Skills and Perceptions of Entry-Level Staff Supervision

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By

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Abstract

The following study consisted of 532 respondents to a survey related to the supervision of entry-level staff in student affairs. Participants included both supervisors of entry-level staff and entry-level staff themselves. Individuals shared their thoughts and experiences regarding the supervision of this population. Themes emerged in four areas: Readiness for the supervisory role, challenges related to supervision, supervisor skills, and working through transition. Implications and recommendations for practice and further research are discussed.

Introduction
Supervision is one of the most complex activities that student affairs professionals are called upon to perform
(Winston & Creamer, 1997, p. 187)

To someone working in student affairs, truer words may never have been spoken. Supervision is a key component in the experience of nearly every student affairs professional. Whether overseeing undergraduate resident assistants and student leaders or graduate students, supervision is a critical aspect of one's early career experience. Magolda and Carnaghi (2004) indicate that the two primary objectives of most student affairs preparation programs are to socialize and professionalize graduate students for their future careers. As such, most entry-level staff members, a substantial number of who are recent graduates from advanced programs, are well-prepared and trained for supervising undergraduate and graduate students (Renn & Hodges, 2007). The term entry-level or new professional typically refers to anyone with five years or less of full-time experience in the field (Cilente, Henning, Jackson, Kennedy, & Sloane, 2006; Coleman & Johnson, 1990). This group represents approximately 15% to 20% of the personnel in the higher education workforce (Cilente et al., 2006). The study of college student development helps young supervisors understand the motivations and thought processes of their supervisees. Those who supervise graduate students and new professionals often push for reflection upon the supervisory experience. However, once an individual moves into midlevel and senior level positions, intentional training, mentorship, and opportunities for reflection are rarely implemented. In most mid-level to senior-level positions, despite being an expectation of the job, supervision of staff garners little attention. Wood, Winston, and Polkosnik (1985) indicated that most mid and upper level supervisors have received little if any formal training in the area of supervision and management.

Perhaps it is assumed that supervision is an intuitive process or a rite of passage, and once an individual reaches the mid to upper levels of the profession that they "just know" how to supervise. Unfortunately, the assumptions of skills needed and used by both supervisor and supervisee can cause challenges in the supervisory relationship. Harned and Murphy (1998) explain that:

A common dynamic is that a . . . professional is promoted into a managerial position with little or no true preparation, where the fallback to avoid failure is not better supervision [of subordinates] but harder work. This can create an unhealthy situation that may result in resentment and disenchantment by both overwrought supervisors and neglected staff (p. 45).

Often times, assumptions about the skills needed and used by both supervisor and supervisee can cause challenges to the supervisory relationship. For a field that prides itself on training and preparation, student affairs professionals must more fully address the needs for supervision of full time professionals.

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences and perceptions surrounding the supervision of entry-level staff in student affairs. Data collection focused on the supervisory relationship, training and preparation, and support from both those that supervise entry-level staff, and the staff members themselves. By further exploring the skills and perceptions of entry-level staff supervision, our hope was to identify ways to bridge the gap between supervisor and supervisee and uncover methods to better support and prepare supervisors of entry-level staff.

Review of Literature

In order to fully explore the supervision of new professionals, it is important to look at the manner in which supervisors are prepared, what supervision models are utilized within student affairs, and the type of relationships that exist between supervisor and supervisee.

Supervision Training

Preparation for supervising staff should be a critical component of staff training. Garland and Grace (1993) argued that "employers of new student affairs professionals must recognize a responsibility to provide new staff with ongoing training and support to build expertise, develop professionalism, and provide opportunities to evaluate and improve performance" (p. 96). However, most student affairs staff training programs tend to focus on the preparation of individuals for a specific position, rather than the broader development of professional skills and competencies, such as those outlined by the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) and the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) (ACPA, 2007). While many new professionals may develop the skills necessary for staff supervision through routine practice of their first position, much of this skill development is implicit and not openly discussed. Moreover, these skills are often focused upon the supervision of undergraduate or graduate students, and not full time professionals. Finally, while some employers provide on-going professional development opportunities for new professionals, there exists no standard curriculum for preparing professionals to take on the supervision of other professional staff members.

