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Perspectives of Professional Development on Supervision Skills

Roger "Mitch" Nasser
Lindenwood University, RNasser@lindenwood.edu

PERSPECTIVES OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ON SUPERVISION SKILLS

Article by Roger "Mitch" Nasser

Abstract

Supervision skills are essential at all levels of administration in higher education. However, it is unclear where many professionals attain these skills. New professionals, who often supervise student workers, receive training during their graduate program experiences. Senior level professionals, those who run Student Affairs divisions or segments of those divisions, are often not questioned in their practices. Senior administrators are valued for decision making and strategic planning. Unfortunately, the final population, middle managers, do not receive training and may be expected to have skills upon arriving in a position. The following study examined perceptions of middle and senior administrators in student affairs regarding the impact of professional development on supervision skills. Results suggested a new model for professional development, which examines experiences in the context of skill development and personal understanding. The model requires both supervisor and supervisee display honesty in establishing goals on an annual basis.

Introduction

Researchers have suggested supervision is a key skill in the development of new professional staff members. Unfortunately, supervision is a difficult skill to master and may be a lifelong process (Winston & Creamer, 1997). Supervisors are essential in helping new professionals navigate the political system at universities and assist in the social transition (Magolda & Carnaghi, 2004; Reybold, Halx, & Jimenez, 2008). Supervisors are the central factor in the personal and professional growth of new professionals.

Supervisors of new professionals in higher education administration, known as middle level managers, typically receive no training for the supervision role. Many graduate programs focus on the supervision of student staff, while ignoring advanced supervision techniques (Renn & Hodges, 2007). Senior administrators also fail to provide adequate training for these professionals. As a result, middle managers may face this challenge

alone and rely on their own skill development as a support for supervision challenges (Calhoun & Nasser, 2013).

Literature Review

New professionals in higher education administration may enter their first positions without proper knowledge of student development theory or issues of inclusion (Belch & Mueller, 2003). This lack of knowledge may lead to challenges in decision making or political navigation. New professionals may look to their supervisors for support, but their supervisors may not be available at the level desired by new professionals. Middle managers may not support new professionals due to lack of training (Wood, Winston, & Polkosnik, 1985).

A key reason why middle managers receive little training regarding supervision could be the availability of their supervisors, often known as senior level administrators. Many senior level administrators spend significant time managing campus crisis, including oversight of threat assessment teams (Deisinger, Randazzo, O'Neill, & Savage, 2008; Kaminski, Koons-Witt, Thompson, & Weiss, 2010). Many senior level administrators consider this responsibility as central to their positions. In fact, many of these professionals create and chair intervention teams as a means to predict, prevent, and respond to behavior concerns (Fein et al., 2004).

Senior administrators may also consider middle level managers experts in the field, with no need for instruction on supervision skills. Researchers suggested many middle level managers are hired due to perceived expertise in decision making (Saunders & Cooper, 1999). This perception may place middle level managers at a disadvantage. Many may struggle as a result of lack of available instruction and training (Harned & Murphy, 1998). If student affairs administration is considered a profession of service, should supervisors acknowledge a need for support and training?

Studies have suggested supervision skills of middle managers are important for developing new professionals in student affairs (Saunders, Cooper, Winston, & Chernow, 2000). While some experts suggested psychology as a basis for supervision (Stock-Ward & Javorek, 2003), others have indicated mutual relations as a better current practice (Shupp, Wilson, & McCallum, 2018; Winston & Creamer, 1997). A recent model of supervision, synergistic supervision, appears to address this relational focus (Calhoun & Nasser, 2013; Saunders et al., 2000; Shupp & Arminio, 2012; Tull, 2006; Winston & Creamer, 1997). This model begins with mutual goals set by both the supervisor and supervisee. The two must agree on these goals. This goal setting technique creates a sense of ownership for both parties, and places the supervisor in a position of caring both personally and professionally (Tull, 2006). A recent study developed synergistic supervision further, suggesting the model include relationship building, self-reflection, empowerment of supervisees, and strong communication. The challenge in supervision and availability of support forms the framework of this study (Shupp & Arminio, 2012).

Method

The purpose of this study was to investigate perceptions of middle managers in higher education administration regarding the influence of professional development on their supervision skills. The researcher interviewed middle managers and senior level professionals in higher education administration positions examining the challenges in supervision and impact of professional development on supervision skills. The populations for the study were middle managers in higher education administration and senior level administrators.

There were three research questions for the following study.

1. What professional development is provided to middle managers by supervisors? If professional development is not provided, what factors prevent professional development opportunities?

2. How are the quality and quantity of these professional development opportunities perceived by middle managers in higher education?

