Management by objectives: Practical applications to school supervision

Author: Robert R. Newton

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Management By Objectives: Practical Applications To School Supervision

Robert R.Newton
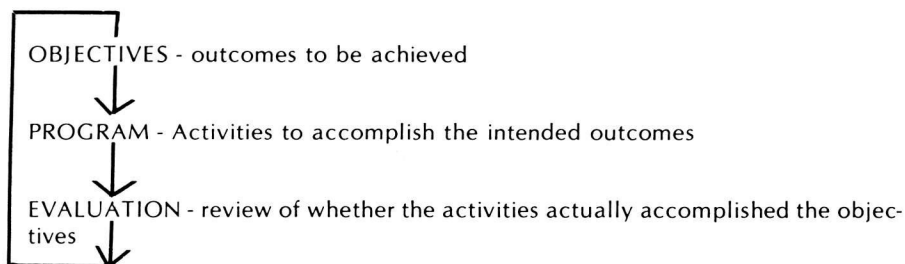
No panacea for all school management problems, a process may be inaugurated which can be a powerful tool for systematically planning and improving many areas of school operation.

Management by objectives is a process whereby superior and subordinate managers of an organization jointly identify common goals, define each subordinate's major areas of responsibility in terms of the results expected, and use these intended outcomes as guidelines for implementation and periodic evaluation of the subordinate and the unit within the organization.[1] The diagram below illustrates a modified version of this process.
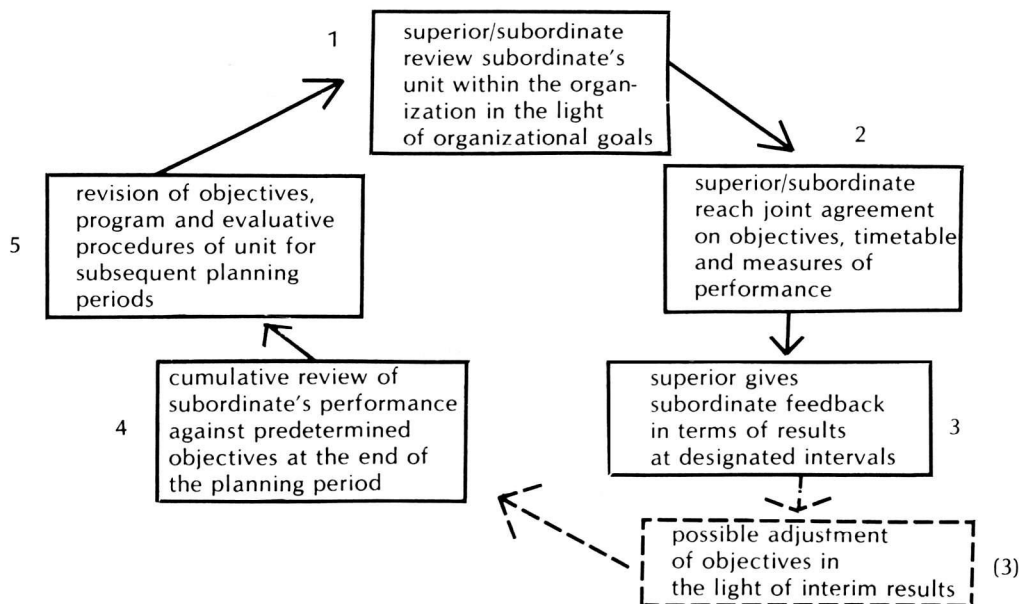
The key element in this process and the essential first step in management by objectives is to identify the responsibilities of each subordinate in terms of the results expected. At the heart of the approach is a simple but powerful paradigm:

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OBJECTIVES - outcomes to be achieved

PROGRAM - Activities to accomplish the intended outcomes

EVALUATION - review of whether the activities actually accomplished the objectives

Proponents of management by objectives argue that a precisely stated objective has a strong motivating effect on the performer and that it can produce results dramatically better than any amount of generalized motivation or exhortation.[2] The interaction of the manager and the subordinate focuses on outcomes rather than personalities. Management by objectives also provides both manager and subordinate with a mechanism whereby both can more easily determine objective criteria for measuring the subordinate's performance.