In fact, it is clear that graduate preparation programs are instrumental in equipping many new professionals with appropriate skills for future experiences in student affairs, but that training will only go so far. For instance, some graduate preparation programs focus on ethical issues faced in transitioning to life as a new professional or supervising undergraduate student staff (Renn & Hodges, 2007), few programs dedicate time discussing the issues that happen beyond the entry-level stage and more specifically on matters surrounding the supervision of full

time professional staff. Once students make the transition to practitioners, the type of supervision they receive can impact their professional experience and warrants further examination.

Supervision in Student Affairs

The importance of good supervision on the development of professionals is well documented (Dalton, 1996; Ricci, Potterfield, & Piper, 1987; Saunders, Cooper, Winston, & Chernow, 2000; Upcraft, 1982). Several techniques have been recommended for supervision within the student affairs field, including a developmental model rooted in psychology proposed by Stock-Ward and Javorek (2003), and the concept of synergistic supervision, first introduced by Winston and Creamer (1997).

Synergistic supervision has been touted as an effective model for supervision because it benefits both the individuals (supervisor/supervisee) and the institution, enhancing organizational effectiveness (Saunders, et al., 2000). If both the supervisor and supervisee can work together to realize each other's goals and maximize leadership growth, both the individuals and the organization will thrive (Winston & Creamer, 1997). This is consistent with the key components of synergistic supervision, which include mutual buy-in, two-way communication, and a focus on competence and goals by both parties (Winston & Creamer, 1998).

In addition, synergistic supervision, and more specifically and the relationship between supervisor and supervisee, has been viewed as a means of retention for student affairs professionals (Tull, 2007). Shupp and Armino (2012) also evaluated the needs of entry-level staff in regards to synergistic supervision and recommended a number of ways that supervisors can better support supervisees. Some of the recommendations included: focusing on reflection, professional development, empowerment, communication, and the relational aspects of supervision. The literature supports the idea that synergistic supervision is an effective method to use within student affairs, primarily because of its focus on relationships. Supervision, at its core, is based upon the relationship between the supervisor and the supervisee.

Supervisor/Supervisee Relationship

Developing strong relationships is a focal point for student affairs practitioners, so it stands to reason that the relationship supervisor and supervisee would be a key factor in the development of new professionals. Recent research has examined the transition process for new professionals (Amey & Reesor, 2002; Cilente, et al., 2006; Janosik, Creamer, Hirt, Winston, Jr., Saunders, & Cooper, 2003; Magolda & Carnaghi, 2004; Renn & Hodges, 2007; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008), the desired traits for new professionals (Belch & Mueller, 2003), expectations of supervisors, expectations of graduate students entering professional practice, and how to prepare new professionals for practice (Jones & McEwen, 2006).

At the entry-level stage of a professional's development, it is crucial that they have the support and tutelage of mentors and supervisors. Cilente et al. (2006) suggested it is the responsibility of supervisors of new professionals to "help them adapt to an inherently different culture than what they may be used to" (p. 18). These individuals may not be equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to excel and need someone to provide guidance and direction. Ignelzi (1998) also found that "the supervision that developing professionals receive is important for learning and mastering the craft of their profession" (p. 2).

New professionals believe they are self-aware and open to change, are knowledgeable of institutional culture and politics, and recognize the value of professional networks. In addition, they feel that they understand the importance of good supervision, strive to find balance between theory and practice, and hope to establish a professional identity early (Amey & Ressor, 2002; Cilente, et al., 2006; Magolda & Carnighi, 2004; Renn & Hodges, 2007). Ignelzi and Whitely (2004) contend that the ways in which the supervisee interprets and makes meaning of his or her work directly impacts the concept of supervision. New professionals value mentorship and are constantly looking for guidance and support (Cilente et al., 2006; Janosik et al., 2003; Tull, 2006). Yet, if there is a discrepancy between what supervisors and supervisees feel are important, the supervisory relationship may be damaged.

