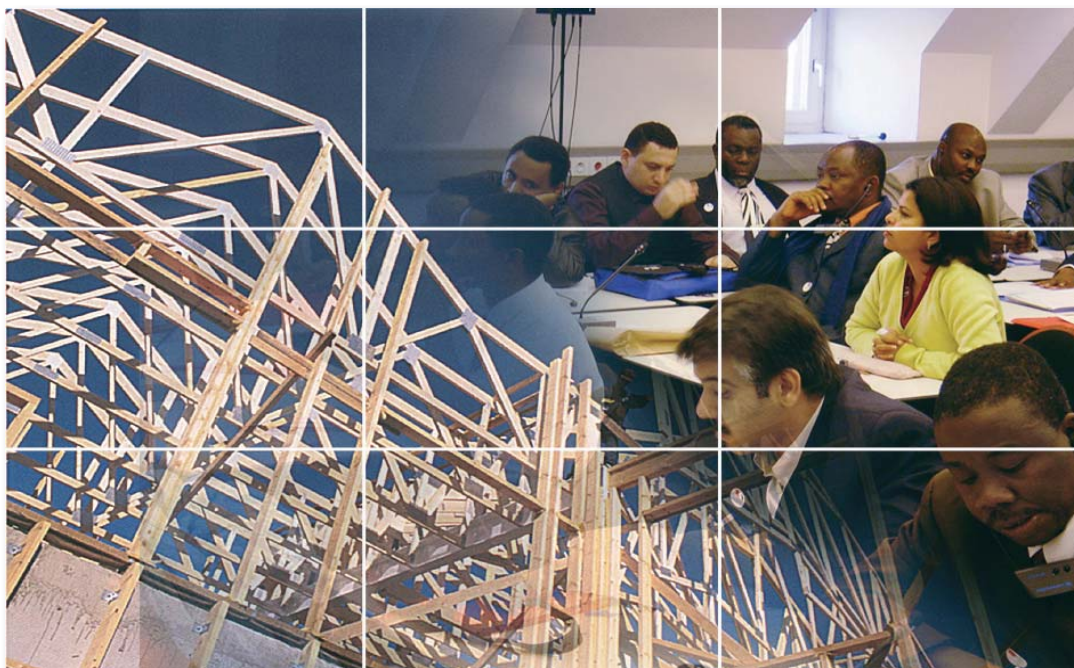


Module





2

Roles and functions of
supervisors



Module 2

..... ROLES AND FUNCTIONS OF SUPERVISORS

	Introduction	2
	Scope of the module	3
	Expected outcomes	3
	What supervisors are supposed to do	4
	Looking at job descriptions.	4
	Core functions	7
	Main conflicts of role	10
	What supervisors are doing: some evidence from research	13
	Distribution of time between tasks	13
	The views of the supervisors	14
	The views of the teachers	15
	New trends and innovations	18
	Towards a more coherent job description	18
	Focus on school rather than on teachers	21
	Increasing role of supervision in system evaluation	22
	Towards more openness and transparency	24
	Lessons learned	26

Module 2

..... ROLES AND FUNCTIONS OF SUPERVISORS




Introduction

An essential question with which to start off any discussion on reform of a supervision service concerns the main roles it is supposed to play. The terminology used to identify supervision staff can give a first identification of these roles. This terminology varies widely from one country to another. In some countries, the term inspection is considered too negative; hence the terms supervisor, advisor, resource person or simply education officer or district officer are used instead. However, despite the diversity of labels, there is much commonality in what these officers are supposed to do.

As mentioned in *Module 1*, the term 'supervision' generally refers to two distinct, but complementary tasks: on the one hand, to control and evaluate and, on the other hand, to advise and support teachers and headteachers. To undertake these functions, supervisors are in principle based outside the school at local, regional or central levels and make regular visits to schools. They also serve as liaison agents between schools and act as go-betweens to link schools with the administrative services at different levels.


Of course, within and around the school, several actors can also support teachers and control what goes on in the school. Principals, senior teachers, parent representatives and school board members are for example in such a position. These tools of internal supervision and their relationship with external supervision will be discussed in more detail in *Module 6*.



Scope of the module

This module will examine the roles and functions of supervisors in different contexts. The core functions assigned to the supervision body will have a major impact on the structure of the service, the management (e.g. recruitment and training) of its staff, and on the way they manage their work. *Modules 3, 4 and 5* will examine these issues.

In this module, we will first look at the tasks of supervisors as stipulated in their official job descriptions and discuss what should be their core functions (in *Part I*). We will then examine some research data on what they actually do (*Part II*). Very often there is a blatant discrepancy between their official job descriptions and their daily tasks. As a result, several countries have recently taken various innovative measures to make their supervision services more efficient. The nature and impact of these recent reform trends will be examined in the last section (*Part III*).



Expected outcomes

At the end of this module, participants should be able to:

- identify the main roles and functions of supervision services;
- appreciate the tensions inherent in the job of the supervisor;
- identify possible reforms that aim at a more effective definition of the roles of the supervision service; and
- prepare coherent and feasible job descriptions for their own supervision services.

What supervisors are supposed to do

Looking at job descriptions.

Traditional supervision services are generally homogeneous as far as human resources are concerned. There is little specialization or differentiation between officers of the same service in terms of the work to be done. They basically do the same things in different geographical areas or for different types of schools. Consequently, job descriptions of supervisors are similar and largely coincide with the functions of the service itself.

That being said, job descriptions of supervisors do vary considerably between countries according to the specific category of supervisor being considered and the degree of precision of the tasks being prescribed.

