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ABSTRACT

A survey of Ohio rural superintendents examined their perceptions of the methods by which the State of Ohio Department of Education influences public school districts. The Power Perception Profile, which classifies power into seven categories, was completed by 63 rural, 53 suburban, and 42 urban Ohio superintendents with reference to the state department of education. Rural superintendents ranked information power as the power method used most frequently by the department, followed by expert, coercive, legitimate, referent, reward, and connection power. Consistency of responses across school district type was high, although urban and suburban superintendents ranked expert power as the most frequently used strategy, and urban superintendents gave reward power a higher ranking than did rural and suburban superintendents. The findings were compared to Etzioni's Compliance Theory, which suggests that administrator use of normative, remunerative, or coercive power will result in predictable subordinate reactions, depending on organization type and other variables. The use of coercive power, as perceived by a large number of superintendents, is incongruous with normative organizations such as schools. Contains seven statistical tables. (SV)

Rural School Superintendents' Perception of State Department of Education Influence

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The purpose of this study was to determine rural school superintendents' perceptions of the methods by which the State of Ohio Department of Education influences Ohio's public school districts. This study was designed to answer practical questions about the influence and control the state department of education utilized while implementing legislative mandates. In addition, this study examines the relative importance of these criteria as perceived by rural public school superintendents in Ohio. Results were then analyzed to determine if the superintendents' perceptions of the state's use of power were consistent with those recommended by Etzioni's Compliance Theory (1975).

Etzioni categorized organizations based on the dominant compliance mode. More directly, Etzioni investigated the relationship between superordinates' power use in organizations and subordinates' perceptions and responses. He theorized that compliance patterns in organizations result from an interaction of the dominant type of power used and the subordinates' dominant type of involvement. Specifically, Etzioni postulated that the use of coercive control is congruent with alienative involvement (hostile), that remunerative means of control are consistent with calculative involvement (neutral feelings, material benefits), and that normative control is associated with moral involvement (strong beliefs and values about the organization).

Because schools, like religious and political organizations, are normative organizations, Etzioni argued that the use of certain types of power, such as coercion, may be considered incongruent with the psychological disposition of teachers and administrators and thus have significant negative consequences. Failure to use "appropriate" types of power within the context of the subordinate's perspective leads to negative outcomes at the individual level (employee resentment, low morale, alienation), and to instability at the organizational level (Cusick, 1983; Lortie, 1975; Wynne, 1987). Schools are normative in character and it is important to recognize the importance of certain values (equity, fairness) in relation to understanding teachers, administrators, and their responses to each other (Cusick, 1983; Dreeben, 1968; Blase, 1988).

Etzioni offered a framework for securing subordinate compliance that suggests the administrator has three possible types of power and that there are predictable relationships between the type exercised and the subordinate reaction and other organizational variables.

Data for the study were gathered by mailing a copy of the Power Perception Profile: Perception of Other to the selected superintendents. A random selection of 73 Ohio public rural school superintendents were assessed with a survey instrument to which 63 superintendents responded, resulting in an 86 percent return rate. Data collected reflects the superintendents'

perceptions of the power methods utilized by the State of Ohio Department of Education. The Power Perception Profile: Perception of Other classifies power into the following seven categories: coercive, reward, information, expert, connection, legitimate, and referent power. The format consists of twenty-one pairs of forced choice statements in which the participant rates the leader on a three point scale for each pair of statements. The participant allocates three points between the two alternative choices in each pair, based on the relative importance of each alternative.

Information power (M = 11.46) was identified as the most frequently used power method. Expert power (M = 11.19) was also identified as very frequently utilized, while coercive power (M = 9.51) and legitimate power (M = 9.22) were identified as frequently occurring. Referent power (M = 7.79), reward power (M = 7.25), and connection power (M = 6.32) were cited as being utilized less frequently.

A concurrent study was conducted which compared responses across school district type (urban, n = 42; suburban, n = 53; rural, n = 63) (see Table 1). Consistency of responses was high (Spearman Rho: Urban and Rural = .86; Suburban and Rural = .96) (see Table 2). However, differences were noted in the use of information power $F(2, 155) = 6.66$, $p = .0017$ (see Table 3), and reward power $F(2, 155) = 16.30$, $p = .0001$ (see Table 4). Rural district superintendents' perceptions indicated a greater use of information power by the state department of education than did superintendents of urban districts (Scheffe F = 6.64) (see Table 5). Additionally, superintendents of urban districts perceived the state department of education as using a higher degree of reward power than did superintendents of either suburban (Scheffe F = 7.89) or rural districts (Scheffe F = 15.93) (see Table 6).

When results were compared to the descriptions of Etzioni's Compliance Theory, a variety of power methods were utilized from each of the three power types (normative, remunerative, and coercive). Normative power was utilized by the state department of education as Etzioni's Compliance Theory describes. However, remunerative and coercive power methods were also identified as frequently utilized (see Table 7). This would not be consistent with the descriptions of Etzioni's Compliance Theory.

Based on the analysis of the findings of this study, several conclusions can be drawn.

1. It would appear that there is a high degree of consistency among school district superintendents' perceptions of the power methods employed by the State of Ohio Department of Education. Rural superintendents viewed information power and expert power as highly utilized power methods.