The literature demonstrates that the supervision of entry-level staff is an area that clearly warrants additional investigation. Further exploring the perceptions of entry-level staff supervision may help to identify ways to bridge the gap between supervisor and supervisee. Examining how each side views the supervision experience might help uncover ways to better support and prepare supervisors of entry-level staff. The researchers sought to identify the perceptions of supervision by soliciting feedback from those experiencing it first-hand, so surveying both entry-level student affairs staff and their supervisors seemed justified.

Methodology

As Fowler (2002) stated, using open-ended responses allows researchers to better access the respondents' true feelings on an issue. This method allows for answers that may be not be anticipated by researchers and is less biased then other approaches because limits researchers from providing suggested responses.

In an effort to afford participants the opportunity to answer questions in their own words, the researchers constructed a survey primarily using open-ended responses. Sturgeon and Winter (1999), and Willke, Adams, and Girnius (1999) found that answers to open-ended questions in email and internet surveys were much richer than in other survey modes, so and online delivery system was used.

Data Collection

For this study, the researchers used the selection process known as purposive sampling (Patton, 1990). Participants were recruited electronically through emails and list-servs, primarily those associated with ACPA, NASPA, and professional organizations related to those two entities. Data was collected using a short-survey developed through Survey Monkey, which was distributed via email to colleagues and list-servs over a two-week period. Results were narrowed to surveys completed by entry-level student affairs professionals or those that supervise entry-level professionals.

Sample Characteristics

A total of 532 participants who met the necessary criteria completed the survey. Among the respondents, 36.2% (n=184) were male, 62.6% (n=323) identified as female, with 0.2% (n=1) identified as transgender. With regards to institution type, 59.1% (n= 300) were employed at a

public 4-year institution, 36.2% (n=184) worked at a private 4-year institution, 3.9% (n=20) were employed at a public 2-year institution, and 0.8% (n= 4) worked at a private 2-year institution. In addition, participants were asked to identify the functional area (unit within Student Affairs) in which they worked. The top five areas represented were Residence Life with 39% of respondents (N=198), Student Activities at 12.4% (n=63), Student Affairs Administration at 9.1% (n=46), Academic Advising at 7.9% (n=40), and Career Services at 6.3% (n=32).

A key difference in the data was the experience level of participants. 5.7% (n=29) of respondents identified as full time professionals without a master's degree, 13.4% (n=68) were graduate students, 33.7% (n=171) had 1-3 years experience post masters, 16.5% (n=84) had 4-6 years experience post masters, 9.5% (n=48) had 7-10 years post masters experience, and 21.3% (n=108)10 or more years post masters experience.

Instrument

The survey instrument included questions for both those who supervised entry-level staff, and entry-level staff themselves. After supplying basic demographic information and acknowledging informed consent, respondents were asked to identify their supervisory role/experience. Participants responded to question items that focused on their perceptions and experiences related to supervision (either as a supervisor or supervisee). Using open-ended response questions allowed participants to further expand upon their thoughts, adding detail and providing an opportunity to reflect upon their supervision experiences. Survey questions differed slightly in wording based upon whether or not the participant indicated they were a supervisor or supervisee.

Participants identified as entry-level staff supervisory experience included: 40.4% (n=205) supervised primarily undergraduate student staff, 16.3% (n=83) did not currently supervise any staff, and 8.7% (n=44) supervised graduate students. 4.9% (n=29) supervised bachelor level professionals, and 29.7% (n=151) supervised master's level professionals.

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed using a mix of methods. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the closed items and an inductive analytical approach was applied to analyze the open-ended responses (Thomas, 2006). The purpose for using the inductive approach was to condense the raw text data into a brief summary format, establish clear links between the research objectives and the summary findings and develop a theory about the underlying structure of experiences. This approach is evident in several types of qualitative data analyses (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Creswell, 2005; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Pope, Ziebland, & Mays, 2000).