Below is a list of functions assigned to supervisory officers in three different countries: the Assistant Basic Education Officer in the State of Uttar Pradesh, India; the School Supervisor in Trinidad and Tobago; and the Primary School Inspector in Tanzania.

Examples

Assistant Basic Education Officer (Uttar Pradesh)

The official job description contains 31 items – 15 administrative and 16 pedagogical. The selection of responsibilities mentioned hereafter illustrates the wide diversity of tasks, their heavy administrative bias and the problematic distinction between pedagogic and administrative functions.

Administrative:

- *to submit the transfer and promotion proposals of teachers and employees and ensure that they are being executed;*
- *to submit proposals for disciplinary proceedings within the Block Panchayat (elected governing body at block level) area to the District Basic Education Officer and, following his approval, execute them;*
- *to send the records of life insurance of retired male/female teachers and other employees to the District Basic Education Officer and Accounts Officers;*
- *to prepare the pay bills of all male/female teachers and other employees of Parishad and send them to the Accounts Officers for disbursement and ensure the disbursement of salaries in time and maintenance of their service books; and*
- *to prepare the bills of pensions, family pension and relief pension of all retired male/female teachers and send them to the Accounts Officers and ensure their reimbursement.*

Pedagogic:

- *to inspect all the schools in the Block Panchayat and keep the administrative and educational set-up in tact and send the inspection reports of the schools inspected by him/her and subordinate inspectors to the District Basic Education Officer;*

- to ensure the proper management of all the students' funds and check their misuse;
- to seek community participation in education and make arrangements for rendering the village Education Committee effective;
- to collect all the educational statistics of the Block Panchayat and analyze the data; and
- to create an efficient management system for the village education libraries and co-ordinate the Education Expansion Office as well as the payment of remuneration.

School Supervisor I (Trinidad and Tobago)¹

Examples of tasks in the official job specification of School Supervisor I, who is responsible for about 16-20 primary schools, include:

- inspecting schools to ensure that the education programme and policy are being effectively carried out;
- advising on modern teaching methods, skills and techniques;
- supervising and participating in the conduct of instruction and orientation of teachers;
- liaising with various organizations, community groups and other interests in matters affecting education;
- checking on study assignments and instructions to teachers;
- investigating complaints involving teachers, parents and the public, settling disputes and submitting reports;
- preparing confidential reports on principal and vice-principals, assessing reports on teachers, reporting on matters related to the discipline of teachers;
- reporting on equipment, furniture and the state of school buildings; and
- performing related work as required.

Primary School Inspector (Tanzania)

The PSI is the main field inspector. It is his or her duty to work with colleagues in inspecting schools on a regular basis. The duties of the PSI are the following:

- to supervise the implementation of government education policy and regulations;
- to ensure the effective implementation of the school curriculum;
- to advise on matters related to education when and where appropriate;
- to execute the inspection programme;
- to write up all relevant inspection reports;
- to supervise all teachers on probation;
- to deal with any teacher rated as being 'weak';
- to liaise with colleagues when required;
- to supervise, liaise and hold conferences with WECs;
- to monitor the WECs in supervising and accounting for the expenditure of any money allocated to schools or the School Committee for specific purposes;

¹ Source: Harvey and Williams, 1991, p. 193.

- *to hold conferences and seminars with headteachers, teachers and school committees when necessary;*
- *to promote and support the establishment and work of the TRCs; and*
- *other duties include books and syllabus reviews as members of subject panels in curriculum development and acting as setters and markers of examinations.*

Question

When looking at these three different job descriptions, what similarities and differences do you come across?

There is some variation between these three job descriptions: supervisors in Trinidad, for instance, have less purely administrative duties among their official tasks than their colleagues in Uttar Pradesh. Although in other cases the list of responsibilities assigned may be less detailed and somewhat different, it is fair to say that job descriptions of supervisors generally demonstrate the following characteristics:

- an overload of responsibilities;
- dispersion of tasks; and
- inclusion of activities that bear little relationship to the core functions of a supervisor.

An examination of these three lengthy job descriptions could make the reader more confused than clear about a supervisor's mandate. It is useful therefore to look in more detail at what precisely are the core functions of supervisory services.

Task 1

Using the job description of a supervisory officer in your own country, identify the core functions as well as the tasks of lesser importance. Does the job description provide a feasible job for supervisors and a clear indication of their main role within the system?

Completing the task: some hints

A job description generally contains many verbs. It is useful to group these into different categories, by putting together synonyms. The categories that are most represented in principle reflect the core functions of the supervisor.

Most probably, there will be at least two recurring categories: a first one related to 'control', containing verbs such as 'inspect', 'supervise', 'evaluate' and 'assess'; and a second one related to the verbs 'support' and 'advise'.

Probably there will be quite a few other categories, relating, for instance, to 'report', to 'prepare administrative documents' and to 'participate in meetings'.

The more categories appear and the more differences there are between them, the greater the risk that supervisors will face an overload of tasks and a dispersion of duties. This will make it difficult for them to play an effective role in the education system.

Core functions

Generally, supervision staff are expected to play three different yet complementary roles, which are quite evident in the job descriptions:

- to control and evaluate;
- to give support and advice; and
- to act as a liaison agent.

Graph 1: . Core functions of supervisors

Core functions	Field					
	Pedagogic			Administrative		
	Focus					
	Teacher	School	System	Teacher	School	System
Control						
Support						
Liaison agent						

Each of these roles has two fields of application that are not always easy to disentangle, namely the pedagogical and the administrative. Moreover, supervisors can focus either on the individual teacher or on the school as a whole and as we will see later on, they can also play an important role in monitoring the system as a whole.

