

Chapter 6

Influencing Day-to-Day Activities of Others

Learning Outcomes

At the end of this chapter, you should be able to:

- Define authority as one source of power within an organization.
- Describe how one's place in an informal organization can result in power.
- List the major differences between a rule and a policy.
- Explain why directives are efficient, but are more likely to be resented by professionals than information or advice from a manager.

In Chapter 4 we observed that we could easily make the argument (and some have) that there is one overarching activity of management—leadership. A similar argument could be made for another activity that we have already mentioned repeatedly and will continue to mention throughout this book—influencing. For example, planning, the focus of the previous chapter, is really all about what managers do to anticipate and influence the future. Or, developing and managing budgets (discussed in Chapter 12) are what managers do to influence the flow of financial resources within an organization or program.

Like planning, influencing is proactive; it doesn't just leave events to chance. The future of an organization might evolve in desirable ways, but it might not, unless we actively plan and work toward achieving its goals. Similarly, the day-to-day activities of staff members might naturally contribute to the organization's goal achievement, but they might not, unless managers actively do things to help ensure that they will. Some people might prefer to do what they find most pleasant or beneficial to themselves. Others, while sincerely wanting to do what is best for the organization and its clients, may not know the best way to do it. People within organizations require guidance—the influence that managers can and must provide. Most of the books on management in the manufacturing and business sector (and even the popular website *Wikipedia*) describe the activity of influencing staff behaviors as one of the major activities or functions of management. It entails, among other things, setting limits on staff members' behaviors. In describing it, they use the word *controlling*. (That is the term that was used in earlier editions of this book.) However, as many of our colleagues have pointed out, while control is an important element of influencing behavior, the term has many negative connotations that seem a bit condescending and inconsistent with the role of professionals within organizations. What's more, there are several positive self-affirming ways to influence staff behavior that do not fall under what we generally associate with control.

SETTING LIMITS

When we think about setting limits on staff members' behaviors, we often think about forbidding or constraining certain actions. This is not a bad place to start in order to understand what we mean by this management activity and how it relates to influencing. The activities of children and adolescents require limits and constraints to ensure they are appropriate and that they will not result in harm to themselves and others. In our work with clients, we set and maintain boundaries that we believe to be both consistent with professional ethics and in their best interests. Similarly, staff members sometimes require limits and constraints to ensure that their activities are safe, appropriate, and productive. They are designed to ensure (to the degree possible) that the activities of staff members are consistent with organizational goals and objectives.

Bernard Neugeboren described this activity as evolving from "the need to integrate individual and organizational goals."¹ His description of the mechanisms employed by the human service manager differs little from those described in the business literature. In fact, it is also a comprehensive list of methods available to managers within most any other social system (e.g., families or communities).

Ideally, setting limits can be accomplished indirectly. Managers influence certain systems within organizations. The systems, in turn, help to influence individual staff behaviors. This entails a three-step process: (1) establishing standards, (2) measuring performance against these standards, and (3) correcting variations from standards and plans.² The first step, establishing standards, may be less necessary if planning (Chapter 5) has been performed well. The products of planning (e.g., missions, goals, objectives, and budgets) provide most of the general expectations for staff members. However, certain staff members' decisions and behaviors, often those that could not have been anticipated, may require the introduction of some additional, more specific behavioral standards that are not part of plans.

Not surprisingly, setting limits on one's colleague and professional peer is one of those management activities that many social workers often do not relish. Many of the words associated with it help to explain some of the resentment that staff members often feel toward it and toward managers who exercise it. They include words and phrases such as *curbing*, *indoctrinating*, *regulating*, *checking up on*, *threatening*, *holding to a standard*, or *verifying*. Those words sound a lot like "Taylorism" (Chapter 3) and the negative views of workers associated with it. Terms like these also seem to imply that it is the behaviors of individual workers, never the system itself, that is to blame if an organization is not as successful as it should be. However, we know that often this is simply not the case. A system can be so dysfunctional that it promotes decisions and behaviors that are inappropriate and disruptive. For example, in some bureaucracies that allow little room for creativity and autonomy, staff members may respond by doing no more than absolutely required, complying with policies even when they know that they produce the wrong result, or acting in some other passive-aggressive way.