Additionally, to maintain the trustworthiness of the data across and in-between the open-ended questions, a strict protocol for analysis and interpretation was followed (Creswell, 2005). Open-ended responses were reviewed by both researchers to identify themes. A measure of analytic trustworthiness derived from our separate analyses of the responses and initial open coding. We then compared codes and themes for congruence and dissonance, exploring each for underlying biases.

We also developed categories that could increase our understanding of the experiences of entry-level staff. The transcripts were coded in a hierarchal fashion, beginning with open coding, and then moving into axial and selective coding to develop themes in four areas. These

included: readiness for supervisory role, challenges related to supervision, supervisor skills, and working through transition. These themes were further subdivided as shown in Figure 1:
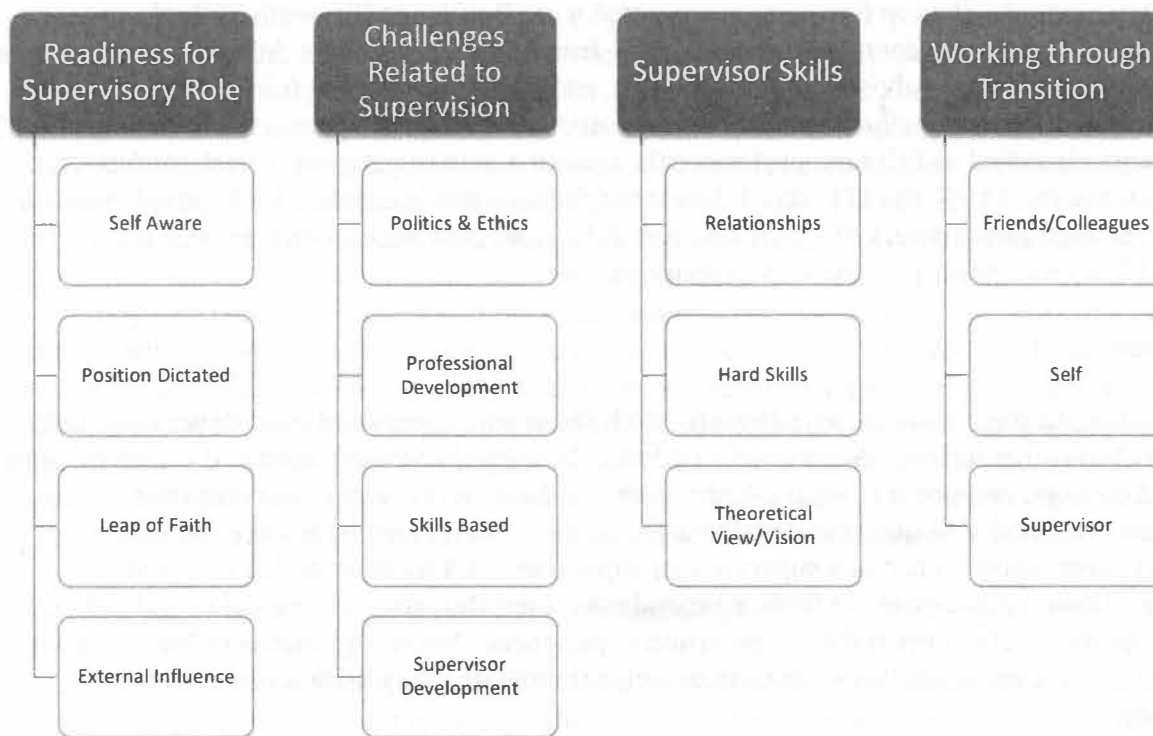

Figure 1: Thematic Framework for Study

Findings

Our findings revealed four distinct themes and smaller subsets within those themes. These themes and the subsets within those themes are explained and discussed in this section.