2. Superintendents from various district types (urban, suburban, rural) again

agree on the utilized power methods. However, rural district superintendents' perceptions indicated a greater reliance on information power than did superintendents of urban districts. This may be due in part to the ability of urban districts to employ administrative personnel to interpret and disseminate information from the state department of education, while rural districts, with smaller administrative staffs, may rely more heavily on state level consultants and supervisors.

3. Although reward power was perceived by all superintendents to be a secondary means of control, superintendents of urban districts perceived the state department of education as using a higher degree of reward power than did the superintendents of either suburban or rural districts.

4. Results indicated that the state department of education utilized power methods from each of the three power types (normative, remunerative, and coercive). While normative power and the limited use of remunerative power would be consistent with the normative nature of school district organization, the use of coercive power, as perceived by a large number of superintendents, is incongruous with the needs of a majority of normative organizations.

Implications resulting from the study are as follows:

1. The state department of education should strive to serve as an advocate for rural school districts. Assistance teams should be utilized to provide support for those districts whose students perform below minimum standards, as well as to provide assistance to districts who wish to implement innovative and/or experimental programs.

2. Local school people should be encouraged to work cooperatively toward similar goals. This could be accomplished through unified efforts in state sponsored agendas and regionalization of some grant-funded programs.

3. A unified stance should be presented by the Chief State School Officer and the Governor. This alliance will help to bond the needs of local school people with those legislators whose bills and legislative mandates drive many of the education reform movements present in schools.

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Table 1: Means, Standard Deviations, and F-ratios for Three Groups of Superintendents on Each of Seven Types of Power Used by the State Department of Education

Power	Total N=158		Urban N=42		Suburban N=53		Rural N=63	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Coercive	9.709	3.341	9.857	2.581	9.830	3.507	9.508	3.671
Connection	6.000	2.851	6.000	2.776	5.623	2.339	6.317	3.267
Expert	11.013	2.822	10.762	2.377	11.000	2.710	11.190	3.192
Information	10.873	2.015	10.048	1.545	10.830	1.949	11.460	2.169
Legitimate	9.304	3.440	9.238	3.773	9.453	3.035	9.222	3.576
Referent	7.886	3.016	7.429	3.163	8.385	2.836	7.794	3.054
Reward	8.114	2.346	9.667	2.008	7.906	1.746	7.254	2.508

Table 1 (cont.)

Power	F-ratio	p*
Coercive	.188	.8286
Connection	.853	.4280
Expert	.289	.7495
Information	6.659	.0017*
Legitimate	.074	.9285
Referent	1.166	.3145
Reward	16.303	.0001*

* any p-value of .05 or less is considered significant

Table 2: An Analysis of Rank Order of State-Used Power Methods as Perceived by Superintendents

Rank	Power Method	Urban	Suburban	Rural
1	Expert	1	1	2
2	Information	2	2	1
3	Coercive	3	3	3
4	Legitimate	5	4	4
5	Reward	4	6	6
6	Referent	6	5	5
7	Connection	7	7	7

Spearman Rho:

Urban vs. Suburban	= .89
Urban vs. Rural	= .86
Suburban vs. Rural	= .96

Table 3: ANOVA Summary Table for the Three Groups of Superintendents on State Use of Information Power

Source	df	Sum Squares	Mean Square	F
Between Groups	2	50.441	25.221	6.659
Within Groups	155	587.027	3.787	p=.0017*
Total	157	637.468		

* any p-value of .05 or less is considered significant

Table 4: ANOVA Summary Table for the Three Groups of Superintendents on State Use of Reward Power

Source	df	Sum Squares	Mean Square	F
Between Groups	2	150.151	75.076	16.303
Within Groups	155	713.798	4.605	p=.0001*
Total	157	863.949		

* any p-value of .05 or less is considered significant

Table 5: Post Hoc Comparison of Superintendent Groups on State Use of Information Power

Group	Mean Comparison	Mean Difference	Scheffe F
Urban vs. Suburban	10.048 vs. 10.830	-.783	1.894
Urban vs. Rural	10.048 vs. 11.460	-1.413	6.640*
Suburban vs. Rural	10.830 vs. 11.460	-.630	1.509

* significant at .05

Table 6: Post Hoc Comparison of Superintendent Groups on State Use of Reward Power

Group	Mean Comparison	Mean Difference	Scheffe F
Urban vs. Suburban	9.667 vs. 7.906	1.761	7.890*
Urban vs. Rural	9.667 vs. 7.254	2.413	15.927*
Suburban vs. Rural	7.906 vs. 7.254	.652	1.327

* significant at .05

Table 7: Power Method Means and Frequencies

Power Method	Mean	Status	Power Type
Expert	11.013	Very Frequently Occurring	Normative
Information	10.873	Very Frequently Occurring	Remunerative
Coercive	9.709	Frequently Occurring	Coercive
Legitimate	9.304	Frequently Occurring	Coercive
Average	8.986	----------	----------
Reward	8.114	Not Frequently Occurring	Remunerative
Referent	7.886	Not Frequently Occurring	Normative
Connection	6.000	Very Infrequently Occurring	Coercive