Though management by objectives has taken a variety of complicated forms and is a procedure for dramatically changing the entire system of managerial leadership in an organization, it is also a technique which can be applied separately to specific operations within an organization. The present author's experience suggests that a simplified management-by-objectives model can be analogously and usefully applied to the supervisory tasks of educational organizations, and that supervision in an individual school is comprised of three basic manager-subordinate relationships: principal-department chairperson; department chairperson-teacher; teacher-student.

I. Management by Objectives and the Principal-Department Chairperson Relationship: Schoolwide Supervisory Plan

A continuing weakness of many schoolwide supervisory plans is the lack of clearly defined expectations both for the performance of supervisory personnel and for that of the teachers they supervise. Expectations are usually stated in vague terms so that neither the principal nor the department heads begin the school year with a clear definition of what they are expected to accomplish.

In applying management by objectives to the general problem of devising an overall plan of supervision, the first task of the principal, in conjunction with the department chairperson, becomes the definition of supervisory objectives for each department. This definition concerns not only the number and timetable of visits

specified for each teacher but also agreement on the focus of concern in dealing with individual teachers. The department chairperson is expected to identify the strengths and weaknesses within the department, to set parallel objectives for meeting needs, and to design a supervisory plan to effect improvement. The principal and department chairperson agree on the targets which then become the guidelines for periodic and, eventually, final evaluation of the effectiveness of the department chairperson in the supervisory role.

For example, an agreement might be reached between the principal and the English department chairperson that an experienced teacher should be visited four times in the course of the year, twice in the first semester and twice in the second semester. A joint review of past supervisory visits to Teacher A might indicate that the most useful focus would be his questioning techniques and his method of teaching writing (see below). Teacher B, a new teacher without experience, might be scheduled by the principal and the department head to be visited seven times in the course of the year, four times in the first semester and three in the second semester. Specific objectives for supervision of this teacher could also be identified, focusing on problems which usually emerge for beginning teachers (see below).

CLASSROOM SUPERVISION OBJECTIVES FOR 1979-80
DEPARTMENT: ENGLISH   CHAIRPERSON:

TEACHER	FIRST SEMESTER			SECOND SEMESTER		
	no. of visits	class to be visited	focus of visit	no. of visits	class to be visited	focus of visit
Teacher A (experienced)	2	10th grade English (twice)	questioning techniques	2	11th grade English (twice)	writing assignments
Teacher B (beginning)	4	9th grade general science (twice)	organization of instruction	3	9th grade general science (twice)	to be determined on the basis of first semester supervisory visits
		10th grade chemistry (twice)	organization of instruction		10th grade chemistry (once)	
Teachers C, D, E, etc.			ETC.			

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TARGETS: <u>first semester</u>:

> November 10 (midsemester) - half of the total number of supervisory visits to be completed and forms submitted to office; all teachers visited at least once.
>
> January 10 (conclusion of first semester) - all visits completed and forms submitted to the office.
>
> <u>second semester</u>:
>
> ETC.
>
> <u>conclusion of the academic year</u> - June 30   cumulative review of the performance of each department head in terms of original targets

The performance of a chairperson who is expected to complete a designated number of supervisory visits by the end of the semester is reviewed at midsemester; accurate records are kept by the principal, and the department head is reminded in specific terms of progress toward the agreed goals. At the end of the academic year, the chairperson's performance is evaluated both in terms of visits completed and the degree to which visits focused on the objectives predetermined for each teacher.

At the beginning of the school year, the principal completes a form similar to the example above for each department. Taken together, these classroom visitation outlines form the principal's overall supervisory plan for the academic year.