Readiness for Supervisory Role

When participants were asked how they knew they were ready to supervise new professionals, four themes emerged: self-awareness (54%; n=287), position dictated (23%; n=123), leap of faith (16%; n= 85), and externally driven awareness (7%; n=37).

Self-awareness. Participants whose responses reflected a sense of self-awareness actively pursued a supervisory experience and prepared through reflection and the realization that they were ready for the challenge. One participant stated, "It was mostly an intuitive sense coupled with believing I was an expert in Student Affair and a strong leader who could motivate, inspire, and manage the performance of others." Another respondent said, "I think there comes a point when you know you've done all you can do supervising students and mentoring coworkers…"

Position dictated. Other participants became supervisors simply because supervision was part of the current job position. These individuals may or may not have had any formal training or preparation to become supervisors. These thoughts were captured in the following statements: "I didn't necessarily [know I was ready]. It came with the job – as I was promoted I gained supervision duties. I didn't necessary learn the theory and research until my Ph.D. training." This individual assumed the supervisory role via promotion, but wasn't formally prepared until later, during post-master's work. Similarly, another participant stated that "I didn't [know I was ready]. I got promoted (and as a result I was a mediocre supervisor for several years)." This person took the supervisor job, but recognized after the fact that a lack of training and preparation likely led to poor supervision.

Leap of faith. A third group was comprised of those who may not have felt ready for a supervisory role, but decided to take a chance anyway. Responses from this group included statements such as "I'm not sure I did know [I was ready]. I thought I was ready because I had been an RD for six years and had been watching and learning from supervisors for a while." Another participant described it as follows:

> I don't know if you really know that you're ready to supervise. I think it is something that you find out while doing it. Naturally we all have skills or strengths that might make us a better supervisor than one of our colleagues, but with time everyone fine-tunes their tools.

For the individuals in this group, even though they may not have felt fully prepared, having a core set of transferable skills and several years of work experience was enough for them to give supervision a try.

External influence. A small percentage of participants indicated that they were convinced by a colleague to take on a supervisory role. These respondents needed that push to realize their potential, as demonstrated by this response: "I honestly didn't realize it...someone else did. I doubted myself until I was in the role doing it." Another response was "having the support and encouragement from my supervisor to take on new professionals was how I knew I was ready." For these individuals, it took someone who had a familiarity with their skills and potential to provide them with the confidence to take on the supervisory challenge.

Overall, the results indicated that the majority of professionals decided to move to a position of advanced supervision because they felt they were ready. However, it is possible these new supervisors may have overestimated their own abilities, knowledge base, and understanding of staff needs. Both the supervisor or the supervisee may experience some challenges in their new positions. These experiences will be further discussed in the next section.

Challenges Related to Supervision of New Professionals

A number of comments emerged related to the challenges associated with supervising new professionals. Participants provided responses related to both employee preparedness and supervisor development.

Employee Preparedness. Topics related to professional image, political awareness, and an understanding of the ethics were recurring theme in the data. Nearly 44% (n = 234) believed that new professionals needed a better understanding of campus politics and/or ethics, while 24% (n= 128) touched on topics related to professional development such as soft skills (e.g. communication, self-confidence) and 19% (n=100) mentioned hard skills, for example, learning processes and procedures unique to each institution. Supervisors stated that their staff needed a better understanding of how they should act and react in their first professional position. Several expressed that entry-level staff seemed to lack a full understanding of their role within the organization as illustrated in this statement:

> They think they know everything and typically have to learn by making mistakes rather than through guidance from others. They focus on what's best for them rather than what's best for the department/institution first, and they can't understand why that's a problem. They believe they are entitled to a lot, whether that's decision-making authority or live-in quality of life perks. They love to give supervisors and higher-level administrators "feedback" constantly. They are extremely worried about what is fair.

Other challenges relate more to self-confidence and professional ability, as described by this participant:

> Helping new professionals to develop their professional identity as well as manage their expectations of self and others. New professionals often come into the position feeling that they have to prove themselves, which causes them to question their competence. Helping new professionals balance this with the work they do can be challenging.