Control

The control function that relates to the original meaning of the word ‘inspection’ is at the heart of compliance monitoring as defined earlier (see *Module 1*). Still today, in many countries control is considered to be the essential function of supervisors by central ministries.

Examples

In Spain, the first function of the Inspectorate Service is to “ensure that the laws, regulations and any other legal dispositions of the educational administration are fulfilled in schools and services”. Similarly, in the Netherlands, “the primary responsibility of the Inspectorate has always been to ensure compliance with statutory regulations. This has traditionally been seen as an important way of ensuring that the teaching and training provided within any given sector is in principle the same”.²

The control function covers pedagogical as well as administrative inputs and processes. Traditionally, control of the teaching staff - the human resource input - received top priority. This is not only because the teacher is the most important input, but also because the evaluation by the inspector is, in many countries, an integral part of the teacher promotion system. In Belgium, for example, each inspector used to have to prepare 180 reports concerning individual teacher behaviour on the basis of class visits.

At the same time, supervision of material inputs is also on the list of core tasks. In many of the poorest developing countries, the situation of school infrastructure has deteriorated so much that supervision of material inputs is taking precedence over supervision of human inputs.

² Source: Hopes, 1991.

Support

Obviously, simple control without support will not easily lead to quality improvement. This is why, from the very beginning, these two dimensions of supervision have been intimately linked.

In most instances, support takes the form of advice given to teachers and headteachers during supervision visits, which cover both administrative and pedagogical issues. Other modalities of support should also be considered, such as: individual tutoring; demonstration lessons; in-service training programmes; and organization of peer-learning.

Liaison

Because of the two previous functions, which include regular school visits, supervisors are also the main liaison agents between the top of the education system, where norms and rules are set, and the schools, where education really takes place. As expected of go-between agents, they have a double task: to inform schools of decisions taken by the centre, and to inform the centre of the realities at school level.

Their liaison role is, however, not only vertical: increasingly, supervisors are entrusted with horizontal relations and have a privileged role to play in identifying and spreading new ideas and good practices between schools. Particularly when ambitious reform programmes are being launched, their role in disseminating the reform and in ensuring smooth implementation at the school level becomes important.

As if their job description was not sufficiently complex, supervisors must also establish good linkages with other services involved in quality development such as pre- and in-service teacher training, curriculum development, preparation of national tests and examinations.

Question

What possible role conflicts will supervisors face when trying to fulfil these different core functions?

Main role conflicts

The work of supervisors has always been characterized by a number of tensions that are difficult to overcome.

Tension between administrative and pedagogic duties

The first tension is between administrative duties and pedagogical responsibilities. In many countries these tensions have increased because of the gradual deterioration of school functioning. When the system starts deteriorating, the need for pedagogical support becomes stronger, but at the same time, supervisors must invest more and more effort into administrative control and problems of discipline. This is a real vicious circle that makes the work of supervisors increasingly difficult and exposes them to further criticism.

Examples

*An IIEP study on school functioning in Madhya Pradesh, a State in **India**, found that 80 per cent of the visits of inspectors were routine inspections of an administrative nature, simply to solve practical problems related to the day-to-day school functioning. Likewise, in **Bangladesh** “about 70 per cent of inspections have been concerned with granting/renewing recognition to schools, 15 per cent with inquiry into allegations, 10 per cent with academic supervision, and 5 per cent with other purposes”. Data on **Trinidad and Tobago** suggest that secondary school supervisors, when visiting schools, spend slightly more time on personnel matters (including teacher discipline) and plant matters (including construction, repairs, maintenance and security) than on programme matters (such as curriculum, time-tabling and student-related matters).³*

Indeed, when a choice has to be made between administrative and pedagogic duties, the latter will suffer. But arguably, some supervisors may prefer to focus on administration rather than pedagogy, as they have the power to take administrative decisions but, in the eyes of some teachers, lack the authority and/or competence to give pedagogic advice.

Tension between control and support

But even when supervision staff find time for more pedagogic tasks when visiting schools, there remains tension between their control and appraisal functions on the one hand, and their support and development functions on the other. A recurring theme in the literature, this second role conflict is probably more serious than the first. Teachers around the globe voice criticism that the merging of these distinct roles in one person perverts the relationship between the teacher and the adviser.

Moreover, this is not at all a recent issue. Since the inception of the first inspectorates, supervisors have been asked to control and to assist. Two decades ago, studies saw this tension as a fundamental weakness, and it remains a moot point in many countries from different regions of the world. As stated by a researcher:⁴ “his subordinates expect the supervisor to be a democratic leader (and give them more autonomy in their role performance), and to behave

³ Sources: Govinda and Varghese, 1993; Bangladesh MOE, 1993, p. 45; Harvey and Williams, 1991, p. 195.

⁴ Source: Gaziel, 1979, p. 65.

professionally, as an instructor and guide; his superordinates expect him to be a benevolent leader, to use his formal authority and to be more bureaucratic”.

This conflict of roles is obviously a matter of concern in those countries where the inspector and the adviser is one and the same person. Manifestly, the widespread trend towards more democracy and the call for more participation and for greater school autonomy, characteristic of most education systems, has increased criticism of the traditional inspection model and makes the combination of the control and support functions more and more difficult. Inspectors are often accused of demonstrating a bureaucratic authoritarian attitude, which goes against the spirit of initiative expected from teachers within today’s school management practices.