Even in a generally healthy system, it is sometimes necessary to limit staff members' freedom and autonomy. No one is exempt from the occasional need for influence, whether they are professionals, paraprofessionals, or non-professionals, new or "senior," older or younger, paid or volunteers. However, staff members, especially professionals, often do not like being reminded that others are influencing them, especially since there can be a rather thin line between influencing and manipulating. Effective managers find ways to limit staff

members' decisions and behaviors in ways that neither humiliate them nor build resentment. Managers, who can exercise influence using methods that are perceived as impersonal and helpful to the work environment, will find that they generally are well received. However, some methods, by their very nature, have a greater potential to be resented by staff members than others. As we look at the options that are available to managers, we will also look at the strengths and weaknesses of each. We will see how each can positively and negatively affect the work climate within a human service organization.

THE POWER TO INFLUENCE

In order to influence various systems within an organization, and thus to influence the behavior of individuals, one must first have the power to do so. What is power? What does it mean when we say that we have power? It does not take power to get someone to do something that is enjoyable or desirable. For example, power is not generally required to get staff members to quit work for the day or break for lunch. However, it may take power to get them to stay after work hours to finish a task or to get them to take a lunch break when their friends are unavailable to eat lunch with them. The difference between these examples helps to define power. In the simplest of terms, power is the ability to get another person to do something that he or she might not *choose* to do.

Legitimized Power

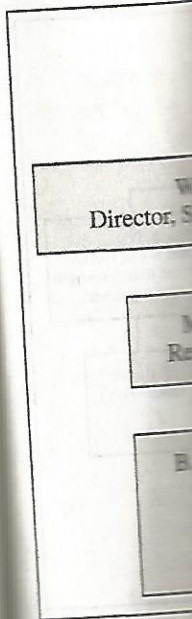
How do managers acquire power? They are given some power by the organization. When an individual is hired, he or she assumes a certain position on an organizational chart. The position carries with it a certain amount of authority—for example, the authority to make certain decisions and engage in certain behaviors and to influence the decisions and behaviors of some other people. One definition of authority is “power legitimized by the organization.” The organization grants the manager the power to influence some of the work-related activities of certain other individuals who appear in subordinate positions on that chart. What we are describing here is the line authority that will be described in more detail in Chapter 7. It is easily identified in the formal organizational charts that are often distributed at orientation sessions for new employees. The charts contain boxes and/or lines to represent people or groups of people and solid or dotted lines to denote the various types of authority relationships that exist. Figure 6.1 is an example of a hypothetical formal organizational chart.

Legitimized power is also acquired in another way within organizations. It happens through delegation of tasks and the authority to complete them (also discussed in Chapter 7). When individual staff members or task forces and committees are granted certain types of authority, they assume at least some of the power that rightfully belongs to the manager who granted it to them. It allows them to do things (e.g., make or recommend decisions or request the assistance of others) that they otherwise would be unable to do.

Power and the Informal Organization

Legitimized power is only one type of power that influences the activities, attitudes, and even the beliefs of others within organizations. Some people acquire power because of special skills or knowledge. For example, an electronics “guru” who develops a reputation for solving