It appears that many new staff either have too much or not enough confidence in their knowledge of the profession and their understanding of their role within it.

Supervisor Development. A number of supervisors reflected on what they could do developmentally with their staff members to alleviate challenges. These respondents (13%; n=70) placed the responsibility to minimize challenges in supervising entry-level staff on themselves as supervisors. They stated that it was up to them to adjust to their supervision styles to the developmental needs of each person, and to avoid making assumptions on what supervisees knew or did not know. This mentality is illustrated in the following response, "Supervision is not taught, I had to get books on supervising new professionals to ensure I was educated for this role. This is something I think graduate preparation programs need to educate on."

The data suggest most supervisors believe new professionals are not prepared for the political and ethical challenges present in entry-level positions. These supervisors may elect a more professional approach with their supervisees in order to educate them on these challenges.

Supervision Skills

In response to the question, "What makes a good supervisor?" three qualities emerged from the data: possessing the ability to create and develop strong relationships (59%; n=314),

having an understanding of required skills and knowledge (29% n=154), and being visionary - embracing a broader theoretical understanding of the field (12%; n=64).

Relational Supervision. Respondents were clear that a personal and caring relationship between supervisor and supervisee was of the utmost importance, as described here:

> A supervisor needs to listen to employees, develop a mutual respect with them, care about the people they supervise and recognize when to be firm but also when grace is needed. A supervisor should respond to issues in a timely manner and encourage growth of all their employees.

Those who responded in this manner made it evident that a personal touch was something that entry-level staff highly value. They want to feel respected and that what they do matters to the supervisor.

Administrative Skills and Knowledge. In addition to strong relationships, hard skills such as those in the area of administration were deemed an important characteristic of a good supervisor. These skills are captured in this respondent's list, "organization, good communication skills, humor, concise in giving out information, detail oriented, good writing skills, someone who self-reflect, someone who sets deadlines."

Visionary. Finally, a theoretical approach that was more strategic and visionary was valued. Respondents stated that they wanted a supervisor who demonstrated broader leadership qualities and who could see the whole picture. When asked about what characteristics made a good leader, one respondent stated, "The primary ones to me are: balance of challenge and support, critical thinking, authentic leadership, ability to embrace change, and effective understanding of how to translate developmental theory to practice." For this individual, and those who had similar responses, the character and make-up of the supervisor was very important. To them, preferred supervisor skills include a blend of solid administrative knowledge, the vision to make connections between the abstract and the concrete, and the ability to provide guidance and support through strong relationships.

If most new professionals seek strong developmental relationships with supervisors, we can assume they may believe these relationships will be positive. New professionals may not connect criticism to a positive professional relationship. They may also feel disconnected from supervisors in terms of perceived understanding of the position and profession as a whole.

Working Through Transitional Issues

Recent literature has discussed the sudden and abrupt challenges new professionals face when transitioning into their first position (Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008), what we referred to in our survey as a sense of shock. Of all the respondents, 38% (n= 172) stated during their time as an entry-level professional that they felt some sort of shock. Participants were asked to comment on how they worked through this shock in their transition.

Self-Reliance. Of those that indicated they felt shock, the majority of respondents 57% (n=98) revealed that they relied on themselves to address the shock, either by staying the course,

switching positions, or using spirituality and reflection. Not all respondents could handle the shock on their own and relied on others to help get through this trying time.

Outside Support. Perhaps the most surprising finding relates to new professionals seeking external support for issues within the job. A fair number of participants indicated that they (31% or n=53) leaned on friends and colleagues for support. These support systems may or may not have been found at their current institution, but did not include their direct supervisor. Many participants mentioned former professors or mentors from their graduate programs as providing guidance. Connecting with other new professionals also helped work though the transition, as illustrated by this quote from a new professional in residence life:

It was nice to not be the only first year RD last year. I connected with the other RD and we would debrief a lot about how we were feeling and how we were adjusting to the culture of a new institution.