Gender may also, at times, confound matters. For while teaching staff are becoming feminized, supervision personnel are not. At the beginning of the 1990s in the USA, less than 3 per cent of school superintendents were women, although, at least a quarter of elementary principals and more than half of teachers were female. Similarly, in Mexico, at the end of the 1990s, women represented more than 60 per cent of the primary school teaching staff, yet they only made up 28 per cent of the regular supervisors and 6 per cent of the supervisors of indigenous schools.

Task 2

Calculate the share of women among supervisors in your country, and compare it with the share of men. Look also at the differences between supervisors and teachers.

Explain the under-representation of women amongst supervisory staff in many countries.

Completing the task: some hints

It might not be easy to find recent data on the number and sex of supervisors in your country. Generally, though, a personnel or statistics department should be able to help you. Even if data are not complete or somewhat outdated, the task remains useful.

Differences between countries can be wide. In most countries though, supervision has always been and continues to be a profession with a much higher number of males than females. A good indication of the participation of women in supervisory posts is to compare their share among supervisors and among teachers. It is likely that their share among teachers, especially at primary level, will be much higher than their share among supervisors.

Different reasons can be mentioned:

- fewer women have the necessary qualifications and experience, as they were (or, in some cases, are) discriminated against in schools;
- women are less eager to accept 'hardship' posts, which, in many countries, are a condition for promotion;
- women do not have the same access as men to networks that provide support to individual members and push up their promotions;
- there is little career counselling and few role models to motivate women;
- it is felt that a control task is more appropriate to a man than to a woman.

Tension between standardized procedures and need for tailor-made services

In addition to the two classical tensions commented on above, an increasing concern is the intricacy of combining two different supervision approaches. Arguably, there is a need to offer tailor-made services, upon request, to schools that enjoy growing autonomy and demand specific supervision and support services. Schools differ greatly: the needs of a small rural primary school are quite different from that of a big urban secondary school. But in many countries, the need for a diversified service conflicts with the tradition of delivering standardized services, as requested by the central bureaucracy. This issue relates to the way in which the work of supervisor is being organized and will be discussed further in *Module 5*.

What supervisors are doing: some evidence from research

It is useful to compare the official job descriptions of supervisors with what they actually do. Attention is first given to time-budgets of supervisors, then to the opinions of supervisors and school staff.

Distribution of time between tasks

On what kind of activities do supervisors spend most of their time? Examples will follow from supervisors in three different countries: India, Zimbabwe and Chile.

Examples

*Table 1 provides information about the task distribution of supervision staff in **Uttar Pradesh**, India. It is based on the answers received from a sample of 133 Assistant Basic Education Officers (ABSAs) who were invited to give a rough idea of the distribution of their time for different activities.*

Supervising buildings and construction	30.3
Collection of information	28.6
Meetings	11.7
Academic supervision	8.7
Departmental work	7.1
Others*	4.7
Midday meal distribution	3.3
Distribution of scholarships	2.1
Co-curricular activities	1.8
Plan preparation	1.7

* Census operation, election duties and social work.

*This table, which presents the averages of the individual estimates, shows that less than 10 per cent of the ABSAs' time is spent on academic supervision. Roughly 30 per cent is spent on the collection of information and another 30 per cent on the supervision of construction work, an activity that is not even explicitly mentioned in their official job description. Indeed, the interview revealed that, in addition to their official responsibilities, the supervisors have gradually been requested to perform a series of other duties, such as: monitoring construction work of school buildings; collecting, compiling and disseminating numerous types of statistical data; distributing midday meals; organizing health check-ups; tree plantation drives; etc. A second example comes from **Zimbabwe**, where the six professionals in a District Education Office were interviewed. Individual responses were used to compute the mean time for the group and the results are summarized in the following table:*

Office work	28
School visits	23
Report writing	18
Staff development	15
Attending meetings	11
School functions	3
Investigations	1
Pastoral	1

Responses show again that school visits, which form the core part of the supervisor's mandate, are overshadowed by office work and that, more generally, administration-related activities tend to take up a sizeable proportion of the supervisors' time.

*A third example is based on responses supplied by a sample of provincial supervisors in Departamento Provincial Santiago Sur in **Chile**, where supervision makes a distinction between schools most in need of their support and other schools.*

Technical meetings (co-ordination, programme preparation)	26
School visits (to 'needy' schools)	20
School visits (to other schools)	14
Meetings with partners (school directors, school managers)	8
Self-improvement training sessions	8
Preparation of visits	8
Administrative work (report writing, replies to requests)	7.2
Follow-up to visits	6
Work related to application of official rules and regulations	2.8

These different data illustrate a serious problem with supervision in many countries. Supervisors are overburdened with routine administrative tasks, some of which have little or nothing to do with their official job description. Consequently, the time that they can devote to pedagogical support and advice becomes limited, if not insignificant.

The views of the supervisors

In the IIEP studies, when asked about their main problems, the most common reply of supervisors was excessive workload. In their view, this is because they are often responsible for too many teachers or schools (see *Module 5* on the management of supervisory work); and because they have too many different tasks, many of which have little to do with supervision as such. In Korea, for example, 60 per cent of supervisors considered "an excessive non-supervisory workload" as their main problem.

This has a number of negative effects. Administrative tasks, which are less crucial but generally more urgent, are given more time than real pedagogical issues. When visiting schools, supervisors spend little time on classroom observation; and when they do, their attitude is more evaluative than supportive.

This brings us to another problem mentioned by the supervisors: that their work is more disciplinary than developmental. Supervisors everywhere – including those in countries where specific support actors exist (master teachers or resource persons, for instance) – claim that they would like to get more involved in teacher support and advice.

