

**The Perceived Supervisory Role Expectations of  
Area Extension Directors in Iowa**

Robert A. Martin, Associate Professor  
Agricultural Education  
Iowa State University

Raja Abeysekera  
Extension Service  
Sri Lanka

Accepted for Publication March 1987

The role of the area supervisor in the Cooperative Extension Service is multifaceted. Not only does the person in that role need to possess skills and knowledge in various technical areas but also should possess skills and competencies in supervision and management. To obtain the necessary support and genuine cooperation from professionals, pure administrative functions alone are not sufficient for supervisors in the extension service.

As Haimann and Hilgert (1982) stated, like all aspects of modern life, the concepts and practices of supervisory management are undergoing major changes. The old idea of getting a job done through power and formal weight of authority is no longer recognized as effective. Present day supervisors realize that supervising primarily through authoritarian direction and close control usually will not bring about the desired results. The supervisory job has become more complex and demanding and requires the development of numerous personnel and supervisory skills.

Peters and Waterman (1984) indicated the following vital factors regarding the efficiency of an organization: (a) having a sound philosophy, (b) having acceptable and clear values, (c) providing positive reinforcement, (d) giving due recognition, (e) supporting innovativeness, and (f) motivating people along the line of human nature. Therefore, a supervisor has a great responsibility in attaining the objectives of the organization. Do all supervisors fulfill these responsibilities?

Kosoko (1980, p. 7) stated:

Irrespective of the kind or nature of an organization, the supervisor's role is critical to the goal attainment of the organization. In order for the goals to be attained, all members of the organization must cooperate with supervisors. However, unless all members of the organization have similar perceptions of the role of the supervisor, the needed cooperation will not occur. Dissimilar perceptions will result in differing responses to the supervisor's actions and interactions.

There have been many efforts to clarify the roles and functions of the extension supervisor. As the extension service has matured, several authors working in or related to extension have identified general organizational functions for which supervisors are responsible in varying degrees (Daley, 1984; Kosoko, 1980; Sanders, 1981; Vandenberg, 1958). Many functions like training, program development and education, personnel management, communication, public relations, and financial management, have been studied. Recent studies have attempted to determine the perceptions of supervisory role expectations among different

groups regarding various supervisory tasks. These perceptions and expectations have been useful in understanding the values, expectations and behavior of employees. The need for further research concerning the development of these skills in other work settings has been highlighted in several studies of the topic (Kosoko, 1980; Leidheiser, 1970; Pfaffcan, 1983; Sanders, 1981).

In this study, the researchers expected to learn more about the perceptions of beginning extension professionals regarding selected supervisory skills. By identifying these perceptions, area extension directors of the Iowa Cooperative Extension Service (ICES) would be able to adjust and conduct higher quality supervision which could result in higher job satisfaction, motivation and productivity among extension professionals. Although all extension professionals at various times suffer from the stresses and pressures of their jobs and need feedback and motivation, the researchers focused on beginning professionals because of the added stresses of starting a new career and meeting the high expectations, real or imagined, of clients, peers and supervisors. Novices are often expected to perform the same as a veteran (Sergiovanni & Starratt, 1979).

#### Purpose of the Study

The overall purpose of the study was to identify the supervisory roles carried out by area extension directors as perceived by beginning extension professionals in the ICES. A subsidiary purpose was to determine the extent to which beginning professionals needed further assistance in selected areas of their work and to determine what inservice training needs in supervision should be addressed. The specific objectives were as follows:

1. Identify the supervision that should be provided;
2. Identify the need for further assistance;
3. Identify potential supervisory training needs; and
4. Compare these perceptions by years of employment, sex and level of education.