Supervisor Assistance. The smallest number of respondents, a mere 12% (n=21), used their supervisor to work through any difficult transitional issues that they experienced in beginning their entry-level position. Those that did say their supervisor assisted them in working through shock stated that providing feedback, being a good listener, and being positive were crucial actions that supported their development. Below is an example.

I talked a lot of my feelings, processes, and ideas out with my supervisor, who was a great reflective listener. The listening really helped me to process my own thoughts and come up with my own solutions probably eight or nine times out of every ten issues I had.

While this quote does indicate that some supervisors do have supportive relationships with their supervisees, such a small number (12%) suggests it is likely that many new professionals do not utilize their supervisor for transition issues. It is conceivable that they do not feel supervisors understand or do not feel comfortable within the supervision relationship. Whatever the reason, this is a supervisory issue that warrants further examination.

Discussion and Implications

Our findings support previous research while providing some valuable new information for professionals at every experience level to consider. These findings may be broken down into areas related to training, expectations, communication, and attrition.

Survey data shows a lack of training for new supervisors of professional staff. In spite of the fact that this issue was first suggested nearly 20 years ago (Harned & Murphy, 1998; Wood et al., 1985), many new supervisors still report receiving little or no training in this area, which echoes more recent literature by Jackson, Moneta, and Nelson (2009) and Hirt and Strayhorn (2011). While the lack of training may be explained by an assumed knowledge or comfort level, decreased availability of senior level professionals to provide the training, or some other reason, this oversight could have a trickle-down affect which impacts all professionals. Senior and mid-level staff members who hire individuals to supervise entry-level staff must be intentional in providing training specifically in the area of supervision to new supervisors.

The data also suggests that new professionals and their supervisors have different expectations related to performance and motivation. New professionals may see their first position as a step toward a career, focused more on developing their professional identity, while supervisors may expect more of an investment in the institution by the new professional. Responses suggest that candidates focus more on the theoretical rather than the practical when forming their expectations and making assumptions about their first position. They have a hard time dealing with the realities of the job, especially when what happens is not exactly as it was written in their textbooks or discussed in class. The connections are not always clear for new professionals to make, so perhaps supervisors need to be more intentional in verbalizing and demonstrating how theory ties into and informs practice.

Our results support the scholarship of Kuk, Cobb, and Forrest (2007) in that there is a mutual expectation that new professionals be agents of change. However, while professionals may wish to alter the status quo and create change early and often, doing so without proper knowledge can have a negative impact and is perceived poorly by supervisors. If supervisors prefer their entry-level staff understand the politics and history of an institution prior to action, it is imperative that those items be shared with staff early in their employment. If the issues mentioned are not addressed, differences in expectations may lead to gaps in communication and can erode the supervisor/supervisee relationship before it has a chance to fully develop.

Results also indicate that new professionals seek a relationship with a supervisor that is self-serving in nature. They expect a relationship that is focused on their career development with their supervisor providing unquestioned support of their decisions. A lack of this support causes a negative perception of criticism and may result in lack of trust from the new professional. While new staff members seem to be desire feedback and mentorship, if feedback is not provided regularly, or if it is not given in a sensitive manner, frustration can set in. If a supervisor is challenged with improving his or her staff members, constructive criticism and feedback are effective and necessary tools. New staff members need to be better equipped to handle this feedback, and supervisors need to be more aware of the manner in which this feedback is delivered. Either way, communication between supervisor and supervisee is important for the development of both parties. Yet, only 12% of the respondents indicated that they utilized their supervisor for support during difficult times on the job. If this is true, then more work needs to be done on the supervisory relationship.