A similar approach can be utilized in confronting needs and defining improvement within a departmental program. For example, concerned that instruction in social studies is remaining on the lowest cognitive levels and that students are not being expected 'to think' in these classes, the principal and social studies department faculty might agree that an analysis and evaluation should be made of the cognitive levels (recall, application, synthesis, etc.) on which departmental testing is focusing. Or, to counteract declining standardized verbal scores, a principal and the faculty of the English department might set as an objective the examination of the quantity and quality of required writing assignments.
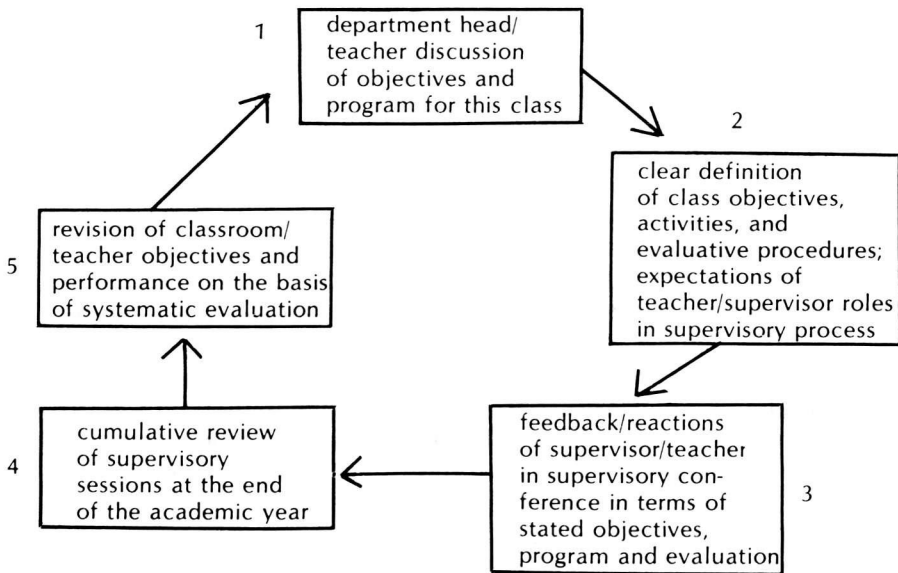
In the case either of a departmental supervisory plan or departmental program needs, the planning process would be the same: 1) review of departmental strengths and weaknesses in the light of general goals, 2) joint determination by the principal and the department head of specific outcomes, 3) periodic monitoring of progress toward goals, 4) cumulative review at end of the academic year, and 5) revision of objectives, program and evaluative procedures on the basis of systematic evaluation.

II. Management by Objectives and the Department Chairperson-Teacher Relationship: Supervisory Visits to Individual Classes

The management by objectives format can be inserted into the process of supervision that occurs between the department chairperson and the individual teacher. Prior to a supervisory visit, the teacher, in conjunction with the department head, determines performance objectives for the class to be visited, a program of activities to accomplish these objectives, and evaluative procedures that will be utilized to determine whether the objectives have been accomplished. The chairperson, for his/her part, evaluates the performance of the teacher in terms of the execution of this plan. A follow-up supervisory conference and report is structured around:

a. the accuracy and appropriations of the objectives for the class session,
b. the degree to which the activities actually accomplished the objectives, and
c. whether or not the evaluative procedures effectively measured achievement of the stated objectives.

The diagram below illustrates the process.

1. department head/ teacher discussion of objectives and program for this class

2. clear definition of class objectives, activities, and evaluative procedures; expectations of teacher/supervisor roles in supervisory process

3. feedback/reactions of supervisor/teacher in supervisory conference in terms of stated objectives, program and evaluation

4. cumulative review of supervisory sessions at the end of the academic year

5. revision of classroom/ teacher objectives and performance on the basis of systematic evaluation

In this approach, classroom performance is evaluated not so much on the supervisor's impression of whether the class was good or poor but on the degree to which outcomes were systematically pursued and achieved. The focus is not on personalities but on results. A management-by-objectives approach to classroom supervision presents a framework for recognizing, with the help of a

supervisor who can describe accurately and objectively what happened in a class, the degree of congruence between what the teacher set out to do and what was actually accomplished. The teacher himself is also able to judge his performance against anticipated outcomes; it is likely that this self-evaluation will be more effective in producing change than any amount of advice given by a supervisor.

### III. Management by Objectives and the Teacher-Student Relationship: Course Planning

The management-by-objectives applications described above pertain to the relationship between the principal and department head and the relationship between the department head and the teacher. Management by objectives can also be applied to a third important structural level--the relationship between the teacher and the student.

