

Paper –Principles and Practice of Management

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Topic- Concept of Authority

Numerous concepts of authority exist in everyday life. For example, a person with superior knowledge and skills in some areas is called an authority, meaning that he is an expert the authorities. The expression authorised dealers denotes an appointed representative with special rights or permissions. The company form of organisation itself exists as a legal authority. These are useful meanings of authority, but we need a more precise definition of the term as it is used in the context of organisation and its management. Authority, even in the context of organising, is defined in various ways because of the various sources through which one acquires authority in the organisation. For example, authority may arise because of official position of a person, his personal competence, or the nature of his subordinates. Naturally, the definition of authority will differ in all these cases. However, in the process of organising, the emphasis is mainly on positional authority In this respect, authority may be defined as the legitimate right to give orders and get these orders obeyed. Thus, the exercise of authority involves superior-subordinate relationship. For example, Max Weber, a classical analyst of organisations, has defined authority as: the willing and unconditional compliance of people, resting upon their belief that it is legitimate for superior to impose his will on them and illegitimate for them to refuse to obey

Various scholars who rely on the formal aspect of authority define it in this way. For example, Simon, a noted thinker on organisational processes, has defined authority as follows:

"Authority may be defined as the power to make decisions which guide the actions of another. It is a relationship between two individuals, one superior, another subordinates the superior frames and transmits decisions with the expectation that these will be accepted by the subordinate. The subordinate executes such decisions and his conduct is determined by them."

Both these definitions emphasise authority relationship in the context of superior and subordinate. However, in modern organisations, authority exists in the context of relationship among various positions which may be occupied by the persons not necessarily having superior-subordinate relationship, for example, functional authority.