3. How are the professional development needs of middle managers different from those perceived by their supervisors?

The primary qualitative research method for this study was grounded theory (Glense, 2011). Grounded theory was appropriate as the researcher had no anticipated data direction. There is no current explanation for impact of professional development on supervision skills, which suggested the results might create a paradigm shift. Themes emerged from the data collected. The researcher developed theories and direction as responses dictated. A need for middle manager professional development would support previous research and press practitioners to design models. If professional development opportunities existed or results showed no need, further research efforts may focus on successful techniques.

The data results drove emergent themes. However, the previously discussed literature review presented a framework for possible results. First, research inferred new professionals have a desire for more meaningful relationships than supervisors wish to provide (Calhoun & Nasser, 2013; Shupp & Arminio, 2012; Tull, 2006; Winston & Creamer, 1997). These middle managers may feel overwhelmed with the seemingly high demands of staff members. Second, new professionals may not receive proper preparation from graduate programs (Cujet et al, 2009; Herdlein, 2004). As the needs of higher education have changed, so have the skills necessary for success in positions. The unpreparedness of new professionals may increase the perceived need of training by middle managers. Third, middle managers feel prepared for positions prior to applying, implying no need for training on supervision. Once in the position, these same professionals desire more explicit direction (Calhoun & Nasser, 2013). Finally, additional pressures and requirements from local and federal governments may prevent senior

level administrators from training middle managers at an acceptable level (Lipka, 2009). Increased responsibilities may impact the time of senior level staff, forcing middle managers to make independent decisions and learn by experience.

Instrumentation and Participants

The researcher conducted phone interviews. An electronic invitation was sent to middle managers and senior professionals in higher education administration. The email included a description of the study, contact information for questions, and IRB approval documentation. The investigator located contact information for participants through a review of college and university web sites. The researcher used a method of purposeful sampling through identification of participants with lived experience (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981; Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). Professionals serving as Director, Assistant Directors, or Coordinators were considered eligible middle manager participants. Professionals serving as Assistant Deans, Deans, Assistant Vice Presidents, Associate Vice Presidents, Vice Presidents, and Vice Chancellors were considered eligible senior level participants. A total of 52 participants were recruited by the researcher. This population consisted of 23 senior level managers and 29 middle managers. Of this total, 18 professionals (9 middle managers and 9 senior administrators) agreed to participate in the study. Participants had to meet the following criteria, in addition to position held.

1. **Experience Level:** Interviewees must have completed a minimum of one academic year at their current institutions. In addition, participants must have a minimum of five years of professional experience for consideration. Graduate experience did not count toward the total experience.

2. **Job Responsibilities:** Interviewees at a Middle Manager level must supervise a minimum of one professional staff member and/or one functional area department. While preference was given to those at a Director level, oversight was the determining factor for selection. Senior level administrators must supervise multiple departments for consideration.

3. **Educational Background:** Interviewees must have a Master's degree or Doctoral degree for consideration. Volunteers with a Bachelor's degree only were declined due to the significant literature on impact of Graduate Programs on supervision skills (Herdlein, 2004).

The method of data collection was semi-structured interviews conducted via telephone. Glense (2011) suggested this form of questioning benefits the researcher as it provides a deeper analysis of conversation. Prior to initiating the interview, participants accepted the informed consent terms of the study. There was little risk in the present study and recordings were destroyed upon completion of the study. The risk in this study was limited since the interview contained no identifier information. The researcher used pseudonyms instead of participant names for reporting purposes. However, participants who contacted colleagues about the study may have suggested the sender participate

in the interview process. Participants may have also shared their participation with colleagues, which is out of the researcher's control.

One participant requested his interview be conducted using the video software, Zoom. The interviews were recorded through an audio device for future analysis. The recordings were destroyed at the conclusion of the project. The interviews were conducted over a period of 21 days. Eligible participants were scheduled at a mutually convenient time. There was no incentive for participating in this study other than contributing to research.

The interview consisted of four separate sections. The first section included biographical information. Participants shared specific demographics, work experience, and supervision level. Areas signifying work experience and supervision responsibility acted as separators for further responses. The second section of the interview focused on middle manager experiences including preparation, current assessed skill level, and desire for professional development. The third section examined senior administrators' perceptions of skills needed for middle managers and professional development offered. The final section focused on preferred supervision techniques, aspects of good supervision, and their own reflections on present experience. The interviews lasted 20-45 minutes depending on the experience level of the respondent. Each population responded to three sections of questions. Both middle manager and senior administrators were asked demographic questions and those related to supervision experience and perspective. Middle managers were asked a section of questions related to their experiences with professional development and impact of the activities. Senior level administrators were asked if they offered professional development, needs of those they supervised, and impact of offered activities.

