

Unit- I: Chapter 3 – E – Authority and Responsibility

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Objectives: The objectives of this chapter are to make the students understand;

- The concepts of Authority and Responsibility;
- The sources of Authority;
- The limits to Authority;
- Responsibility; and
- The relationship between Authority and Responsibility.

Introduction

Authority is an important principle of organisations and is central to administration. Authority, the right to get the work done by others, enables Public Administration to implement public policies. It is the legitimate power to influence the behaviour of a person and groups of persons. Authority attached to different positions in an organisation is as per the hierarchy and importance of the positions. An official cannot get the work done if he does not have an adequate amount of authority.



Definition

Authority is at the base of all formal organisations. It is the right of a person to make a decision and then get the work done by asking others to comply with the decision. Every person in an organisation who has to get the work of the organisation done requires authority. Following are some definitions of authority:

1. **The Oxford Dictionary:** Authority is the power to give orders and make others Obey; moral or legal supremacy; and the right to command.
2. **Henry Fayol:** Authority is the right to give orders and power to exact obedience.
3. **Allen:** Authority is the sum of the powers and rights entrusted to make possible the performance of the delegated work.

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4. **H. A. Simon:** Authority is the power to take decisions which guide the actions of another. It is a relationship between the supervisor and his subordinates. The superior frames and transmits decisions with the expectation that the decisions will be accepted by the subordinates. The subordinate accepts such decisions, and his conduct is determined by them.
5. **Mooney and Reiley:** Authority is the supreme coordinating power.

Authority is thus the positional or legitimate power of an official to get the work done in an organisation. It is the power of the superiors to make decisions and get them implemented by their subordinates.

Distinction between Authority and Power

Power and Authority are often used interchangeably, but they are distinct concepts. Authority is attached to a position in an organisation, and power is informal, referring to the personal influence a person has through which he can get things done. According to M.P. Follett, power is “the ability to make things happen, to be a causal agent, to initiate change.” To Chester Barnard, Power is “Informal Authority”. Max Weber defined Power “as the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance.” Thus, we can say that Power is the capacity or ability to direct or influence/manipulate the behaviour of others or the course of events.

The distinction between Authority and Power as follows:

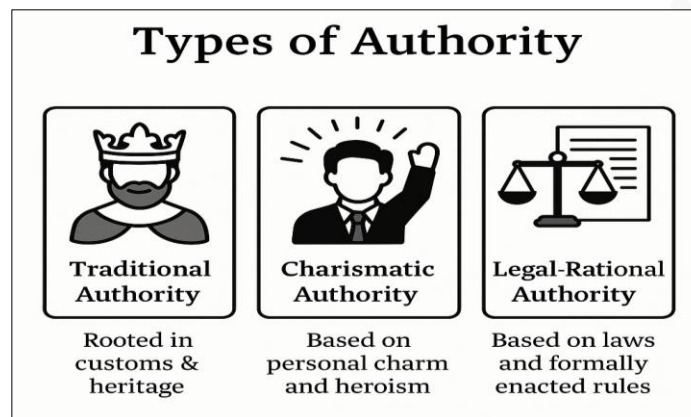
Basis	Authority	Power
		
Meaning	Authority is the legal and formal right of an individual on a particular position, to give orders and commands, and make decisions.	Power means the ability or potential of an individual to influence others and control their actions.
Location	Authority lies with the position. If there is a change in the person's position, his authority also undergoes a change	Power lies with the person. He can exercise his power even if there is a change in his position
Legitimacy	Authority is legitimate and based on the position within the organisation. Law institutionalises it.	Power based on the influence of a person and not on his position in an organisation is not legitimate. It is not recognised by law.
Extent	Authority is well-defined, noticeable and finite.	Power is not defined, noticeable and finite.
Formal/ Informal	Authority is positional, i.e. every formal position has a certain amount of authority.	Power rests with the individual and is present in the informal setup.
Acceptance	A subordinate accepts authority because it is legitimate.	A subordinate accepts power due to threat, fear and coercion.

