

STAFF SUPERVISION AND DISCIPLINE IN A SCHOOL AS AN ORGANISATION

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1.0 Abstract

The present paper discusses staff supervision and discipline in a school context. As we know, in order to maintain an efficient and effective work environment, employees are often required to address inappropriate behaviour and / or performance through corrective and / or disciplinary action. Supervision is a process by which a trained professional provides regular support, instruction and feedback to peer supporters. The process is designed to ensure the emotional well being of both the peer supporters and the clients accessing the program. The benefits of supervision include enhanced accountability, increased feeling of support, development of professional skills and improved efficiency. Supervision is also associated with decreased feelings of isolation and role ambiguity. The increased morale generated by supervision ultimately results in lower levels of volunteer burnouts. The supervisor being the manager in a direct contact with the operatives, has got multifarious functions to perform. The objective behind performance of these functions is to bring stability and soundness in the organisation which can be secured through increase in profits and better results which is an end result of higher productivity. Therefore, a supervisor needs to make sure that all his / her members of staff are well disciplined and focused at their core business all the time.

Key terms

Supervision, staff, discipline, school, manager

2.0 Introduction

As supervisors, heads of schools play a critical role in ensuring proper and acceptable behaviour by their subordinates (Bean, 2002). For any organisation to achieve its goals, it should have

employees who are disciplined and well behaved (Maurice, 1990). Discipline in the workplace is the means by which supervisory personnel correct behavioural deficiencies and ensure adherence to established organisation rules and procedures (Wiles and Bondi, 1996). The purpose of discipline is to promote correct behaviour. It is not designed to punish or embarrass an employee. As Duncan (2005) posits, a positive approach may solve the problem without having to discipline. However, if unacceptable behaviour is a persistent problem or if the employee is involved in a misconduct that cannot be tolerated, management may use discipline to correct the behaviour.

Schools fulfill their educational responsibilities most effectively when there is a consensus about common goals and all concerned work towards reaching these. This is the ideal that the head will be working towards. The head will be most successful if their staff respects them as a professional who sets an example of conduct, and who is reasonable and considerate of others. "Do as you would be done by" is a very good principle to work by. If you do not like to be criticized publicly, neither do others, but most of us are happy to be praised in front of others. We react positively to praise, we feel good about ourselves and the person giving the praise, and most human beings respond by repeating the type of behaviour which earns the reward of praise. School heads occupy a high status in their schools, and there is much research which shows that high status persons are effective sources of reward (Alfonso et. al, 2010).

3.0 The head's responsibilities as leader

The school head is the person responsible for the efficient management of the school. He / she is both the administrative leader and the educational leader, but these leadership roles have one function only. This function is to ensure that successful learning takes place for all the pupils in the school (Owens, 1995).

The head cannot teach all the pupils himself / herself, nor can he / she carry out all the educational or administrative tasks. These have to be delegated to teaching or non-teaching staff, depending on the nature of the task. However, the responsibility for everything which takes place in the school remains with the school head. Therefore, it is necessary for him / her to ensure that tasks are carried out efficiently, that staff behaves in a professional manner towards each other and the pupils, and that there is accountability towards the pupils, the parents, community and wider society (Sergiovanni and Starratt, 2003).

4.0 The need for supervision

Because the learning and all the activities of the school remain the responsibility of the head they need to ensure that delegated tasks are actually carried out on time, and in a proper manner. Therefore, the head need to supervise, to oversee the work of others in the school. Through meeting their senior management individually or in groups, they will get feedback on the administrative functioning of the school, including curriculum implementation and development. By being active within the school, by visiting classes, talking to teachers, pupils and parents, they keep themselves informed about the school community, its people and events. Problems can often be prevented, simply because the school head keeps, as they say, his or her ear to the ground. At the same time, they are setting a good example to others of self-discipline (Ota, 1995).

5.0 Discipline

Discipline is concerned with the establishment and maintenance of order and the harmonious functioning of a society. A school is also a society on a small scale, and discipline within the school serves the purpose of ensuring that learning can take place (Lock, 1992). Within this, the rights of the individual and of all members of the school society are protected. In most schools, a set of rules which act as a code of conduct is drawn up for pupils to conform to. Such rules should be as few as possible, and should be reasonable. Pupils should be involved in drawing up school rules.

In the case of rules for teaching staff, they should be drawn up and agreed by the staff as far as is possible. In doing this, the head would want to involve the teacher unions so that there is full co-operation. Staff meetings can include on the agenda items designed to help teachers find positive ways to deal with school matters. In countries where corporal punishment is banned or is discouraged, such discussions can be helpful to teachers seeking to establish their authority in positive ways.