Impact of Reflexivity

The researcher for this study has a background in student affairs administration. As such, it is essential to review impact of reflexivity in this present study. Mauthner and Doucet (2003) discussed the concept of reflexivity as a possible impact to results in a study. They suggested a researcher may adjust his or her methodology for a given topic based on personal experience. While this connection is possible, the authors also pointed out it may be difficult to acknowledge or limit all reflexivity as the researcher may be unaware of his or her full connection to the topic. They explained this challenge:

There may be limits to reflexivity, and to the extent to which we can be aware of the influences on our research both at the time of conducting it and in the years that follow. It may be more useful to think in terms of "degrees of reflexivity", with some influences being easier to identify and articulate at the time of our work while others may take time, distance and detachment from the research. (p. 425)

The researcher's passion for administrative work and interest in supervision skills directed the project but the use of a grounded theory approach and emergent themes may have prevented bias in the data analysis of interviews. Recent research suggested

reflexivity may aid qualitative methods, specifically interviewing. Berger (2015) described a study on the experiences of immigrants in the United States. His own experiences as an immigrant aided the semi-structured process and enhanced his results while avoiding corruption of data. He discussed his experience:

Finally, coming from the "shared experience" position, I was better equipped with insights and the ability to understand implied content, and was more sensitized to certain dimensions of the data. I was familiar with the "immigration language" and aware of potential sensitivities, thus I knew what to ask and how to ask it as well as understood the responses in a nuanced and multileveled way. (p. 223)

The researcher's understanding of student affairs administrative positions, specifically entry and mid-level provided opportunities for probing questions. In addition, the excitement of

the researcher spread to those interviewed. This shared interest created additional discussion which enhanced the results of the study. Finally, the researcher's personal interest was rooted in contributing to the knowledge base and not a personal agenda. This perspective welcomed any and all results.

Results

RESEARCH QUESTION ONE

The first research question of this study asked what professional development was provided to middle managers by supervisors. If professional development was not provided, respondents were asked what factors prevented professional development. Middle managers and senior level administrators appeared to differ in their opinions on offerings of professional development. Six of the nine middle managers felt professional development opportunities were not offered by their supervisors, while all nine senior level administrators believed they offered professional development to their staff members. This disagreement in perceptions resulted in a closer review.

Five middle managers stated professional development was not provided by their supervisors. These professionals felt responsibility for their own development in the absence of supervisors. Most attempted to prepare themselves for their current positions and review past experience as a guide for future practice. They examined opportunities at their institutions for future growth. Some took on committee responsibilities when available and initiated collaborative discussions with other departments. All five shared a core value of self-exploration and avoiding satisfaction with current abilities. A few mentioned seeking mentorship outside of current supervisor for feedback and processing.

Two middle managers suggested professional development was supported by their supervisors. These professionals developed their own professional development

opportunities in conjunction with their supervisors. These middle managers reported their supervisors engaged them in intentional discussion about their development. They were empowered to seek opportunities and follow up with supervisors after returning from the experiences. These middle managers also indicated supervisors recommended past experiences which provided them essential skills. Supervisors, under this model, acted as guides in development.

One middle manager indicated professional development was provided by his supervisor. He discussed a structured approach which combined departmental experiences with institution specific training. His institution held semiannual division wide retreats which addressed impact of current issues. These large gatherings also provided opportunities for connection with other departments. This middle manager explained staff were expected to participate in these activities once arriving at the institution when probed further.

All senior higher education administrators interviewed indicated they offer professional development opportunities. Two of these professionals stated they provide support for professional development. Specifically, they discussed providing funding for external opportunities which are identified by participants. There was no process for applying for development funds as each department they supervise had their own line item. These senior administrators further discussed the improbability of fully understanding the needs or interests of their divisions. This uncertainty creates the supportive structure.

Four senior level administrators discussed offering targeted professional development opportunities to their staff members. These activities address basic job functions and legal precedents important for daily operations. These administrators also suggested training their employees in these methods addressed liability concerns. Federal regulations such as Title IX and Cleary Compliance issues create the need for professional development. Professionals utilizing a targeted professional development method also reviewed practices and trends of national governing groups such as ACPA and NASPA when considering opportunities. This point suggested professional development is offered as a means to remain current with comparative institutions.