Delegation	A superior can delegate authority to a subordinate	A superior cannot delegate power as it is his personal influence rather than official authority.
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Types of Authority

Max Weber, a Sociologist, stated that authority is a universal phenomenon that characterises social relationships. Social scientists have defined and given different types of Authority. Some types of authority are as follows:

- I **Max Weber: Types of Authority:** Max Weber's description of authority relates to the 'Concept of Domination' given by him. He has given the following three types of Authority:



- a. **Traditional Authority:** Traditional Authority refers to the authority derived from traditions or customs. The leader gets authority based on established traditions, and the followers follow the leader as the traditions demand them to do so. The leader may inherit this type of authority and may also abuse it by legitimising it under the guise of social traditions and customs.
- b. **Charismatic Authority:** Charismatic Authority is based on the personal qualities of a leader. It is believed that the leader has some exceptional superhuman or supernatural qualities generally referred to as 'charisma'. A prophet, a messiah or a political leader is treated as a charismatic leader and can bring people having differing views on a common platform. The followers accept his authority as long as he possesses and retains his charisma. In case he loses his charisma, he may not be able to retain his position; and
- c. **Legal-Rational Authority:** Legal-Rational Authority is based on rational rules and regulations. The authority under this system rests with the position and not the person. The people or the subordinates accept the authority of the superior as it is based on law, and people believe in the rightness of law. Obedience of the people and subordinates is as per the legally established impersonal order. The administrative staff under this system is called bureaucracy, which Weber considers as the most efficient form of organisation.

II There are three types of authority in most organisations.

- a. **Line Authority:** Line Authority is with the line agency responsible for achieving the primary objectives of the organisation. It flows through the hierarchical structure, having superior-subordinate relationships from the top to the bottom of the organisation. It gives the supervisor

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the right to direct his subordinates to get the work of the organisation done. Authority is attached to the positions located at different levels of the hierarchy.

- b. **Staff Authority:** Staff Authority is with a staff agency attached to the line agency, outside the line of command. This authority is purely advisory and provides information to the line head or the chief executive to enable him to take an informed decision. It is not obligatory for the line officer to accept the advice given by the staff authority. A staff agency acts as the specialised body/think tank of an organisation.
- c. **Functional Authority:** Functional Authority refers to the limited line authority given to a staff agency to enable it to perform some specialised work. The staff authority may be given command to carry out a particular function in their area of operation. Functional authority helps in maintaining and raising the quality and uniformity of functions in the organisation. It is associated with the functional guidance given to different departments.

III Amitai Etzioni has given the following types of Authority:

- a. **Coercive Authority:** The basis of coercive authority is fear of punishment, penalty or reprimand. The employees or subordinates follow the command due to the fear of being castigated or punished, and not because they accept the legitimacy of the command. The superior may resort to giving negative rewards or physical punishment.
- b. **Normative Authority:** The basis of normative authority is the norms and standards set up or prevalent in the organisation or society. It is based on value judgements as contrasted to facts. It is the symbolic rewards that the employees get and are based on perceived esteem and prestige of the organisation. It is based on the established norms and persuasion of the people. Its method of control is symbolic, such as appeals for putting in the best for the benefit of the institution.
- c. **Utilitarian Authority:** Utilitarian Authority is the use of monetary or material rewards by the superiors to the subordinates to get the work done. It may be in the form of preferential work assignment, a higher salary or increments, and or incentives and perks.

Sources of Authority

Authority, as stated earlier, helps an administrator in taking appropriate decisions and getting them implemented. The authority given to him is as per the position he occupies in an organisation. The sources of authority in administrative organisations are as follows:

- I. **Law:** The Constitution of a State is the supreme source of authority and all laws made have to conform to it. Any law that does not conform to the Constitution can be declared ultra vires by the judiciary. Administrators derive authority from different laws and legislative enactments, statutory rules and regulations, judicial interpretations and precedents. For example, for traffic police officials traffic-related rules are a source of authority. Similarly, the Motor Vehicles Act gives authority to the officials of the department of surface (road) transport. These laws describe in detail about the authority of different officials and their right to command obedience in their respective spheres.
- II. **Tradition:** All organisations develop certain norms, precedents and traditions over a period of time. Older the organisations, more entrenched are the norms and traditions developed by either socialization or indoctrination. Law and traditions, both command obedience as law alone may not be sufficient to do so. Traditions are thus an important source of authority in administration. It also includes codes and work habits that enable the higher officials in exacting obedience of the subordinates. Subsequently, the members of the organization give due importance and

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recognition to values, traditions and codes of their profession. They recognise the role of traditions in helping them achieve the objectives of an organisation.

- III. **Delegation:** Administrative officials at the higher levels of the organisation cannot perform all the work of the organisation, so they delegate their authority to their subordinates. So, delegation is a source of authority for the subordinate to perform a certain part of the work. The delegation of authority, written or oral, has subsequent responsibility. It also helps in lowering the burden of higher officials and training subordinates for future roles at higher positions. For example, in most of government organisations, there are specific documents that authorise the senior officials to delegate their authority to subordinates. In the case of making budgets or other financial transactions, there are very clear and identified positions to which financial authority can be delegated.