Figure 6.1 Form

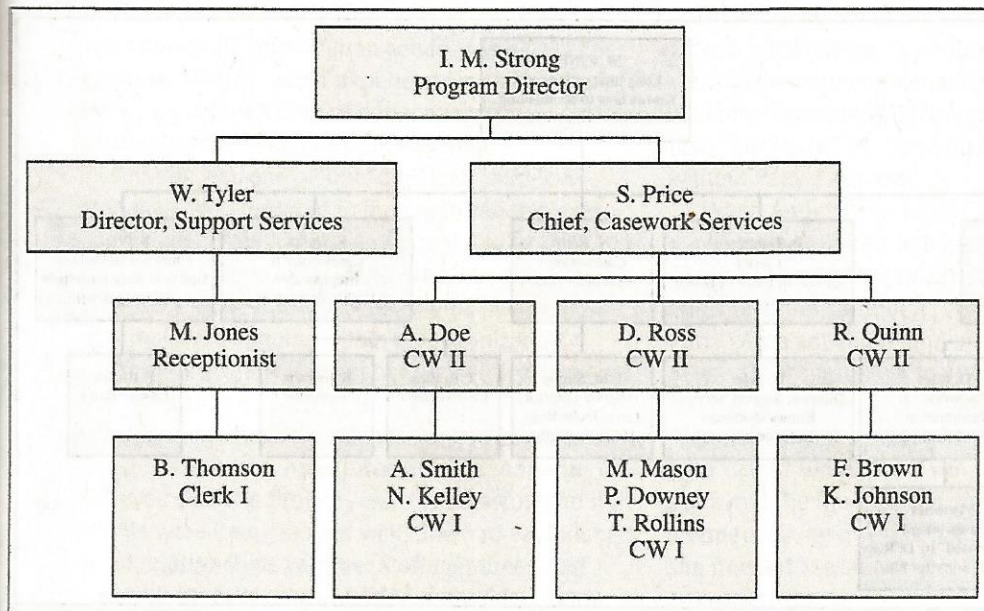


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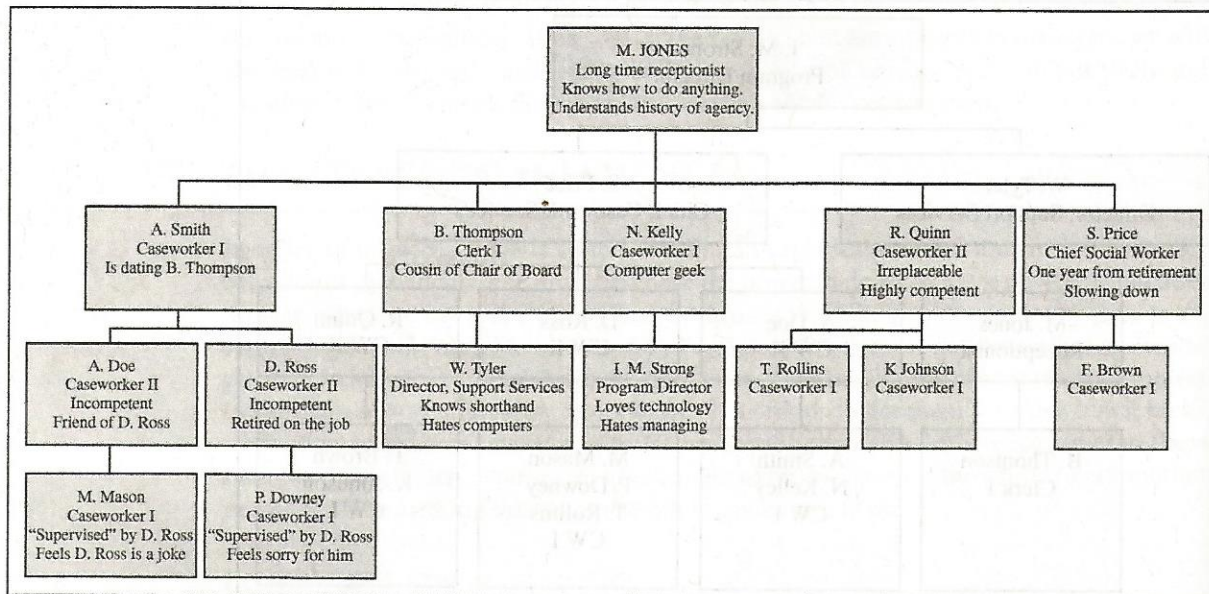
Figure 6.1 Formal Organization: XYZ Program



technological problems of other staff members can become quite powerful and can thus get others to do things they might not otherwise choose to do. Experience, access to information, and the knowledge of the history of an organization also can be sources of power. Association (kinship or close friendship) with others who hold legitimate authority can result in power. Some people are bullies—they acquire power by intimidating others. Others seem to be able to get the other staff to comply with their wishes because of other personality traits (charm?) or simply that hard-to-define attribute known as charisma. These other sources of power are often unrelated to the individual's seniority, salary, or place on the organization chart. However, they are reflected in what can be referred to as the informal organization. The informal organization is not supposed to be the way that power is distributed within an organization. It cannot be found in written form, but it invariably exists within organizations.