The remaining three senior level administrators indicated they provided professional development through a structured process to all employees. While the structure may differ at each institution, there are commonalities consistent with the structured approach. First, these professionals discussed providing opportunities for a variety of experience levels. New professionals may receive specific training on adjusting to the profession while more seasoned professionals receive more advanced opportunities. One administrator also mentioned the inclusion of hourly staff in these development opportunities. Second, the structured process intentionally or unintentionally creates groups for professionals to discuss issues or process concerns. Providing a campus network of peers aids in the transition of all levels of professionals to the institution. Third, these administrators mentioned the development process begins immediately upon arrival to the institution. This immediate inclusion into the campus community was referred to as "on-boarding". Once again, the immediacy of the involvement provided

more comfort to the professional staff. While these administrators had not assessed the impact of the structured development, they did indicate their employees were more engaged in the institution as a result of participation.

Middle managers and senior administrators shared three components which may impact the offering of professional development. First, several participants mentioned the culture of the institution as having a direct impact on quantity of opportunities. Some participants discussed the challenge of working at an institution comprised mainly of professionals who worked their way up into positions of authority without experience at other institutions. This culture may cause an environment of satisfaction with the status quo and thus, limit professional development. Conversely, the arrival of a new senior administrator who values professional development may create a new culture filled with professional development opportunities. Some middle managers discussed the limited availability of their supervisors as reason for their own lack of opportunities. They did not place blame on their supervisors but indicated a cultural cycle at their institutions. Senior administrators who believed in an institutional culture of professional development equated these offerings with support of employees. They argued without professional development, those they supervise may feel devalued in their positions.

The second factor impacting professional development opportunities according to participants was the culture of higher education administration as an occupation. Senior administrators and middle managers concurred with the assumption middle managers do not need professional development. They suggested many new programs are developed with new professionals in mind. Senior administrators may have concerns regarding the transition and retention of new professionals and thus offer more opportunities to this group. They also may assume middle managers have received significant opportunities prior to arriving at their institutions since these middle managers may have accessed programs as new professionals. Middle managers and senior administrators both mentioned a current gap in professional development for middle managers.

Finally, middle manager participants stated the busy schedules of their supervisors may impact the availability of professional development opportunities. These responses suggested senior administrators may have a variety of time commitments and significant responsibilities which prevent professional development. Some middle managers indicated the size of their institutions may have a direct impact on availability. This discussion included a variety of institution types. Senior administrators at small institutions may be called to emergencies or meetings, while their colleagues at larger institutions may have substantial departmental oversight with limited time for each staff member. Middle managers seemed to understand this factor. They also suggested this lack of availability equated to a high level of trust. This feeling of trust propelled their motivation within their positions.

RESEARCH QUESTION TWO

The second research question of this study was how are the quality and quantity of professional development opportunities perceived by middle managers in higher education administration. Middle managers were asked if the professional development activities provided by their supervisors impacted their supervision skills. Senior level administrators were asked a similar question regarding possible impact on supervision skills. While the majority of middle managers indicated professional development was not provided by their supervisors, the responses of those suggesting otherwise were directly analyzed. All senior level participant responses were analyzed regarding perceived impact.

Middle managers who stated professional development was provided by their supervisors suggested these activities positively impacted their supervision skills. They believed the professional development activities provided them with skills to better understand their employees. In addition, these professionals were more able to identify needs of those they supervised almost instinctively. They believed in providing professional development for their staff members as a cycle of institutional culture. In addition, these middle managers felt more prepared to supervise a diverse population of staff members. When the middle managers reflected on what specifically changed within them, they seemed to agree the professional development opportunities aided in development of their leadership philosophies. These core values influenced their supervision skills.

Senior administrators responded similarly regarding the impact of professional development on the supervision skills of middle managers. These professionals highlighted the importance of learning from colleagues across the country. Professional development activities involving external practitioners may showcase unique perspectives to middle managers and provide networking opportunities for future discussions. Senior administrators also indicated the passing down of knowledge gained was an essential element to the professional development of middle managers. These department managers shared their knowledge with employees who could then further the use of learned skills with their staff members.

Finally, the researcher reviewed responses of those middle managers who indicated professional development was not provided by their supervisors. The purpose of the review was to gauge the impact of lack of opportunities on the participants. Most middle managers shared they sought connections with supervisors as a means for professional development. These middle managers held an expectation their supervisors would improve them through discussion. They believed their supervisor's role was to serve as a mentor and guide through their experiences. Many felt slighted when they realized their supervisor would not be available to interact with them in the manner expected. In addition, middle managers responding in this manner felt a lack of trust with their supervisors. Since they did not feel connected to their supervisors, they were unsure of their supervisor's agenda at the institution. A few middle managers questioned if they were even supported by their supervisors at campus functions or budgetary meetings. Some shared an unwillingness of their supervisors to engage in discussions of new

ideas. This inflexibility seemed to further distance these middle managers from their supervisors.

