with their teachers are seen by teachers as more effective supervisors than those whose faculty relationships are less positive. To examine this notion, we employed canonical correlation analysis, a statistical procedure that searches for a principle to "explain" the relationship between two variables, which in this case are psychological group membership and supervisory effectiveness.

Our analysis identified two statistically significant correlations. The first relationship showed group membership accounting for some 39 percent of the variance in supervision effectiveness. The items from our instruments which best explain this relationship suggest that general interpersonal/communication behaviors are the source of this correlation. The second relationship, accounting for about 3 percent of the variance shared by the two instruments, is personal liking for the supervisor. It appears that the supervisor's group membership status strongly influences his or her perceived job effectiveness. Furthermore, it appears from this analysis that the supervisor's interpersonal/communication behavior can be changed to obtain more positive perceptions of his or her job effectiveness.

What do the results of this study say about the "cold war" between supervisors and their teachers? Is the gap between them as wide as the phrase implies? From our vantage point, "cold war" is too harsh, implying great tension just short of open conflict. That does not seem to be the case here; although tension was undoubtedly present, it existed at a fairly low level.

The science teachers and supervisors we studied did agree in their

William Ritz is Science Education Coordinator, School of Natural Sciences at California State University in Long Beach; Jane Casshell is Staff Associate for Development and Evaluation Associates, Inc., Syracuse, New York.

effectiveness ratings in a fair number of cases. Figure 1 displays the ten activities that both groups agreed supervisors did most effectively. Note that both groups felt the supervisors were most effective in dealing with supplies and equipment, activities of special significance in science teaching. Also quite impressive are the data indicating that both teachers and supervisors viewed supervisors as being supportive of creative ideas originated by teachers. This agreement does not characterize a truly cold war atmosphere.

In discussing perceptions of supervisor behavior and relationships, Blumberg (1980) stresses the need for "a balance between the energy devoted to the task itself and that devoted to the development of healthy

also appear to result in more positive ratings of effectiveness.

If interpersonal/communication activities are so critical to enhanced teacher perceptions of supervisory effectiveness, what is there about the supervisor's role that makes this such a difficult area? Do some supervisors simply underestimate the potency of this aspect of their work? While most would undoubtedly say that people are important, they simply may not understand just how much their attention to interpersonal relationships influences the teacher's view of their effectiveness. "Busy-ness" may also be an important factor. The supervisor who is heavily involved in the whirlwind of "job description" responsibilities may find it burdensome to give much attention to interper-

the classroom, which does not assure success as a supervisor. There is also the matter of rewards—to what extent do school districts provide incentives for supervisors to devote attention to the people aspects of their work? "Success" in the institutional sense is most often entirely linked to the formal responsibilities of supervision. Only the rare school district rewards a supervisor for his or her emphasis on interpersonal/communication activities.

In the long run, the most important factor may be found in the supervisor's job description itself. The very fact that the supervisor is called upon to evaluate teaching performance may cloud even the best efforts to develop a positive working relationship. If this is the case, the recent suggestion of an ASCD working group (Sturges, 1979) to separate *administrative* and *consultative* supervisory roles is especially important. By whatever means possible, however, it is essential that supervisors improve the interpersonal/communication aspects of their supervision.

References

Blumberg, Arthur. *Supervisors and Teachers: A Private Cold War*. 2nd ed. Berkeley, Calif.: McCutchan Publishing Co., 1980.

Felsen, M., and Blumberg, A. "Student Membership Relations in the Classroom Group." Paper presented before the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, La., March 1973a.

Felsen, M., and Blumberg, A. "Teacher Membership Relations in the Faculty Group." Study, Syracuse University, 1973b.

Felsen, M., and Blumberg, A. "Classroom Group Membership: An Unexplored Dimension of School Life." *Journal Supplement Abstract Service*, Vol. 3 (MS No. 495). American Psychological Association, 1973c.

Felsen, M., and Ritz, W. "Science Supervision in New York State: An Examination of Supervisor-Faculty Relationships." *School Science and Mathematics* 79 (October 1979): 465-472.

Jackson, Jay M. "A Space for Conceptualizing Person-Group Relationships." *Human Relations* 12 (1959): 3-15.

Ritz, William, and Felsen, Martin. "A Profile of Science Supervision in New York State." *Science Education* 60 (1976): 339-351.

Sturges, A. W. "Instructional Supervisors: A Dichotomy." *Educational Leadership* 36 (1979): 586-589.

Figure 1.
Contrasting Top Ten Supervisory Activities Handled Most Effectively
as Ranked by Science Supervisors and by Science Teachers

Ranking of Activity	Science Supervisors	Science Teachers
1.	Activities relating to supplies/equipment	Activities relating to supplies/equipment
2.	Supporting creative ideas originated by teachers	Consulting with administrators
3.	Consulting with administrators	Informal communication and dialogue with staff
4.	Curriculum activities	Supporting creative ideas originated by teachers
5.	Informal communication and dialogue with staff	Protecting staff from undeserved criticism
6.	Getting to know staff as individuals	Getting to know staff as individuals
7.	Observation of classroom teaching	Curriculum activities
8.	Mediating conflict between teachers and others	Helping a teacher with a personal problem relating to school
9.	Protecting staff from undeserved criticism	Mediating conflict between teachers and others
10.	Evaluation of teaching	Giving personal feedback relative to teaching performance

relationships among the people working on the task." The ratings made by the teachers in this study indicate a fairly good balance (in terms of activities effectively accomplished) on the part of the supervisors. Certainly, several of the "top ten" activities are related to the development of productive relationships among the people involved, whereas others appear more clearly task-oriented. Again, these ratings are not indicative of a truly cold war atmosphere.

However, there were some key aspects of disagreement, especially in "interpersonal/communication" activities. We cannot ignore these differences, especially in view of the strong statistical relationship between this category and teacher ratings of supervisory effectiveness. Those activities through which supervisors enhance their group membership status

personal relationships. This would be especially true of those who have substantial teaching responsibilities.

One also has to wonder to what extent supervisors have been trained in the interpersonal/communications aspects of their positions. Certainly, only a few school districts provide newly-appointed supervisors with training for their responsibilities. Blumberg (1980) found that some 20 percent of the supervisors he studied "located the source of their problems in themselves, most typically in their feelings that their communications skills were inadequate."

One might also question the process through which supervisors are selected. Few school systems select instructional supervisors on the basis of their "people" skills; most supervisors move into their new positions as a result of demonstrated success in

Copyright © 1980 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.