The views of the teachers

The teachers seem to be in line with the supervisors when they feel that supervision work should be more developmental and less control-oriented. It is not that teachers reject the idea of being controlled; what they dislike is rather the attitude of ‘controllers’. The two most frequent complaints are that some supervisors are authoritarian, faultfinding and bureaucratic and, moreover, biased, subjective and arbitrary.

Examples

*Almost all teachers in **Bangladesh** also expressed a feeling that supervision staff suffer from an attitude “of a controller and superior officer”. According to them, supervisors show little patience and respect for teachers, even in the presence of the learners. Their visits to schools for that reason lead to stress among teachers, rather than helping them to develop their skills. This is also evident in **Nepal**, where many teachers “perceive supervisors as a threat as they feel they could transfer them without good reason”. Korean teachers also complain about supervisors’ authoritarian and bureaucratic attitudes and their lack of professional knowledge.*

Bitter complaints about supervisors’ work further include irregular and bad planning of visits, not enough time spent in the classroom and, at times, irrelevant advice. All this does not mean that teachers do not recognize the positive effects of supervisory work (see *Box 1* on evaluation of impact of supervision in Sri Lanka) but rather that, in their opinion, the problem with supervisors is mainly an attitudinal one.

Box 1: Assessment of the impact of supervision on schools, in Sri Lanka

In Sri Lanka, both principals (a sample of 69) and teachers (a sample of 181) were asked to evaluate the impact of supervision. The results are as follows: more than 80 % of principals believe that supervision has a positive impact: 81 % think so of master teacher visits; 83 % of incidental supervision and 87 % of team supervision. Sixty % of teachers are of the opinion that SLEAS officer visits have a positive impact on the teaching-learning process and on teacher motivation. Respectively 76 and 71 % feel that master teachers visits have a positive impact on the teaching-learning process and on teacher motivation.

Among other things, this shows that headteachers are less critical than teachers. Heads of schools, at times, consider supervisors as partners in their attempts to discipline and control teachers. However, it seems that the closer one comes to the classroom, the less benefits are felt from supervision. Teachers appreciate visits by master teachers or teams of supervisors, which include master teachers, more than those by SLEAS officers. The fact that the latter are more interested in teacher control and the former more in teacher support helps to explain this.

School staff in Sri Lanka were then explicitly asked how supervision and support acted positively or negatively on their work. The positive effects that they mentioned are summarized as follows: First – principals made this point more strongly – supervision improves teacher motivation and student enthusiasm. Visits by outside specialists tend to

make students more active and reinforces the commitment of teachers. This seems to be particularly the case in deprived schools, where regular visits (mainly by master teachers) are received by the teachers as a real sign of interest and encouragement. Second – this is stressed more by teachers – supervision helps to improve teaching- learning practices. Inputs received from supervisors and, again, mainly from Master Teachers, help teachers to strengthen their knowledge of teaching methodology, subject content, use of remedial teaching and teaching aids. Principals indicated that this is especially the case for new teachers who like to be supervised and receive advice. Third, supervision encourages better planning and preparation by the teachers. Since master teachers examine term notes, weekly notes and student’s exercise books, teachers say that they tend to keep such records more systematically. Moreover, as stated by one principal: “Frequent supervision stimulates teachers to be prepared and plan their activities. They are reluctant to be caught unprepared in incidental supervision that is unannounced”.

Among the negative effects of supervision, two are particularly worth mentioning. First is the lack of planning by supervisors, characterized by the haphazard way in which supervision takes place. Teachers indicated that, at times, supervisors visit schools only towards the end of the year, which makes their work less effective. In some instances, it was felt that some supervisors come to the classroom unprepared and in others that their visit was confined to a few minutes of observation. Related to the attitude of the supervisors, secondly, principals stated that occasionally teachers are hurt by the remarks made by supervisors either during or after their visits, in other schools or public places.

It is interesting to note that the opinions of headteachers are often less critical than those of the teachers. This is probably linked to that fact that headteachers and teachers have different expectations. Headteachers may want visits to be, at least in part, oriented toward teacher control and discipline and not exclusively toward pedagogical development – the main concern of teachers.

In Chile, an effort was made through focus group discussions to systematize what teachers consider to be a good supervisor. The results were the following:

- somebody who helps, assists and indicates possible errors without waiting for them to occur in order to be able to sanction them;
- somebody who does not impose, but who respects the specificity of the school and is willing to listen;
- somebody who knows how to guide, with good human relations and empathy;
- somebody who concentrates on the daily school processes in a systematic and integrated way;
- somebody who develops support networks;
- somebody who takes into account the know-how of the teacher and stimulates his/her professional development.

This list confirms that teachers strongly dislike the classic faultfinding approach and expect supervisors to treat them as professionals and take into account the specific realities of the school when providing advice.

Task 3

Reflect on how the examples given in this section relate to the situation in your country. On what type of activities do supervisors spend most of their time? How does that relate to their official job description? How do supervisors look upon their own work and how are they looked upon by the teachers?

Completing the task: some hints

It would be useful, in this regard, to reflect on your own experience and/or to interview a few supervisors. You could proceed as follows: refer back to the job description (see *Task 1*) to identify the main duties of a supervisor; ask them to draw up a time-budget for a normal week (or month), by assigning to each of these a percentage of time spent during that week; compare the core responsibilities, defined according to the job description, with the duties that take up the most time.