#### Methods and Procedures

The population of this study consisted of all county extension professionals who had been working in the ICES for 36 months or less. There were 56 extension professionals who qualified for the study. A self-administered, fixed-response mail questionnaire was used as the data collection instrument for the study. Six major areas were considered in developing the questionnaire: (a) program development; (b) leadership development, (c) personnel management, (d) orientation, (e) evaluation, and (f) inservice education. There were 94 supervisory task statements in the questionnaire, and two responses were asked for each item. The respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with role expectation statements under Column A and the level of further assistance needed with that task under Column B. A five-point Likert-type rating scale was utilized for each response. The respondents were asked to circle a response from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Items rating 4.5 or above were considered to be very important roles for supervisors and had strong implications for inservice training. Those items rating 3.5 or above on the "need for further assistance" scale were considered important items for supervisors to consider in assisting beginning professionals.

Calculation of means, standard deviations, frequencies and percentages comprised the major statistical analysis in the study. Because there were bachelor's and master's degree holders and males and females in the study, comparisons were made using  $t$  tests on the level of education and gender to the perceived level of agreement and the need for further assistance in each supervisory task. One-way analysis of variance tests were made to compare the three groups with different levels of experience in the ICES (0-12 months, 13-24 months and 25-36 months).

The study was conducted during the fall of 1985. Two weeks after the initial mailing of the questionnaire, a follow-up letter was sent. A reminder letter and another questionnaire were sent as a second reminder follow-up letter four weeks following the initial mailing. Fifty-one questionnaires were completed and returned representing a 91% response rate.

### Findings and Discussion

It was found that 51% of the respondents (26 persons) had 12 or fewer months of service, 24% of the respondents (12 persons) had 13 to 24 months of service, and 25% of the respondents (13 persons) had 25 to 36 months of service. Approximately 69% of the respondents (35 persons) from the total population were bachelor's degree holders, and 31% of the respondents (16 persons) were master's degree holders. One-third of the respondents (17 persons) were males, and two-thirds of the respondents (34 persons) were females.

Reliability coefficients (Cronbach's alpha) of the instrument scales were calculated at .82 for the "role expectation" scale and .87 for the "need for further assistance" scale.

Beginning extension professionals agreed that most of the role statements were responsibilities of supervisors. However, four role statements were rated low ( $\bar{X} = <3.0$ ): (a) Selecting instructional methods and media, (b) Establishing relationships with other organizations, (c) Using parliamentary procedures, and (d) Recognizing clients' potentials.

The most highly rated role statements of supervisors in the ICES ( $\bar{X} = 4.5$  or above on a 5-point scale) are presented in Table 1. These statements could provide the basis for inservice education for supervisors.

The 14 statements that rated fairly high on the "need for further assistance" scale ( $\bar{X} = 3.5$  or above) are shown in Table 2. These statements indicate the need for further assistance as well as potential areas of inservice education for supervisors.

In analyzing the differences between the responses of males and females on the supervisory role expectations scale, it was found that females rated the following items significantly higher than males ( $p < .05$ ): (a) planning, (b) conducting effective meetings, (c) developing communication channels, and (d) explaining policy. Males rated the following items significantly higher than females (.05 level): (a) seeking publication and (b) reducing potential for misunderstanding. However, regarding the need for further assistance, males differed from females by indicating they (males) had a greater need for further assistance in setting short- and long-range goals, seeking publications, utilizing teaching and learning principles, developing good relationships, explaining staff expectations, understanding extension philosophy, and acquiring research information.

Table 1

Highly Rated Role Expectations of Selected Supervisory Tasks as Perceived by Beginning Extension Professionals in Iowa

Item	Mean	S.D.
1. Discussing problems in programs	4.7	0.6
2. Identifying areas for improvement	4.6	0.5
3. Establishing appropriate raises	4.6	0.6
4. Explaining privileges and fringe benefits	4.6	0.6
5. Offering encouragement or recognition	4.6	0.6
6. Establishing good relations with workers	4.5	0.7
7. Evaluating progress	4.7	0.5
8. Counseling and analyzing unsatisfactory performance	4.8	0.4
9. Notifying me regarding my level of performance	4.8	0.4
10. Planning orientation of new professionals	4.5	0.7
11. Explaining extension philosophy, rules, methods and policies	4.5	0.7
12. Making available guide books	4.6	0.5
13. Correcting violations of procedures or regulations	4.7	0.6
14. Interpreting and following procedures	4.6	0.7
Grand Mean	4.6	

Note. Only those variables with means of 4.5 or more on a 5-point scale were considered as highly rated.

