

## DO WE NEED "COMPARATIVE" SUPERVISION? A RESPONSE TO DUFFY'S "SUPERVISING FOR RESULTS"

EDWARD F. PAJAK, *University of Georgia*

Concepts derived from the study of leadership in organizational settings other than schools have inspired authors in educational supervision for many years.<sup>1</sup> Proponents of post-positivist views of supervision are certainly no exception. The work of Schön is probably the most recent example of how research and theory from a context outside education can quickly establish an influence on thinking in our field.<sup>2</sup> Francis Duffy's case study of a district manager in the insurance business suggests the possibility of something similar to comparative inquiry in supervision as an alternative to the uncritical importation of constructs that originate in noneducational contexts.<sup>3</sup>

In interpreting his data, Duffy draws parallels on an abstract level between the behaviors of a highly successful insurance manager and the behaviors of supervisors in schools by calling attention to similarities in their work situations. Duffy observes, for example, that supervisors in both contexts coordinate teams of professionals who attain a high degree of autonomy after a fairly brief probationary period.

Duffy also notes differences between the work situations of supervisors in education and the insurance business. The success of insurance agents is easily measured, for instance, by counting the number of new policies generated each month, an outcome that is linked strongly to financial rewards. The success of teachers, in contrast, is not as easily determined and is rarely linked in any direct way to monetary incentives.

---

<sup>1</sup>Robert J. Alfonso, Gerald R. Firth, and Richard F. Neville, *Instructional Supervision: A Behavior System* (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1975); Thomas J. Sergiovanni and Robert J. Starratt, *Emerging Patterns of Supervision: Human Perspectives* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1971).

<sup>2</sup>A Symposium on Schön's Concept of Reflective Practice: Critiques, Commentaries, Illustrations," *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision* 5 (Fall 1989): 6-69.

<sup>3</sup>Francis M. Duffy, "Supervising for Results: A Case Study from the Business World," *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision* 6 (Fall 1990): 31-38.

Duffy proposes the possibility of comparing supervision in different contexts within the broader framework of organizational theory. He does not follow through fully, however, with the analysis that is the strength of his article and his approach to the study of supervision. As is common in our field, he focuses on the similarities of decontextualized behaviors exhibited by leaders in various organizational contexts, and he speculates that the manager he studied would be equally successful in educational administration or supervision. In my opinion, Duffy reaches closure on the issue prematurely.

Lawrence and Lorsch, organizational theorists whom Duffy cites, point out that "the essential organizational requirements for effective performance of one task under one set of economic and technical conditions may not be the same as those for other tasks with different circumstances."<sup>4</sup> Thus, we should more carefully ponder whether a successful supervisor in the insurance business would be equally successful in an educational setting that differs substantially in its goals, technology, product, and reward system. Whether Duffy's insurance manager would actually perform well in an educational context may not be immediately evident, but perhaps a better way of asking the question may help.

- *What kinds of supervision are most successful in different organizational contexts?* This question might help us avoid the trap of uncritically adopting an idea or practice from one field of study into our own.

- *What kinds of supervision are most successful in schools of different sizes and in schools facing different kinds of organizational environments?* This question has the advantage of helping us avoid generalizations about the one best way to supervise or teach, as well as the practice of simply imitating neighboring schools.

Both questions together might also help us to understand the field of educational supervision better and to make more informed decisions about how to practice supervision.

Managers and supervisors in all organizational settings face the paradoxical yet fundamental task of encouraging both differentiation and integration.<sup>5</sup> For differentiation, the individual elements in an organization (i.e., insurance agents or teachers) must have sufficient freedom to respond effectively to idiosyncratic challenges and events that they face daily. For integration, some sort of concerted effort among the elements is essential if the organization as a whole is to be successful. A central problem that managers and supervisors face is how to make integrating effort easier without sacrificing the needed differentiation. Apparently, the trick is to structure the organization so that its

---

<sup>4</sup>Paul R. Lawrence and Jay W. Lorsch, *Organization and Environment. Managing Differentiation and Integration* (Boston: Division of Research, Harvard Business School, 1967), p. 2

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 49.

core task is accomplished (i.e., selling insurance policies or teaching) while promoting feelings of personal satisfaction and growth for individuals engaged in that task.

The most successful organizations that Lawrence and Lorsch studied achieved high degrees of integration and were also highly differentiated; individuals worked well together, but individual differences were valued and maintained. I believe that the skill of Duffy's manager in achieving this balance largely explains his success.

Early organizational theorists emphasized the importance of integrating effort while overlooking the need for differentiation. Furthermore, the early theorists assumed that we could accomplish integration through a rational and mechanical process, by issuing orders through a chain of command. Successful managers, Lawrence and Lorsch have found, actually rely less on the organizational hierarchy to achieve integration and pay more attention to the emotions and feelings of the individuals and groups they work with.<sup>6</sup>

We can successfully achieve integration by establishing committees and teams to facilitate collaboration among otherwise independent units. Routine procedures that encourage communication can also be effective. Finally, the manager himself can carry out integration using interpersonal skills, often outside official channels.<sup>7</sup> This last device seems most descriptive of the case that Duffy presents. Lawrence and Lorsch describe a condition for effective collaboration consistent with Duffy's interpretation:

The parties who are dealing with one another learn to be open and frank about their positions as they work together. This openness leads to a climate of trust among the parties, which results in more effective problem solving.<sup>8</sup>

We can view organizations as open systems in which the behaviors of individuals are interrelated. Therefore, studying the behavior, personality, needs, and motives of one individual (e.g., manager or supervisor) is not enough. To understand how an organization functions, we must consider how the individual's personality relates to the personalities of colleagues (both formally and informally), the task that is performed, the rewards and controls that exist, and the beliefs about how a member of an organization should behave.<sup>9</sup> By considering more closely the perspectives of the insurance agents themselves, for example, Duffy may have discovered that they are driven in part by altruistic motives besides the monetary rewards their manager emphasizes.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>10</sup>Mary K. Evans and Joseph J. Blase, "Moral Perspectives of Life Insurance Sales Personnel: The Role of Organizational Culture in Selling Services," *International Studies of Management and Organization* 16 (Spring 1986): 80-93.

Several cognitive and emotional characteristics are especially relevant when studying managerial behavior in organizations. Lawrence and Lorsch suggest that we look closely at the manager's orientation toward goals, toward time, and toward colleagues, along with the formality of the structure embedded in the organization itself.<sup>11</sup> These factors could conceivably provide a framework for comparing successful supervisors in different types of organizations and different types of schools.

Much more ethnographic research is needed in the study of supervision in education. We are likely to find, I think, that successful supervisors and teachers are not all alike. We may also become less willing to embrace ideas from outside education without carefully considering their appropriateness for supervision in schools.

---

EDWARD F. PAJAK is Associate Professor of Curriculum and Supervision, College of Education, University of Georgia, 124 Aderhold Hall, Athens, GA 30602.

---

<sup>11</sup>Paul R. Lawrence and Jay W. Lorsch, *Organization and Environment Managing Differentiation and Integration* (Boston: Division of Research, Harvard Business School, 1967), pp. 9-10.

Copyright © 1990 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.