At the beginning of a course, each teacher can be expected to produce an outline which describes clearly to students:

1. **Objectives** - what the student will be able to do as a result of the course (in terms comprehensible to students, parents, other teachers, etc.)
2. **Content and Methodology** - how objectives will be achieved: what material will be covered, what methodology will be used by students and teachers, what activities will be required of the student in order to complete the course successfully
3. **Evaluation and Grading** - how the student will be evaluated and the course mark calculated

Clear delineation of these elements of a course is advantageous to both the teacher and the student. The teacher must define with precision the components and systematic progression of the course. The course outline, presented to students at the beginning of the academic year, allows them to grasp what they will be expected to accomplish, how it will be achieved, and how they will be evaluated. A precise course outline is also, and obviously, an important help to other teachers, parents, faculty advisors, etc. Taking the nature of the course and the level of sophistication of students into consideration, a degree of joint-course planning is possible. Probably the clearest (and most extreme) extension of the joint-planning format would focus on students who wish to deviate from general course objectives and undertake independent study. In such a case, the student and teacher could employ the overall planning format described below. The features of the management-by-objectives approach parallel the characteristics

of an independent learner: a person who, with appropriate assistance, can define what he/she wants to learn, can organize the resources available to accomplish these learning objectives, and can come to an accurate conclusion on how effectively goals have been accomplished.
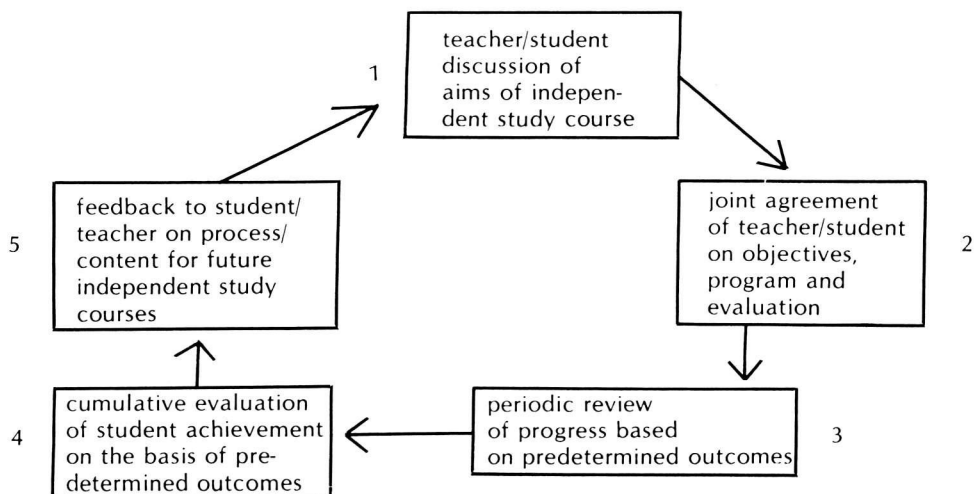
Conclusion

Throughout this presentation two key elements of the management-by-objectives approach have been described and illustrated. The first is the process by which programs are evolved; a process which involves managers and subordinates in a series of jointly-determined decisions and mutually-designated targets. The second, and equally important, element is the inner structure of the systems evolved: objectives, program, evaluation. The examples applying these ideas to supervision demonstrated how both of these elements can be incorporated into an important sphere of managerial activity in schools.

There are many other ways in which management by objectives could be applied not only to the supervision of teaching and learning but to numerous other areas of school management. The three relatively simple applications described above are proposed as practical because they have, in fact, been implemented in day-to-day school situations. Their effect has been to define, more clearly, expectations of department heads, teachers, administrators, and students, and, consequently, to increase the precision with which supervisory and learning objectives were evolved, activities

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chosen to achieve those objectives, and means selected to measure achievement.

Subordinates involved in the joint determination of objectives have experienced an increased sense of ownership and motivation to accomplish the programs they helped to generate. They have also been more satisfied with the increased level of specificity and objectivity of criteria for evaluation. Though obviously no panacea for all school management problems, management by objectives can be a powerful tool for systematically planning and improving many areas of school operation. To some extent at least, it can make the talents and energies of administrators, teachers and students more reflective, purpose-centered and effective.

NOTES

1. A typical statement of the management-by-objective approach may be studied in George S. Odiorne, **MBO II: A System of Managerial Leadership for the 80's** (Belmont, California, Fearon Pitman Publishers, 1979).
2. Odiorne notes: "In the absence of such (performance) standards, no amount of generalized motivation can produce satisfactory results. Where standards have been made clear, they have strong motivating effects in themselves." Ibid., p. 63.

ROBERT R. NEWTON, School of Education - ICEL, University of San Francisco, San Francisco, CA.