Table 2

Need for Further Assistance as Related to Selected Supervisory Tasks as Perceived by Beginning Extension Professionals in Iowa

Item	Mean	S.D.
1. Exploring new areas in extension	3.6	1.0
2. Understanding others' problems and interests	3.5	1.0
3. Identifying specialists' contributions	3.5	1.0
4. Identifying areas for improvements	3.6	1.0
5. Establishing appropriate raises	3.6	1.1
6. Offering encouragement or recognition	3.6	1.2
7. Explaining ways to cooperate with other agencies	3.6	1.0
8. Developing effective public relations	3.6	1.0
9. Explaining programs of other organizations	3.5	1.0
10. Evaluating programs	3.5	1.0
11. Notifying me regarding my level of performance	3.5	1.2
12. Identifying effective methods of evaluation	3.5	1.1
13. Self evaluating performance as an extension worker	3.5	0.9
14. Exchanging ideas with other staff	3.5	1.1
Grand Mean	3.4	

Note. Only means rating 3.5 or more on a 5-point scale are listed.

Between bachelor's and master's degree holders, bachelor's degree holders reported they needed more help in exploring new areas in extension while master's degree holders considered they needed more help in identifying research problems.

Among different experience groups regarding the need for further assistance, the group with a moderate amount of experience (13 to 24 months) significantly differed ( $p < .05$ ) from the other two groups by suggesting it needed more assistance in utilizing teaching and learning principles, instructional methods and media, work habits and practices, team work, communication with other staff, and knowledge of psychology, sociology and human development.

#### Conclusions

Based on the results of the study, it was concluded that:

1. Beginning extension professionals agreed that most of the supervisory roles listed in this study were responsibilities of their supervisors.
2. Beginning extension professionals need further assistance in selected areas of their jobs.
3. Area extension professionals may need inservice training on supervision to enhance performance of beginning extension professionals.
4. There were few differences between males and females regarding supervisory role expectations and need for further assistance.
5. There were few differences between bachelor's and master's degree holders regarding supervisory role expectations and need for further assistance.
6. There were few differences among the different experience groups regarding supervisory role expectations and need for further assistance.

#### Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on the findings and conclusions of the study:

1. The supervisory tasks identified by the beginning extension professionals should be incorporated with job responsibilities of area extension directors and should be performed in supervising beginning extension professionals.
2. The supervisors or administrators should make arrangements to provide necessary assistance to beginning professionals in areas where they identified there was need of further assistance.
3. An inservice program should be arranged for area extension directors to enhance the supervisory roles in which beginning professionals placed a higher priority.
4. Even though the significant differences are few between males and females, bachelor's and master's degree holders, and among different experience groups, these differences should be considered when planning supervisory programs for beginning extension professionals.

5. A similar study should be conducted to identify the perceptions of others including paraprofessionals, staff and administrators in the Iowa Cooperative Extension Service regarding supervision.

6. It would be appropriate to conduct a study to find out expectations and needs of extension professionals in other countries to compare with the findings of this study.

#### Implications and Educational Significance of the Study

According to modern concepts of management, an effective supervisor must always adapt his/her behavior to take into account the expectations, values and interpersonal skills of those with whom he/she interacts. As Likert (1961) stated, sensitivity to the values and expectations of others is an important dimension of effective supervision. Measuring of these intervening variables can be of great assistance in revealing the expectations, values and perceptions of the persons with whom each supervisor interacts. Based on the findings of this study, supervisors can gain insight regarding their supervisee's expectations, perceptions and prevailing needs of assistance. This knowledge will facilitate development of better and effective supervision from supervisors while urging administrators to initiate inservice programs for supervisors to match their capabilities with the supervisee's needs and expectations as based on the data in Table 3. These actions will help to achieve better satisfaction, motivation and productivity from the beginning extension professionals in the Iowa Cooperative Extension Service.