RESEARCH QUESTION THREE

The final research question of this study asked how the professional development needs of middle managers differed from those perceived by their supervisors. Middle managers were asked how they prepared for their current positions while senior level administrators were asked what skills they require for a new hire. These responses were analyzed and compared.

Middle managers suggested two significant needs upon arrival in their positions. First, these professionals experienced challenges navigating their new institutions. Many felt overwhelmed by self-expectations. They were unsure where to start, who key collaborators may be, and how to establish goals. These professionals experienced many challenges as they attempted to acclimate to their new institutions and positions. Some respondents indicated a new sense of authority they had not experienced before. While nervous at first, these professionals persevered in learning their new roles and locations. These middle managers worked independently to build connections through their institutions and identify key players. Once they felt more comfortable, some communicated their progress with their supervisors to gauge success.

Second, middle managers expressed challenges in navigating their new departments. They experienced employees who were not receptive, lack of expectations, and following in the shadow of a previous professional. A few middle managers discussed the challenge they experienced in addressing concerns from various staff members. They saw new professionals as lacking confidence while seasoned employees may have lost the drive to impact students. These middle managers saw an important challenge in preventing negative attitudes of more experienced staff from impacting newer professionals in the office. Some middle manager participants had entered newly created positions. While these professionals shared excitement over these appointments, they also discussed lack of direction from their supervisors. They did not receive expectations nor access to professionals who held the role previously since the positions were new. These professionals succeeded through research, trial and error, and attention to community needs. Finally, some middle managers shared challenges in following someone into their current roles. The concern was more about procedures than the person. These professionals experienced slight backlash when they attempted to alter procedures. Once again, they persevered in their positions and became more comfortable in time.

Senior administrators in higher education described two key skill areas essential for those they hire. The first set of skills is theoretical in nature. These skills encompassed advanced thought processes and resolution of complex issues. Senior administrators discussed middle managers need to think critically and change direction at a moment's notice given changes at the institution. They must reflect on current trends and

theoretical components in creating strategic plans. They must understand the change they implement in their departments will impact the entire institution. Middle managers must have natural understanding of this impact. Middle managers are expected to utilize student development theory when approaching student situations on campus and teach those they supervise the same theoretical components. They must forecast the impact of their decisions on a diverse student body prior to making the decisions. Senior administrators also expected middle managers to exhibit a strong supervision style rooted in a leadership philosophy.

Second, senior administrators discussed practical skills. While these skills were viewed as important for success, they appeared secondary to the theoretical skills mentioned previously. Most senior administrators reported new middle managers should enter their positions with an understanding of managing a department. They viewed middle managers as naturally competent to facilitate departmental operations, thus allowing the senior administrator to address other concerns. Senior administrators expected middle managers to possess strong communication skills. These professionals may have responsibilities communicating across departments, with student, parents, and community members. Senior administrators admitted managing departments has become more difficult in recent years; however, they felt new middle managers could bridge this gap through strong supervision techniques. They argued middle managers who maintained strong connections with employees would succeed since they may be more aware of impending challenges and crisis.

Discussion

RESEARCHER THEORY FROM STUDY: FULL CIRCLE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The researcher developed a new theory based on the results of this study, previous research (Calhoun & Nasser, 2013; Harned & Murphy, 1998; Herdlein, 2004; Mather et al., 2009; Reybold et al., 2008; Saunders et al., 2000; Shupp & Arminio, 2012; Shupp et al., 2018; Tull, 2006; Winston & Creamer, 1997), and the recommendations provided earlier in this section. The theory, Full Circle Professional Development, may apply to all staff members. However, the focus remains on middle management practitioners. Figure 1 displays the model. The theory contains six steps: Pre-Evaluation, Position Review, Professional Review, Development Plan, Activity Review, and Realignment.

Figure 1. Full circle professional development.

The first step of Full Circle Professional Development is Pre-Evaluation. The supervisor meets with the supervisee and assesses actual professional skills compared to employee perceived needs. This meeting should occur once the supervisee arrives at the institution and/or is assigned to the supervisor. The purpose of this meeting is twofold. First, the supervisor shares skills expected of the new middle manager. The supervisor should be specific in expectations. For example, the supervisor should discuss the importance of communication with senior administrators, parents, and alumni instead of simply general communication skills. Once the supervisor has shared skills they believe a middle manager should possess upon arrival, the focus shifts to the supervisee. The supervisee then responds to all the specific expectations with a self-assessment of current skills. The supervisee should be specific in their response to the supervisor's statements. For example, when the supervisee responds to the expectation regarding communication, they should discuss experiences with specific populations referenced rather than communication overall. This first step is complete only when all expectations and responses have been discussed at an acceptable level to both parties.

