

LECTURE 7

MAJOR CONCEPTS OF AUTHORITY AND POWER

Lecture overview

Welcome to our 7th lecture on Major Concepts of Authority and Power. This lecture will discuss types of authority and types of power that a leader/ manager exercises in the running of an education institution.

Objectives



By the end of this lecture you should be able to:

- i. Define the terms authority and power
- ii. Analyze types of authority and show their applicability in institutions of learning.
- iii. Examine types of power
- iv. Describe sources of power

Authority

- Authority refers to the right conferred on the administrator of an organization to make decisions in the course of discharging his duties and responsibilities, to adapt his or her decisions and if necessary to enforce them.
- Authority can be seen as the right to command respect and enforce obedience.
- On the other hand, power is the ability to get others to do what one wants them to do despite their resistance.
- Power is the capacity to use force. It has to do with the ability to influence the subordinates to behave in a certain desired manner.
- This clearly indicates that authority has to do with legitimacy and influencing others without coercing them while power has to do with use of force in order to make others behave in a certain desired way.

Types of authority

- (i) Legal authority (formal)
- (ii) Situational authority
- (iii) Acceptance theory of authority
- (iv) Informal (charismatic) authority

(v) **Traditional authority**

i. Legal authority

This type of authority has the source in the constitution formal authority through appointment to the office. The concept of a particular office assumes the legal authority bestowed on the office. For example, the legal commands of the head teacher are obeyed because the rules in the T.S.C state that he or she is competent and authorized by law to issue the social commands. The education act of 1968 gives a particular legal authority to all education officers to perform legal duties in their profession.

Legal authority is divided into 3 categories.

- a) Line authority
- b) Staff authority
- c) Functional authority

a) Line authority

This stems from policy workers who are commissioned to come up with educational policies, for example the Permanent secretary, Ministry of education line authority allows such leaders to make decisions that may be followed by other employees of the school, universities or organizations.

b) Staff authority

This stems from the officers who implement the policies made by the line officers. These officers include head teachers and teachers among others.

c) Functional authority

This is delegated authority which is bestowed to individuals for special purposes. For example, a head teacher may delegate tasks to an individual or individuals who are competent in the school. Functional authority is dangerous because whoever is given the authority or the responsibility to carry out a certain task cannot take full responsibility in the sense that at the end of the day he/she is accountable to the head teacher.

ii. Situational authority

Sometimes a given situation dictates who will have authority. For example when a head teacher and his are not in and a student falls ill, the teacher in the school at that particular time assumes authority and acts accordingly.

iii. Acceptance theory of authority

Another way of looking at authority is to see the source as residing with the subordinates. Although an administrator has legal authority, the subordinates have legal authority too. Legal authority exists when subordinates obey commands of the superior. Most subordinates are willing to accept authority of superiors within certain limits that demarcate what has been called the zone of acceptance. Even if subordinates do not like what they are ordered to do they follow directions up to a certain point. This authority is limited by the fact that those who have it, also have power to coerce and for that reason the subordinates may fear and thus\, accept what they are asked to do in order to avoid any disciplinary action taken upon them.

iv. Informal authority (charismatic authority)

This is the authority that comes informally from personal qualities or charisma of an individual. Authority stands from appealing personal characteristics. Their authority as leader is legitimized through the over whelming devotion to them by their followers. Charismatic authority in most cases is authoritarian as well as democratic. Emphasis in informal authority is on people and their relationships whereas in formal or legal authority emphasis is on position and function. Informal authority is personal while formal authority is institutional.

v. Traditional authority

This is the authority that stems from traditional beliefs. Obedience is owed to the traditionally sectioned position of authority and the person who occupies it inherits the authority established by past customer. For example, in a school student may accept the authority and positions of teachers or head teachers because those that were ahead of them accepted and respected this positions.

Power

In our earlier discussion we defined power as the ability to get others to do what one want them to do despite their resistance; power thus refers to a relationship between people in which one has the ability to coerce others to do something which they would otherwise not do. Thus, power has something to do with forcing others to comply.

Types of power

Two social psychologists, John French and Bertan Raven, identified five categories of power namely;

- i) Coercive power
- ii) Reward power

- iii) Referent power
- iv) Expert power
- v) Legitimate power

Coercive power

- This refers to the ability to win submission by imposing unpleasant or painful consequences to the subordinates.
- This type of power is based on fear.
- The holder of this power has the ability to punish the other person.
- Such a person is able to exercise coercive power by relying on his physical strength, or the ability to grant or withhold support from others. For example head teachers and other educational administrators have coercive power since they can dismiss, transfer or demote their subordinates.
- The advantage of coercive power is that it makes people follow rules, directives or policies of an organization since they fear punishment.
- Much of organization behavior such as prompt attendance, and strict adherence to rules is mainly attributed to coercive than reward power. Educational administrators should know when to apply each of them.

Reward power

- This is the ability to influence submission by altering something achieved by the sub-ordinates.
- It is derived from a person's ability to reward another individual.
- Rewards include pay raises, promotions, valued job assignments, feedback, new equipment and recognition.
- Reward power is negative when those possessing the rewards misuse them by making the subordinates beg for them when perhaps it is a right for them to have the rewards.
- Reward power often leads to increased job performance since the employees see a strong performance reward contingency.

Referent power

- This is the ability to win respect by the manner in which one behaves and carries out his or her duties, hence become a role model.
- This power is wielded by a person when he or she has personal qualities, characteristics or reputation, which others want to be identified with. For example; pupils respect teachers that behave well likewise teachers respect head teachers that seem to have self-integrity and a sense of duty.

Legitimate power

This is similar to authority.

- It refers to the legal power that an individual possesses by virtue of his /her position in an organization.
- A head teacher has legitimate power to assign duties to the teachers.
- This type power depends on the position that a person holds.

Expert power

- This is the power that is derived from the knowledge that an individual possesses.
- People often see such a person as having knowledge or expertise which they value e.g. Professors, doctors, teachers, lawyers, pilots e.t.c.

Activity



Under what circumstances do various types of power apply in institutions of learning?

Sources of power

Several sources of power exist. Some of them include:

- The authority or rights to make certain decisions** or give certain orders often serves as a real source of power, for example power to hire and dismiss employees, allocate funds and assign duties, administering rewards and punishments.
- Information and communication.** Those who have access to information and have ability to communicate effectively can often wield considerable power in an organization.
- The ability to perform** in other words to do what people in the organization and outside it expects and respect. People usually admire excellent performance and will allow themselves to be influenced by those whose performance they admire. For example, a teacher who teaches excellently.
- Personal traits** can also be a source of personal power. For example, traits that are possessed by charismatic leaders.
- Control over valued resources.

NB:

Misuse of power and authority can create confusion and disagreements in an organization or institutions of learning.

Self- Assessment Questions



1. Apply the five types of power in education set up.
2. Giving clear examples, examine the types of authority and apply them in a school set up.
3. Differentiate between power and authority.
4. In leadership, authority must go hand in hand with power. Discuss in detail the relationship between power, authority and politics in education institutions.
6. Describe any four (4) types of power that can be used by a head teacher to improve performance in school.
7. Explain the types of authority that apply in the running of education institutions
8. State and explain five basic types of power that leaders can use to gain compliance from the group members.

Further Reading



Amanuel, A.T. (2009). *Managing Education: A handbook for student-teachers, trainers and School Principals*. Nairobi: CUEA Press.

Okumbe, J.A. (1998). *Educational Management: Theory and Practice*. Nairobi: University Press.

Olembo, J.O., Wanga, P.E & Karagu N.M. (1992). *Management in Education*. Nairobi: ERAP.