It would be no surprise that the differences are marked. If so, you might ask the supervisors why this is so. There will be different reasons, which might include: lack of resources to perform the core duties; the fact that non-core duties (such as writing reports, collecting data and participating in meetings) generally have a more urgent character, as they carry deadlines; the fact that supervisors are evaluated more on their respect of these deadlines than on the completion of their core duties.

New trends and innovations

In order to address the different problems and challenges, many countries have initiated processes of reform of their supervision systems. Although these reforms do not all point in the same direction, a number of converging trends can be identified.

Towards a more coherent job description

The first trend is to achieve a limited and yet more coherent job description for supervisors. This implies a reduction in the role conflicts mentioned earlier by de-linking control from advice functions and separating administrative from pedagogic tasks. Several experts have made recommendations in that direction, in general or in relation to one particular country. This advice is, however, not all new: the 1956 International Conference on Education recommended that the supervisor “be relieved of the more routine official tasks that so often absorb a large part of his time”, while already in the 1980s, Costa Rica made a distinction between pedagogic advisors and administrative inspectors – the former being more active in school districts, and the latter, in lesser numbers, acting at the regional or sub-regional level.

Separating control and support roles

Several countries have attempted, or are attempting, to separate control from support roles. In some countries, the trend is towards giving supervisors a greater role in supporting and advising teachers.

Examples

South Africa, Malawi, Chile, France, Germany and several states in the USA, among others, request their supervision staff to focus more on giving support, and thus playing a developmental role. In the mid-1970s in Peru, special technico-pedagogic adviser posts were created at the levels of regions, zones and nuclei, whose focus was on giving support and support alone. About the same time, similar changes occurred in Venezuela and Costa Rica. In the framework of the Chilean ‘900 schools programme’, supervisors were given specific training so that they could adopt the role of pedagogical guide in the schools. This change from inspector to advisor was well appreciated by almost all supervisors.

In a few other countries in which school-based management practices have been introduced, New Zealand and the UK in particular, a similar separation between control and support is taking place. But in these cases, the shift is more towards control for external supervision, while support and advice services are supposed to be handled directly at the school level as part of an overall quality assurance approach (typically, the school will pay a private service provider to deliver the support needed).

Examples

The Education Review Office established in New Zealand in 1989 does not play any role in support and advice, but is concerned mainly with monitoring schools. The comparable reforms of 1992 in England and Wales are in part designed to clearly separate the functions of control and support, by prohibiting anyone who has had a

close professional relationship with a school from participating in an OFSTED inspection. The OFSTED team that visits schools is there to control and not to support. Originally, OFSTED inspection team members were instructed not to engage in any form of advice during their visits – an instruction which has been slightly relaxed since then. This clearly shows that the new system introduced in 1992 represented a change in approach from supporting schools to controlling their results. Not surprisingly, it went together with a reduction of the resources available to local authorities, which used to control and provide support at the same time. A link can thus be noted between increased emphasis on accountability and a trend towards control in school supervision.

De-linking administrative and pedagogical tasks

Equally important are the efforts made to de-link purely administrative from pedagogic tasks, to allow supervision staff to concentrate on what is crucial rather than merely urgent. In some countries, such as Spain, the administrative tasks have been assigned to the corresponding departments of the Ministry while in others, such as Chile and El Salvador, a special separate category of administrative inspectors has been created.

Examples

In Spain, a redefinition of the functions of supervisory staff took place in the early 1990s: “various factors connected with the strengthening of educational administration have tended to eliminate from the Inspectorate many central and long-standing features of their profession, namely planning, distribution of materials, equipping schools, managing teaching staff, control of buildings, selection of teachers, special educational programmes, etc. – all examples of executive areas which have now been assigned to other departments of the administration”. This hand-in-hand reformulation of tasks and restructuring of administration has allowed the Inspectorate to focus on its pedagogic duties, both on advice and control. As a result, the number of school visits after the reform has increased significantly.⁵

⁵ Source: Alvarez & Collera, 1995, p. 162.

Question

What problems could arise when implementing the reforms described above?

Simplifying is not simple

While there may exist very valid pedagogic arguments for simplifying the supervisor's role, this is not always a simple task. Experiences from several countries with different characteristics suggest that it is complex due to practical difficulties: the need to employ more staff; teachers and principals being under the supervision of too many people; and competition between different categories of supervisory staff.

Moreover, in the inevitable rivalry for influence, the supervisor with administrative functions tends to command more influence over institutions and teachers – and even parents and the public – than the purely academic supervisor. Supervisors therefore do not necessarily like to be relieved of all their administrative duties. The strong sense of professional independence further complicates the task of simplifying supervision functions. It seems to make it equally hard, according to a survey on the European Union, to ask supervisors to concentrate merely on a few tasks: “there was frequent evidence during the survey that inspectors are reluctant to give up particular duties when professional institutes or bodies are set up within a school system, for example for curriculum development, in-service education for teachers and examinations. They somehow feel that their true responsibilities have been removed from them”.⁶

It must also be mentioned that a supervisor's job description cannot be seen out of its political and administrative context: the more centralized the system and the more authoritarian its government, the more likely it is that school inspectors will

⁶ Source: Hopes, 1991, p. 22.

be seen as instruments for exerting control over the system and the schools. In other words, changing the role and the image of the supervisor will be easier when such a change is part of wider political or management reform, as demonstrated by the radical reforms in the UK, New Zealand, some states of Australia and Chile.

Focus on school rather than on teachers

It is increasingly being realized that controlling individual teachers, or even providing them with advice and support, will not automatically lead to better school results. Improving the quality of schools involves much more than working with individual teachers. It requires a global approach directed toward the school as a whole, involving the relations between the teaching staff and between the school and the community, and paying full attention to the contextual factors. In many countries, the focus is therefore shifting from the individual teacher to the school as a whole.