The second step of the theory is Position Review. After reviewing expectations, the supervisor reviews the position requirements. Once again, the review should include relevant details. The discussion may include an overview of the official position description, departmental make up, and staff manual. The supervisor and supervisee

should review all relevant documents together. The supervisor may highlight any aspect of the documents which may be unique to the institution, such as reporting structure, work hours, etc. The purpose of position review is further examining skills and/or knowledge needed for the position. These skills may be in addition to those cited by the supervisor during the first step of the model. Position review may also indicate which skills should be learned early in the developmental process.

The third step of the theory is professional review. After reviewing the position, the supervisor initiates a discussion on professional goals for the candidate. This review should include three key components. First, the supervisor should ask the supervisee how they wish to improve as a professional in the immediate and long range future. As in previous steps, it is essential the supervisee is specific regarding skills desired. For example, improving writing skills may be abstract while learning grant writing procedures suggests a specific starting point. Second, the supervisor should explore what areas prevent success for the supervisee. Examining these areas for improvement in an open setting may fuel a significant dialogue. This conversation may put the supervisor and supervisee at ease when discussing challenging topics in the future. Finally, the supervisor should ask the supervisee to identify future goals. These goals must be specific. For example, simply stating an interest in pursuing a terminal degree limits conversation and goal setting. Including a conversation on a specific timeline and why the degree is necessary leads to future discussions on the topic. The topic of goal setting may be uncomfortable for supervisors since the stated goals may not be possible at the present institution. Supporting a supervisee's goals establishes a personal connection, which will be valuable in the future.

The fourth step of the theory is the development plan. This plan should be agreed upon by both the supervisor and supervisee and meet the professional development philosophy of the institution. The plan should include any opportunities or activities known at the time of discussion which address skills identified in pre-evaluation, position review, and professional review. Opportunities should be specific, such as attending a Title IX webinar to meet a skill identified in position review or involvement in a national committee to meet a skill identified in professional review. The plan should have flexibility in case the supervisor or supervisee identify further opportunities. The researcher recommends a yearlong plan, but the length should be dictated by discussion and institutional culture.

The fifth step of the model is activity review. The supervisor reviews development activities with the supervisee shortly after each occurs. This conversation may be short in duration, but must address three key follow up questions. First, the supervisor should discuss the overall professional development experience of the supervisee. This conversation may include: content presented, style of presenter, colleagues met through networking, etc. This review helps the supervisee place the experience in context with their own development. Second, the supervisor investigates the impact of the activity on the identified need. Specifically, the supervisor should question if the professional development impacted While one professional development experience may not fully develop skills, it should impact practice positively. Finally, the supervisor

should discuss the connection of the activity with previous and future development experiences. For example, if a supervisee joins a national committee, the supervisor may challenge the supervisee to use the experience to publish or develop a programmatic philosophy through conversation with group members. The review of completed activities leads directly to the final step of the theory.

The final step of Full Circle Professional Development is realignment. During this stage, the supervisor and supervisee discuss adjustments to the development plan. The supervisee may have addressed skills through professional development activities. If the supervisor and supervisee are satisfied with the growth in a specific skill set, the need may be temporarily eliminated. Both parties must recognize a need may develop in the same area later in the supervisee's career. The supervisor may then suggest additional areas for skill development as identified in previous steps. The supervisor or supervisee may also feel a shift is needed if recent development activities have not resulted in skill development. The supervisor may suggest a different type of format or presenter if the supervisee has a poor experience. It is important to note, this process may result in no changes to the current plan.

The researcher believes the theory of Full Circle Professional Development provides a supportive structure for the new middle manager while creating accountability for professional development. The collaborative discussions throughout this process lay the groundwork for a trusting relationship. The supervisor's fear over investing resources and time into a new hire will be alleviated through holding the supervisee accountable for engagement in activities.

Limitations

There were four key limitations to this research. The first limitation was the variation of job titles and responsibilities. The researcher interviewed nine middle managers and nine senior level administrators. The participants were recruited based on job title. However, position responsibilities may have differed significantly based on institution type, geographical location, institutional mission statement, etc. The researcher selected participants based on a general position titles. Middle manager participants included department directors and assistant directors while senior level participants included Deans, Assistant Deans, Assistant Vice Presidents, Associate Vice Presidents, Vice Presidents, Vice Chancellors, and Assistant Vice Chancellors. In addition, two of the participants were serving in interim roles and may have had limited experience in the position depending on when the transition occurred.

The second limitation related to limitation of participants by the researcher. A total of 18 professionals were interviewed as part of this study. However, the researcher chose to interview only one professional per institution. This selection was intentional to provide a larger scale of data for theme analysis. Unfortunately, the researcher was unable to confirm the opinions of individual participants. If the researcher interviewed one middle manager and one senior level administrator from each institution selected, responses

may have been supported. The researcher could have compared the experiences and perspectives of these two populations in a more direct manner.