These factors may lead a lack of employee perseverance and issues of attrition within the field of student affairs. Results suggest that new professionals experiencing difficulties and frustrations early in their career position are choosing to seek support outside of their supervisors. When they are not able to overcome their frustrations, some new professionals elect to leave a position rather than solve the issues at hand. If uncorrected, it stands to reason that this pattern could eventually lead to individuals leaving the profession entirely. Similarly, supervisors may become frustrated at a perceived inability to connect with new professionals. Finally, because of more frequent staff turnover (which could have been avoided), supervisors may also encounter additional stress and frustration related to having to recruit new staff members on a more regular basis due high staff turnover rates.

Limitations of Study

Our research includes several limitations. The manner in which participants were recruited (electronically through emails and list-servs, to individuals associated with ACPA,

NASPA, and related professional organizations) meant that those completing the instrument either needed direct access to the recruitment email or obtained it via another professional. Practitioners unassociated with these organizations may not be represented in the data. Also, the respondents were not evenly distributed among the functional areas. While survey did not target a specific functional area, housing and residence life professionals represented a significantly large portion of the respondents (39%).

It should be noted that these results are not generalizable to all supervisors but are useful in that they provide significant insight into the supervision experiences of new student affairs professionals and those that supervise this group. Our hope was to shed some light into this area and provide a set of recommendations for the profession. Although the sample was diverse with regard to the participants' demographics and level of supervision, the sample size was skewed with regard to functional area (residence life) and gender (62% female). As such, additional research could further explore and better account for these areas.

Conclusion

Responses from new professionals and their supervisors shed new light on the relationship between these two parties. There has been much research in the areas of supervision, but little related to this specific area within student affairs.

Implications for Practice

Based upon the results of this study, some key findings emerged which have implications on current practice. All of these major findings seem to focus around some aspect of self-awareness and are highlighted below:

Supervisor Readiness. Our findings suggest a disturbing pattern in the relationships between supervisors and new professionals. The majority of supervisors (54%) became supervisors because they felt they were ready for the challenge. While self-reflection may be a key aspect in a successful professional, the implication of ego cannot be ignored. These supervisors may experience challenges they are unprepared for, yet believe there is no need for improvement.

Politics and Ethics. The largest challenge in facing new professionals according to supervisors is the understanding of ethics and politics at an institution. Supervisors felt new professionals overestimated their grasp of this knowledge and sought to institute change prior to understanding the climate at the institution. It is possible the idea of self-awareness begins earlier in one's career, and new professionals simply exhibit the same traits as their supervisors.

Affirmation and Support. New professionals believe the relationship to their supervisors is essential for growth. They have expectations of guidance and career direction. They desire near unconditional support from supervisors and may take any perceived notion of criticism personally. This seems to contradict previous research regarding the confidence of new professionals. While they may believe they are self-aware, new professionals still require support, albeit on their own terms. Supervisors must adapt mutually acceptable techniques to reach new professionals. Similarly, new professionals need to be better equipped by deal with feedback and criticism, as it is a crucial part of the development process.

Supervisor Support During the Transition. Many new professionals experience transitional shock after taking on their first full time position. While these feelings may be considered routine by seasoned professionals, it is important that they are addressed and that new professionals are supported. Unfortunately, this study revealed that new professionals search for support outside of supervisors, and some respondents even left their position as a means of dealing with transitional issues. Supervisors would be wise to acknowledge this transitional shock and make a point of helping their new professionals work through it.

Recommendations

The results of this study indicate a number of areas related to the supervision of new professionals that require more attention. Clearly, more focus needs to be placed on better preparing supervisors for the challenges of working with the new student affairs professional. It should not be assumed that individuals know how to supervise professional staff, and student affairs divisions should be much more intentional about training and preparing their staff for these challenges. Similarly, it is important that graduate preparation programs better prepare their students for a more realistic supervisory experience.

The supervision of entry-level staff is an art that continues to evolve. The opinions of those who supervise and those who are supervised that were shared in this study can help to inform the best course of action. Regardless of what method is used to supervise entry-level staff, it would benefit all parties involved (e.g., supervisors, supervisees, and the institutions themselves) to pay more attention to this crucial component in the development of student affairs professionals.

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