Examples

*In **England**, the audit, the system of global school inspection by a team of inspectors has been systematized since the School Act of 1992. Each primary school is to be inspected every few years by a full-fledged inspection team. This team covers all aspects of school functioning, from financial management to pedagogical practices. Such school evaluations are related to the formulation of an action plan to address the issues raised in the inspection report. In other countries (such as **Korea, Sri Lanka and Chile**), similar trends can be observed, although the focus on school functioning is less systematic and often more support than control-oriented.*

School-focused supervision indeed has considerable advantages, but it also has its problems. It requires teamwork and therefore important changes in the traditional behaviour and work habits of the supervisors. Inspectors and supervisors have always been used to work in isolation and with a high level of autonomy. Working in teams requires new attitudes and different working methods for which the supervisors are not prepared. In the UK, for example, the shift towards school-focused inspection has been accompanied by a total restructuring of the inspection services and special training is being given to inspection teams. Furthermore, such a shift also implies the acquisition of new technical skills since full school inspection covers all different dimensions of school functioning including financing and relations with the parents and community. In a certain sense, inspection in this case becomes synonymous with auditing and uses similar techniques (see outline of the OFSTED school audit in *Box 2*).

Box 2: Outline of OFSTED school audit.⁷

OFSTED audits cover the following areas:

1. the quality of education provided by the school;
2. the educational standards achieved in the school;
3. whether the financial resources made available to the school are managed efficiently; and
4. the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils at the school.

These four elements are clearly visible in the main headings that structure the OFSTED inspection report:

1. Introduction: Basic information about the school, intake of pupils and areas served, school data and indicators.
2. Main findings and key issues for action
3. Standards and quality: Standards of achievement, quality of learning.
4. Efficiency of the school
5. Pupils' personal development and behaviour: Spiritual, moral, social, cultural development, attendance.
6. Subjects of the curriculum and other curricular provision.
7. Factors contributing to these findings
 - quality of teaching
 - assessment, recording and reporting
 - quality and range of the curriculum
 - equality of opportunity provision for SEN
 - management and administration
 - teaching and non-teaching staff
 - resources for learning
 - accommodation
 - pupils' welfare and guidance
 - links with parents
 - agencies and other institutions.

Increasing role of supervision in system evaluation

There is a growing consciousness that monitoring the quality of individual teachers and schools is not enough, simply because the quality of an education system as a whole cannot be equated with the quality of the total number of schools. System monitoring needs to be more comprehensive and should involve different criteria that have to do with aspects of equality and justice, international comparability and definition of national norms and standards. In order to be efficient, a monitoring system should not only focus on the individual teacher and school but also on the system, and supervisors have an important role to play in this respect.

Once again, this is not a completely new trend. In 1974, the sixth Commonwealth Education Conference noted that "if a trend can be discerned, it lies in the direction of reducing the amount of inspection of individual teachers and schools, and making fuller use of the experience and expertise of inspectors in wider and more general issues and the formulation of policy". However, at that time that trend was confirmed in reality in very few countries. Recently, it has gained a new

⁷ Source: Wilcox & Gray, p.39-40.

impetus. In some countries, supervision services are invited to produce consolidated reports that present the 'health status' of the school system as a whole or that assess particular aspects of the functioning of the school system, such as the availability and use of teaching materials, the relative difficulties and successes of introducing new pedagogical methods, the management of financial resources at school level, or any other topic that may be of interest to the decision-maker. This evolution gives increased value to the work of the supervision and support staff that start acting as policy advisers rather than as mere controllers.

Examples

In France, a change in the functions of the General Inspectorate was introduced in 1989 on the grounds that, because of their intimate contacts with school realities, inspectors were the best placed to assess the overall school system in a qualitative way and to produce regular reports on specific issues and challenges. These reports, which are based on specific fieldwork and special school visits carried out by the General Inspectorate staff, have become an extremely important input for decision-making at ministerial-level. Yearly résumés are published for the public at large, which are widely commented upon in the press and are the basis for much political debate.

In England and Wales, OFSTED has been producing an Annual Report on the school system as a whole since its establishment. This report, which is presented each year to the Parliament by the Secretary of State for Education, is largely based on evidence from the year's regular school inspections carried out by inspection teams and by HMI, and also on special research commissioned by OFSTED. In addition to this Annual Report, OFSTED also produces other reports on specific topics such as the ones mentioned above.

Task 4

Do supervision services in your own country play this role of 'system' monitoring?

If yes, how do they play that role? And what is its impact?

If not, do you think it could be useful to introduce such system monitoring? And how could it best be organized?

Completing the task: some hints

If in your country supervision undertakes such system monitoring, it would be useful to reflect on various questions, such as what type of report is produced. Is it a real publication or simply a ministry report that will be filed, as so many others? To whom is this report addressed: does the Ministry only mean it for internal use, or does it have a much wider audience? Does the press pay any attention to the report? Who are the authors: Ministry staff or a group of independent advisers/inspectors? Who decides on the focus of the report? The overall review of education: does the content – the theme – change from year to year or does the report remain the same every year?

In your country, in case supervision does not yet play this role, you should reflect on the above questions and, in addition, on the following issues: Do the current reports of school supervision visits contain sufficient information to produce a report on the education system as a whole, or is there a need for a separate series of school visits undertaken specifically for this system evaluation? Which department or unit (within or outside of the Ministry) should be in charge of it?