Third, the researcher did not include demographical questions except for professional experience and institution type. A review of other demographic information may have suggested differences based on gender, racial background, and educational background. While the researcher obtained the names of those participating and in some occasions viewed a photo of the participant, the researcher did not base thoughts on demographic consideration with assumptions. The use of such assumptions may have corrupted the data and served as improper treatment of participants.

Finally, the researcher did not provide definitions to the participants. Middle managers and senior administrators may have different definitions of professional development activities. Providing a definition may have directed responses in a clearer fashion. In addition, some middle managers expressed slight confusion over the question regarding if professional development was provided by their supervisors. Some paused and reflected on how provided would be defined to them. Senior administrators did not have this concern as most responded immediately after hearing the question. Providing definitions for "professional development" and "provided by" may have led to different responses and data analysis.

Recommendations for Practice

ESTABLISHING A DEFINITION OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT WITHIN THE INSTITUTION

The results of this study suggest a gap in expectations for professional development. Middle managers stated professional development was not provided by their supervisors. However, senior administrators believed they provided such opportunities. There could be two possible explanations for this disagreement. First, middle managers and senior administrators may define professional development differently. Many senior level professionals described national conferences as professional development opportunities. Most middle managers who stated they did not receive professional development cited a need for more contact with supervisors. Perhaps these middle managers define professional development as direct access to supervisors. This definition may have matured since their days as new professionals. These statements seem to support previous research which indicated new professionals seek conference and webinar attendance while more seasoned professionals desire a connected experience within their institutions (Mather et al., 2009; Rosser & Javinar, 2003).

Second, participants were challenged by defining the word "provided". Many middle managers questioned if their supervisor actually provided professional development opportunities. The researcher believes middle managers may not equate support for professional development with provided professional development. Some senior level administrators stated they supported professional development through funding but

relied on middle managers to locate their own opportunities. Middle managers may see this perspective of self-direction as unsupportive since the senior level administrator is not providing the professional development directly.

This disconnect between middle managers and senior level administrators may be resolved with a clear discussion of the institutional philosophy regarding professional development. Many participants felt the quantity of professional development offerings was directly impacted by the philosophy of the senior student affairs officer. If this philosophy is shared openly with middle managers upon their arrival, these professionals will have a stronger understanding of the institution and shift their own perspective to this philosophy. Middle managers working at institutions which support self-directed experiences will understand their responsibility to locate activities while also feeling supported by supervisors.

In addition, an explanation of professional development philosophies may increase the perceived value of targeted professional development. Senior administrators described these activities as support for required job duties, including Title IX and Cleary Compliance. Middle managers may see these opportunities as mandatory training instead of professional development. A clear statement from supervisors may impact motivation of middle managers to participate actively in these targeted activities.

Some senior administrators mentioned structured professional development experiences as vital in connecting employees to each other and the institution. Middle managers may not understand the value of this concept. Supervisors must explain these opportunities connect employees with each other and address current issues in a supportive and intentional manner. Inclusion of all staff members, regardless of level, suggests an importance of these activities for attendees. Supervisors who explain this process when new staff arrive may increase engagement in development activities. Staff members will be more motivated, seek out committee experiences, and consider national involvement as a result of these experiences. Middle managers will see this value if supervisors explain the institutional philosophy at the onset of employment.

UNDERSTANDING THE IMPORTANCE OF PERSONAL CONTACT

Senior administrators may consider providing opportunities for conversation with their middle managers. Middle managers seek connection to their supervisors as a means for professional development. Many middle managers shared they desired more conversations with supervisors to process institutional concerns and current issues. They respect the expertise of their supervisors and believe these conversations are key to their development as professionals, specifically if they seek to rise to senior administrative positions themselves. Middle managers also appear to understand the busy schedules of senior administrators which may limit availability. Senior administrators may consider regular meetings with middle managers or simply connecting with them after a significant institutional event. Many senior administrators

also expressed a desire for more contact with their own supervisors. Perhaps their own reflections may aid them in providing time to middle managers.

Senior administrators may consider semiannual discussions with middle managers regarding their professional development goals. The results of the research suggest middle managers engage in self-exploration of professional development opportunities in absence of direct activities from supervisors. Some middle managers also reported feeling significant support from supervisors in locating their own development. However, these middle managers mentioned somewhat regular check-ins by their supervisor to gleam progress toward professional development goals. One middle manager engaged in professional development opportunities recommended by her supervisor while another considered a national conference only after his supervisor asked what he planned to attend. If senior administrators engage their middle managers in discussion about their plans, even infrequently, they may directly impact the futures of their staff members.