Thus, law, tradition and delegation play a substantial role in granting authority to officials at various levels. Normally, written orders by the competent authority, referring to relevant Constitutional or Statutory provisions, accompany a delegation of authority. These orders also indicate the limits of the authority delegated. In the absence of written orders it may not be perceived to be genuine and hence may not be accepted by the subordinates.

Limits to Authority

Authority is not an absolute power, as it has limits as per the Parent Act through which it flows. There are Constitutional, legislative, executive, and judicial control mechanisms to check the misuse and abuse of authority. Some of these controls are as follows:

1. **Legislative Control:** Parliament and State legislatures exercise control over the authority of the administrators and make them accountable. This accountability is through the ministers who are responsible to the legislature. The legislature exercises control through devices like the question hour, zero hour, calling attention motion, adjournment, general debates and discussions as well as during the enactment of the budget.
2. **Judicial Control:** Judiciary and other legal and quasi-legal bodies like tribunals exercise control to ensure that the administrative actions of the officials are well within the limits set by the law. An aggrieved party or a citizen moves the judiciary against the misconduct and abuse of authority of government officials and can sue the government in the court of law if its administrative officers resort to unlawful actions or abuse of authority. Thus judiciary exercises control to limit the authority of administration and ensure that it is lawfully exercised.
3. **Press and Media:** Often considered as the fourth pillar of the government, both the electronic and the print media play a substantial role in exposing abuse of authority and contravention of rights of the people by the government functionaries. Press and media highlight many cases wherein there is abuse and misuse of authority or financial transgressions. Media is a powerful mechanism that brings out the misuse of authority by bureaucratic agencies. There have been several cases in which the government or the judiciary acted on the clues provided by the media.
4. **Civil Society/NGOs:** Civil Society/NGOs play an important role in taking up instances of abuse of authority by public functionaries. These Civil society movements work for providing institutional and legal support to vulnerable people to ensure the protection of their rights. Civil Society/NGOs take up issues related to the environment, violence against women and children,

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consumers, landless labourers etc. Many of these movements have the potential to influence the decisions of the government with wider public participation.

5. Lok Pal and LokAyuktas: Institutions like Lok Pal and Lokayukta, considered to be the Indian version of the Ombudsman are established as per the law to investigate the complaints of citizens against government officials. They are independent of the executive.
6. Organisational Hierarchy: Administrative officials at different levels of the hierarchy have the requisite level of authority to enable them to perform their work efficiently and effectively. They are responsible to their immediate superiors for their work. Hierarchy thus sets a limit to the authority of the functionaries at different levels.
7. Constitutional Safeguards: Constitutional Safeguards: Several constitutional provisions safeguard the rights of the citizens of a country in case the administration misuses or abuses its authority. The administrators are protected against the misuse of authority by the politicians.

Thus, there are limitations to the concept of authority. A government official has to act responsibly as authorised by law. Internal and external control mechanisms ensure that authority *is* judiciously used, following due procedure while exercising it.

Responsibility

Responsibility is the duty/obligation of an incumbent of a position to carry out certain functions. It is the accountability of a person's actions and performance as per the authority attached to his position.

RESPONSIBILITY



According to G.R. Terry, “Responsibility is the obligation of an individual to carry out the assigned activities to the best of his ability”. Authority and responsibility should correspond to each other. Classical theorist Henri Fayol stressed that authority should be commensurate with responsibility. If authority is not commensurate with responsibility, then it can be abused.

An administrator, while giving authority to his subordinates, must also make them responsible for exercising authority thoughtfully and decisively. Responsibility takes two forms: Operating responsibility and Ultimate Responsibility. A manager has to get the work done through his subordinates, so he delegates authority to them to enable them to do so, but the ultimate responsibility rests with him. Hence, operating responsibility rests with the person (subordinate) who is exercising the delegated authority, and ultimate responsibility is with the person (superior) who is delegating authority.

Types of Responsibility: Administrative responsibility is of the following types:

1. Professional Responsibility: Many professions have a professional code of conduct to ensure that the members follow it to maintain ethical behaviour and standards. Not only the generalised civil services but the specialised services also have a significant role in the functioning of the

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government. All these services have a professional code of ethics for their respective members with the onus being on individual conscience. The Civil Services in India have service-specific professional responsibilities.