Some of the shortcomings of the classical management theories that were described in Chapter 3 were attributable to a failure to recognize that the distribution of power within organizations is not solely determined by the formal organizational chart. The informal organization (that is part of an organization's culture) can be just as powerful (and, sometimes, more powerful) an influence on people's behavior than the formal organization. It can assist managers in influencing day-to-day activities, or it can make doing it much more difficult.

Understanding of the informal organization rarely occurs in a methodical or planned way. A perceptive new employee may pick up on the subtle communications of "older hands" who seem to imply that the organizational chart "is not always the way things work around here." She might learn, for example, that no one really takes a high-ranking administrator's requests very seriously, or that "whatever you do, do not ever antagonize the director's administrative assistant." Over time, observant staff members learn how the

Figure 6.2 Informal Organization: XYZ Program

informal organization operates. Figure 6.2 is how the informal organizational chart might differ from the organizational chart in Figure 6.1.

In the military, new recruits quickly learn that it is the company first sergeant, not the junior officer or even the company commander, who holds the real power in the unit—he or she is the one who can make their lives miserable or relatively pleasant. This is generally true despite the officers' higher rank and superior place on the formal organizational chart. In many human service organizations, a very senior secretary or business manager may be quite powerful in the informal organization because of a combination of knowledge, experience, and the respect of other powerful people. On the other hand, a new hire, or a lower level staff member, can quickly obtain considerable power by simply having knowledge or skills that others lack and need to acquire them.

Current theory suggests that the presence of an informal organization can be a key vehicle of support for such tasks as communication of needed information or providing support for staff behaviors. The message to the manager should probably be to acknowledge its existence, understand it as much as is possible, and use it when appropriate. Sensitive managers who identify who is the real locus of power in an organization can use these key people as allies to reinforce their own focus on the achievement of organizational objectives. Their potential to influence the behavior of other employees cuts both ways, of course. If the manager is unsuccessful at achieving their cooperation and support, key persons in the informal organization can sabotage a manager's efforts to influence. For example, even employees who are strongly motivated to do good work may not feel that they are able to risk the ire of a powerful individual in the informal organization who does not value effective performance and communicates the suggestion that they had better not become a "curve breaker" by doing more or doing it better than other staff members.

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Case Example

Annette was thrilled when she was hired to be the new Director of Educational Projects at a large non-profit organization serving families at risk of abuse. With 20 years' experience in various social work jobs, she felt prepared to manage the four large grants that she would be administering.

Annette was one of four "directors," mid-level managers who reported to the organization's executive director. In her job interview she had learned that the four directors and the executive director were to meet weekly to discuss the many grant projects that were ongoing within the organization.

Annette eagerly tackled her new duties of meeting her staff members, visiting the project sites, and learning about the clients the grants were designed to serve. After three months, Annette believed that the projects were successful, and that clients were being served well. She had established good relationships with her staff members, had met with them regularly, and had provided them with ongoing support and assistance. From the feedback she received from them, they seemed to be clear about their job expectations and duties and required little day-to-day supervision. She found the time to write three new grant proposals.