6.0 Exercising responsibility

In an ideal world, the head would be able to trust all staff to carry out their designated responsibilities in teaching, administration or in care of the pupils without supervision. For good teachers who are positively motivated, their trust will be justified. Such teachers arrive in good time before the start of school, they are absent only with good cause, their lessons are well prepared, they treat pupils with respect for them as persons, yet are firm and clear in giving instructions or information. However, not all teachers are as good as this. A few are lazy, some have personal problems, some are weak teachers and a very small number are immoral. Of these, some will improve with encouragement and support, others with sympathy and understanding, but the head need to take disciplinary action with the idle, incompetent or teacher

with a bad character. The head's reactions will depend on their perception of the teacher and the problem.

7.0 Effective supervision

The most effective form of supervision takes place when the school head is perceived by staff, pupils and parents as a person who knows what is happening within the school. Although they need times when they can work quietly in their office or close the office door for reasons of confidentiality in an interview, the head should try always to be visible when pupils or teachers are arriving at the school and whenever they are moving from one place to another. He / she should also try to visit each classroom at the start of the morning to greet teachers and pupils.

Visits to classrooms should form part of their everyday activity as educational leader. During visits, they will inevitably observe such indicators of learning as conduct of teachers and pupils towards each other, whether there is a quiet working atmosphere in the classroom and whether there appears to be a positive attitude of 'discipline from within'.

The concept of supervision so far described has been a positive one, very close linked with staff appraisal and staff development. Within this spirit, the head would want to support weak teachers who find difficulty with discipline or in lesson preparation. The head should become conscious of needs if they really know their school. The unobtrusive but visible school head in and around the school not only helps to establish a sense of professional purpose, but actually prevents misconduct by teachers and pupils. Sometimes, however, stronger action is necessary where teachers don't respond to their leadership or fail in their duties. Then disciplinary procedures need to begin.

8.0 Disciplinary procedures

Often in a school, a disciplinary problem takes time to become apparent. Once it does, there are three useful procedures for a school head to follow. These procedures should be known to the staff as part of an agreed procedure (Hoy and Miskel, 1987).

8.1 Step 1 – Verbal reprimand

A first step in a disciplinary procedure is to give a verbal reprimand, pleasantly but firmly. This should be stated within the context of the teacher's professional responsibility, and it should be given in the privacy of the school head's office.

8.2 Step 2 – Written warning

In cases where the reprimand does not result in improvement, then written warning can be given. A copy of this would be kept in the file of this staff member.

8.3 Step 3 – Report to school head

If there is still no attempt to improve, a third stage of a disciplinary procedure is when further action is taken, for example, report to the school board. A copy of the report should be given to the teacher concerned. Research needs to be conducted in alternative methods of maintaining classroom discipline.

More serious breaches of a code of professional conduct may require immediate suspension of a teacher. The use of corporal punishment if this is banned under a country's constitution is one example. Another example would be of the teacher who engages in a sexual relationship with a girl pupil. He has abused his position of trust and is unfit to be in charge of pupils. There should be immediate suspension, with a report made to the circuit inspector and to the school board, even if the relationship has not resulted in the girl becoming pregnant. However, suspension is a serious step to take and the school head should first have strong evidence of the teacher's misconduct.

9.0 The head's legal and constitutional responsibilities

The school head is also subject to the laws of his or her country, and must obey its constitution. In delegating responsibilities to members of staff, they often need to arrange for the collection and safe-keeping of money, for example, the school fund. Their administrative arrangements need to ensure that money is kept in a safe place, is banked as soon as possible, and that it is not loaned or borrowed. In cases where there is abuse of responsibility, that is, money cannot be accounted for, they have no choice but to report the matter to the police for investigation and to inform the inspector and school board (Filler, 2005).

The need to take care of money involves a legal responsibility but school heads also have a responsibility to uphold the constitution of the country. In democratic societies, preservation of human rights, including equal opportunities in relation to gender, is held dear. Thus the school head needs to ensure that the school is a place where the values and attitudes of society are developed in the pupils through the conduct of all staff and the example which is set.

10.0 Summary

This paper has discussed the significant role played by supervision of staff in reducing disciplinary problems. Behavioural issues generally result in disruption to the work environment for example, workplace misconduct and / or rules violations as well as performance issues, result in a failure to meet goals and / or properly perform tasks such as when an individual lacks the knowledge, skills or ability to perform the job or where the work is consistently unacceptable in terms of quality or productivity. Discipline should not generally come as a surprise to the employee. The paper has argued that effective supervision by the school head is most likely to reduce cases of indiscipline by both teachers and pupils.

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