2. Organizational/Institutional Responsibility: All employees have institutional responsibility towards the institutions they serve. They also have responsibilities towards public welfare through these institutions. The employees are responsible for their actions and have an equal amount of authority and responsibility.
3. Political Responsibility: The political wing of the government has a political responsibility to make citizen-oriented policies, set priorities and allocate resources for the welfare of the people. A political head of a department i.e. in the case of India a Minister is accountable to the Prime Minister and both are accountable to the legislature for the performance of their work. The ultimate responsibility of the political wing is towards the citizens of a country.
4. Legal Responsibility: Public Administration works under the legal provisions of the law of the land. The Constitution is the supreme law of the land and the administrators carry out their work as per the law of the land. In case they do not follow the established law, rules and regulations they are held liable for the same and action is taken against them. Their actions are subject to the legislative and judicial processes.
5. Moral Responsibility: Moral values like honesty, integrity and empathy play an important role in ensuring that the administration remains ethical and free of corruption. The legislature, judiciary, media and the civil society continually insist on enforcing moral responsibility in the management of public affairs. Educational institutions impart moral values to the children to raise morally responsible people. Nowadays many training institutions have included moral values in their training manuals.

Authority and Responsibility

Classical theorist Henri Fayol emphasised that authority should be commensurate/proportionate to responsibility. They have to be co-equal, otherwise, a person due to lack of adequate responsibility may abuse his authority; or if he doesn't have authority may not be able to get the work done. They are complementary and supplementary to each other. Following are the differences between authority and responsibility.

	Authority	Responsibility
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Definition	According to Henri Fayol, Authority is the right to give orders and power to exact obedience.	According to G.R. Terry, Responsibility is the obligation of an individual to carry out the assigned activities to the best of his ability.
Basis	Legal right to issue orders	Corollary to authority
Location	Authority is as per the position of an official.	Responsibility is as per the given task of a position.
Objective	To take decisions and implement or get them implemented.	To perform the duties as given by the superior.
Dependent on	Formal position as a superior in the superior-subordinate relationship in the organisation. Higher the position more the authority.	Formal position as a subordinate in the superior-subordinate relationship in the organisation. Higher the position more the responsibility.
Delegation	A superior can delegate authority.	A superior cannot delegate responsibility.
Flow	Authority flows downward through delegation and decentralisation. i.e. from superior to subordinate.	Responsibility flows upward i.e. from subordinate to superior.

Conclusions

Authority is vital not only for accomplishing the approved objectives but also to hold an official accountable for his conduct and performance. Authority is always accompanied by an equal amount of responsibility to ensure that the official does not misuse/abuse his authority. Authority and Power are sometimes used interchangeably but power is the personal ability of a person in a position, to influence the behaviour of another person to do things at his bidding. Power is generally based on might, coercion and risk of punishment/reprimand hence lacking legality or legitimacy.

Important Terms/Concepts/Information

1. **Authority:** Henry Fayol: Authority is the right to give orders and power to exact obedience.
2. **Types of Authority by Max Weber:**
 - a. Traditional – Authority derived from traditions or customs.
 - b. Charismatic – Authority based on the personal qualities of a leader.
 - c. Legal-Rational – Authority based on rational rules and regulations.
3. **Sources of Authority:** Law, Traditions and Delegation.
4. **Responsibility:** It is the duty/obligation of an incumbent of a position to carry out certain functions. It is the accountability of a person's actions and performance as per the authority attached to his position.
5. **Responsibility:** According to G.R. Terry, "Responsibility is the obligation of an individual to carry out the assigned activities to the best of his ability".
6. **Amitai Etzioni has given the following types of Authority:** Coercive Authority, Normative Authority and Utilitarian Authority

7. **Max Weber: Types of Authority:** Max Weber's description of authority relates to the 'Concept of Domination' given by him - Traditional Authority, Charismatic Authority and Legal-Rational Authority
8. **Power:** Power means the ability or potential of an individual to influence others and control their actions.

Short and Long Questions

Short Answer Type Questions

1. Distinguish between Authority and Power.
2. Give two sources of Authority.
3. Write a note on Charismatic Authority.
4. Write a note on Legal-Rational Authority.
5. Write a note on Traditional Authority.
6. Distinguish between Authority and Power.
7. Give three limits to authority.
8. Write a note on Responsibility.

Long Question

1. Write a detailed note on Authority and Responsibility.

Suggested Readings

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