Finally, senior administrators may consider immediate conversation with middle managers once they enter new positions. While there are similarities in skills middle managers felt they needed for positions and the perceived needs by their supervisors, slight disconnect was present. Middle managers expressed challenges in navigating their new institutions and understanding departmental expectations. Senior administrators seemed to expect middle managers to transition more easily. Many mentioned their new hires should have the skills to manage departmental operations and the theoretical background to predict future challenges. While middle managers appeared to adjust after experiencing challenges, they may succeed quicker if senior administrators aid them in these transitions. Some senior level managers mentioned an intentional process of aiding in such a transition, called "on-boarding". They felt employees were more comfortable after arriving on campus when immediate support was available. Once again, senior administrators may have time constraints due to responsibilities. However, supporting middle managers in transition may not need to be time intensive. Senior administrators with limited resources may consider online training methods or monthly check-ins with specific questions regarding campus or departmental culture. If middle managers consider their supervisors too busy to support them, their supervisors may only need to reach out an offer assistance when needed.

ADJUSTMENT OF GRADUATE SCHOOL CURRICULUM

Results of this study also support previous research on preparation programs (Cujet et al., 2009; Herdlein, 2004; Kinser, 1993). Middle managers indicated navigating the needs of supervisees as a significant challenge upon arrival at their positions. Some middle managers compared their experiences supervising full time professional staff to supervision of student and graduate staff. These professionals stated supervision of full time professional staff was noticeably different from previous experiences. In addition, new middle managers described an adjustment period in which they "figured out" how to

supervise full time professionals. This lack of preparation can be traced to graduate programs.

In addition, senior level administrators cited specific practical skills staff need prior to entering a middle manager position. These needs included significant supervision skills and departmental management. It appears middle managers may not have these skills prior to arrival since many middle manager participants commented these two areas challenged them upon arrival. This discrepancy may cause middle managers increased stress as they attempt to meet the expectations of their supervisors. This information suggests previous experience is needed in addition to theoretical foundations from preparation programs.

Graduate program directors may consider reviewing programs to ensure the content prepares students for middle management leadership following graduation. Many middle manager positions do not require a terminal degree, which creates a need for education during a Master's program. These programs may consider including additional components on supervision and departmental leadership. These topics can be added to curriculum using one of two methods. First, supervision and departmental leadership can comprise an independent course. This course may review supervision models, confrontation of staff members, and development of the individual. Professors may address departmental leadership through topics such as creating a vision, staff recruitment, and program review. The challenge of creating a course for these topics may lie in removal of a current course. If programs encounter this challenge, the researcher recommends option two.

The second recommended method is including supervision and departmental management in existing courses. Professors teaching student development theory may consider discussing synergistic supervision (Tull, 2006; Winston & Creamer, 1997). This supervision style, while specific to full time professional staff, can be applied to student staff. Instructors responsible for higher education history courses should discuss the shifting of staffing patterns and impact of generational factors to supervision. Teaching new professionals historical implications on supervision will allow them to predict change quickly when they enter middle management positions. Faculty responsible for law courses should consider specific discussion of legal implications for supervisors. While this topic may receive some attention when reviewing liability, the researcher believes the conversation should continue and include issues related to recruitment and retention of employees. If program coordinators are unable to add a specific course on supervision and departmental development, they may consider incorporating discussion into existing courses.

Recommendations for Future Research

The researcher has three main ideas for future research. First, a future study may consider limiting number of institutions and increasing number of interviews at each institution. This process may be similar to Renn and Hodges (2007) study reviewing new professional experiences and those of their supervisors. They were able to provide

analysis through comparing the perspectives. A future study on the impact of professional development on middle manager skills may use a similar comparison between senior administrators and those they supervise. Specifically, discussion with middle managers at institutions with structured development experiences may explain the impact of such activities on retention and involvement from the perspective of those experiencing the activities.

Second, a future study may consider providing definitions and examining demographic factors. A researcher may attempt to define the professional development opportunities presented in this study. Approaching interviews or using a quantitative instrument with three options for development: supported, targeted, or structure may provide more substantial results. In addition, linking specific methods to results in middle manager skill development may build on the results presented in this study. Review of demographic factors may show a connection between offering professional development and gender, racial background, or educational background. These factors were not considered in the current study.

Finally, future research may review the impact of professional development throughout an institution. Examining professional development through senior level administrators, middle managers, and entry level employees may provide support for successful strategies within an administrative division. This study could be run in a similar interview format as the present study or as a case study examining a single institution. If a single institution is utilized, this researcher recommends understanding the professional development offerings at the institution prior to final site selection.

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