One place where Annette continued to be uneasy was in the weekly directors' meetings. The executive director was often absent, attending conferences or seeking additional grant money elsewhere. What's more, the director of another division, Patty, appeared to be making decisions for the group and seemed to be acting as if she were running the meetings. *No one else seemed to think this was unusual, despite the fact that Patty did not have an MSW, as did the other three directors. She had no more work experience than any of them, and less than Annette. However, she had been employed by the organization longer, nearly as long as the executive director, and spent many hours each week in the executive director's office.*

Annette became even more confused during scheduled weekly individual supervision with the

executive director. The executive director did not seem informed about the details of many of the grants, often saying, "It's your job to know how things work." When Annette e-mailed a question to her, the executive director would frequently respond with just, "See Patty," or "Don't make any major decisions without Patty's approval."

When Annette did ask to meet with Patty, the meetings were often tense and uncomfortable. Being new to the organization, Annette had quite a few questions about a variety of issues. Though Patty was a colleague and supposedly an equal, she made Annette feel inadequate every time she asked a question. Several times she exclaimed, "I can't believe you don't know the answer to that one!" Other times, Patty would appear amused, but avoid the answer to a question. Annette soon stopped asking questions altogether, even though she needed assistance, especially about complex project budgets.

After nine months on the job, Annette still loved her work but she was becoming frustrated. Two of the new grant proposals that she had written had been funded. Her staff members were working well with each other and with her. All of the programs that she was supervising appeared that they would meet or exceed their outcome objectives. However, at the weekly directors' meetings Annette felt invisible. Her comments usually were ignored and any success that she reported was not acknowledged by Patty. No one else offered any compliments either. And Patty was consistently critical of her efforts at budget management, an area that Annette readily admitted was not one of her strengths.

When the time for Annette's one-year performance evaluation conference arrived, she met with the executive director. She was handed a draft of her written evaluation. Annette quickly recognized that the comments on it had been written by Patty. For example, they stated, "Annette has not worked well with her fellow directors," "she does not ask questions when she lacks key information,"

(continued)

Case Example *Continued*

"she makes numerous errors in budget management," and "she places the agency at risk by her inability to work as part of a team." When Annette questioned these comments, the executive director just shrugged her shoulders. "I'm sorry, but these comments were the consensus of your fellow directors." Annette then was informed that her contract would not be renewed for a second year.

Soon afterward, Annette had another job offer in another agency and accepted it. About a year later, she learned that the executive director at her previous job was retiring and that a national search had begun for a new executive director. A little later, she saw an announcement stating that Patty had been hired as the new executive director.

Discussion Questions

1. What did Annette fail to understand about organizations?
2. What sources of informal power did Patty possess?
3. Who could Annette have turned to for help in understanding what was occurring?
4. Why might Annette have represented a threat to Patty?
5. What could Annette have done better that might have saved her job?
6. How did the executive director contribute to Annette's situation? Was what she did good management? Why or why not?

METHODS FOR INFLUENCING

There are many "tools" and methods that managers have available for influencing the day-to-day activities and behaviors of staff members. Some are quite subtle and impersonal; others are more direct and more personalized. Some of the planning tools that we discussed in the previous chapter—missions, goals, objectives, and budgets—can and should exert considerable influence on the day-to-day activities and behaviors of staff members. They generally do this in a subtle way. A manager's reminder that, for example, "that is not consistent with our mission," or, "that doesn't contribute to the achievement of our goals and objectives" or, "we have no money in the budget for it" can be effective in constraining some decisions and activities that are undesirable. Of course, a manager also can encourage desirable decisions and behaviors by showing how they are consistent with an organization's mission, goals, or objectives, or by providing financial support for them in the budget. However, sometimes other methods are needed. We will now look at some other ways that managers limit undesirable decisions and behaviors and encourage desirable ones. They are defined in Box 6.1.

Formal Guides for Action

One group of methods for influencing can be collectively referred to as "formal guides for action." They provide guidance as to what to do and what not to do in certain recurring situations. They are meant to be impersonal (they apply to all), though their origins can sometimes be traced to the behaviors of one or more individuals. They include rules, policies, and procedures.

Formal guides for action are a useful reference for all staff members, both paid and volunteers. They take most of the guesswork and the risk out of decision making. Through reference to them, staff members are helped to know whether or not to engage in certain behaviors.