One major advantage of allowing the supervision service to undertake an evaluation of the education system as a whole is that it enhances the image and importance of this service. It is possible, however, that current supervision reports do not allow for the preparation of a system evaluation report. In such a case, two solutions seem feasible: 1. changing supervision report forms so that they take into consideration issues of policy relevance and demand that a few staff of the central service analyze these reports; 2. undertaking a specific exercise and creating a separate service. This might, in some countries, be unaffordable at present.

Towards more openness and transparency

In order to counteract the traditional criticisms of secrecy and subjectivity, supervision systems in several countries have gone a long way to making their procedures more open and transparent. Efforts are being made in at least three complementary directions.

First, there is more openness and discussions with those being appraised, i.e. school staff. In many countries, it is now a rule that each teacher should be notified several days in advance of an inspection visit. Moreover, inspectors can no longer base their assessment on only one lesson and walk away after the class visit. They now have to discuss the report with the teacher and hand over a copy to him/her. This links to a wider concern to render teacher appraisal more participatory.

Example

*The 1995 White Paper on Education in **Barbados**, for instance, stresses that “a fundamental principle of the new Teacher Appraisal System is that there is collaboration between the appraiser and the appraised and full account ... [must] be taken of the teacher’s own contribution and self-assessment.”*

Some countries have gone a step further and are making reports of full school inspections available to the clients of the education system – or, in other words, the parents and the community surrounding the schools.

Examples

*In **England**, **New Zealand**, **Spain** and **Sweden**, for example, school evaluation reports are accessible or made available to the general public, and in the first instance, to the local school community. The 1998 Education White Paper in **Jamaica** mentions that the revised Education Regulations will reflect an obligation by education officers*

to ensure that School Boards are regularly and appropriately informed about assessments of school performance and principal performance.

Question

What do you think will be the impact of this policy of making conclusions from inspection visits available to the public?

There is no clear evidence yet to prove that such publicity leads to change. It is argued, in relation to Sweden, that “where evaluation stimulates change, it does so largely through administrative pressure or heightened awareness within the school of its own problems, rather than through accountability to a wider audience. Although assessments made at the municipal level are generally available to the public, it is not often that either schools make them accessible to parents, or that parents take a direct interest in them”.⁸ It should also be pointed out that such transparency is rare, if it exists at all, in developing countries, where school inspection reports are generally considered confidential.

Finally, in order to reduce secrecy and subjectivity, several countries have started introducing checklists, standardized forms and manuals for supervision purposes. One of the most comprehensive efforts was made by the OFSTED in the UK, which produced and published an extremely detailed framework and handbook for school evaluation as a standardization tool for the different inspection teams

Although such devices cannot guarantee full objectivity, they can really help in making supervision exercises more consistent and reliable. The negative side is that they may reduce the creativity and flexibility of the supervisors and even become instruments for transforming supervision into a formal, ritual exercise.

⁸ Source: OECD, 1995, p. 13



Lessons learned



Question:

The expected outcomes of this module were that you would gain a sound grasp of the roles supervision services play, the conflicts these entail, and, as a result, the aims of recent reforms. Summarise briefly what you learnt by studying this module. Does it compare with what follows?

As presented in the following graph, **supervision staff are expected to** control teachers and schools and, in some cases, evaluate the education system as a whole; offer support and advice to the same actors (teachers, schools, and at system level); represent a link between the schools and the administration; and examine both administrative and pedagogical aspects of the school system.

Core functions	Field					
	Pedagogic			Administrative		
	Focus					
	Teacher	School	System	Teacher	School	System
Control						
Support						
Liaison agent						

The two obvious conflicts within this wide task description are: 1) between control and support; and 2) between the administrative and pedagogical duties. Research

on actual supervision practices in various countries has shown that supervisors spend most of their time on administrative matters and that, while in a school, they focus more on control than on support. This has led to deterioration in relationships between supervisors and teachers.

In various countries, recent **reforms aim at** a more effective definition of the roles of the supervision service. These include:

- the separation of control and support functions, by creating specific staff in charge of support, such as pedagogical advisors or resource persons;
- de-linking administrative and pedagogical tasks; and
- asking supervisors to focus more on schools as institutions rather than on individual teachers.

School supervision services exist in nearly all countries; they have played a key role in the development of the public education system, by monitoring the quality of schools and by supporting their improvement. However, in many countries, these services are under increasingly heavy critique, because of their failure to have a positive impact on quality of teaching and learning. This failure is, in part, the result of a strategic challenge: the mandate of the service outweighs by far its resources, and is also caused by a series of poor management and planning decisions.

Against this background, many countries have attempted to reform their supervision system. These reforms are also inspired by the need to improve educational quality and by the recent trend towards more school autonomy. Indeed, the ability of schools to use their greater freedom effectively will depend to a large extent on the support services on which they can rely, while supervision may be needed to guide them in their decision-making and to monitor the use they make of their resources. While these reforms have met with mixed success, their overall analysis allows us to gain profound insight into what can be achieved in a specific context. This set of training modules takes the reader through a systematic examination of the issues that a Ministry of Education, intent on reforming its supervision service, will face.

The public, which will benefit most from these modules, are senior staff within ministries who are directly involved in the organisation, planning and management of supervision services, staff of research and training institutions who work on school supervision, and practising supervisors.

The authors:

Anton de Grauwe is a Programme specialist at the IIEP. Gabriel Carron was until 1999 Senior Programme Coordinator in the same institute. Both coordinated between 1996 and 2004 an extensive research and training program on “Reforming school supervision and support for quality improvement”.