Table 3

#### Highest Rated Role Statements and Need for Further Assistance Statements as Perceived by Beginning Extension Professionals in Iowa

Role Expectations	Mean N=51	Need for Further Assistance	Mean N=51
<u>Program Development</u>			
Review plan of work	4.4	Explore new areas in extension	3.6
Understanding others' problems and interests	4.2	Understanding others' problems and interests	3.5
Planning and working with committees	4.1	Identify specialists' contributions	3.5
<u>Leadership Development</u>			
Recognizing my potential	4.3	Define plans for lay leaders	3.4
Developing good communications	4.1	Identify ways to delegate leadership	3.4
Informing public about extension through public presentations	4.0	Recognizing my potential	3.3

(table continues)

Role Expectations	Mean N=51	Need for Further Assistance	Mean N=51
-------------------	--------------	-----------------------------	--------------

Personnel Management

Notifying me regarding my level of performance	4.8	Identify areas for improvement	3.6
Counseling and analyzing unsatisfactory performance	4.8	Offering encouragement or recognition	3.6
Evaluating programs	4.7	Establishing appropriate raises	3.6
Discussing problems in programs	4.7	Explain ways to cooperate with other agencies	3.6
		Develop effective public relations	3.6

Orientation

Correcting violations of procedures/regulations	4.7	Planning orientation of new professionals	3.0
Interpret and follow procedures	4.6	Interpret policy for new situations	3.0
Make available guide books	4.6	Correcting violations of procedures/regulations	3.0
		Interpret and follow procedures	3.0

Evaluation

Identify effective methods of evaluation	4.3	Identify effective methods of evaluation	3.5
Self-evaluate performance as an extension worker	4.3	Self-evaluate performance as an extension worker	3.5
Inform others of the evaluation procedure	4.3		

Inservice Education

Set an example in keeping up-to-date	4.3	Exchange ideas with other staff	3.5
Plan credit courses for my professional growth	4.2	Identify new methods I can use	3.4
Help to update my knowledge of subject matter	4.2	Analyze and satisfy special needs for subject matter	3.4
Clarify extension goals and objectives	4.2	Increase competency for leadership training	3.4
Release research information to staff as soon as possible	4.2	Plan credit courses for my professional growth	3.4
		Help to update knowledge of subject matter	3.4

Note. Scale: 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.

## References

- Daley, M. D. (1984). Gender related differences among Iowa public employees. Public Personnel Management, 13(3), 64-68.
- Halmann, T., & Hilgert, R. L. (1982). Supervision: Concepts and practices of management. Cincinnati: Southwestern Publishing.
- Kosoko, O. (1980). Role of the extension supervisor as perceived by selected extension personnel. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, The Ohio State University, Columbus.
- Leidheiser, P. C. (1970). An evaluation of supervisory task importance and performance in the Ohio Cooperative Extension Service. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, The Ohio State University, Columbus.
- Likert, R. (1961). New patterns of management. New York: McGraw Hill.
- Peters, J. T., & Waterman, R. J., Jr. (1984). In search of excellence. New York: Harper and Row.
- Plafcan, T. F. (1983). An assessment of the administrative skills of county staff chairman: In the Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater.
- Sanders, J. K. (1981). Perceptions of the importance and assignment of supervisory tasks within the Texas Agricultural Extension Service. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Texas A&M University, College Station.
- Sergiovanni, T. J., & Starratt, R. J. (1979). Supervision: Human perspectives (2nd ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Vandenberg, G. L. (1958). Role of the supervisor. In G. L. Creech (Ed.), Seminar in extension supervision for the Western Region (pp. 3-9). Madison: University of Wisconsin, National Agricultural Extension Center for Advanced Study.