

Examining the Relationship between Satisfaction with Supervisor and Demographic Variables among Extension Program Assistants

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Introduction

In the 1970s, Cooperative Extension organizations dramatically increased recruitment of paraprofessionals, with resulting significant benefit to the Extension system (Boyce, 1970; Parsons & Kiesow, 1975). Extension program assistants are employed by Ohio State University Extension to help Extension educators. Extension program assistants are responsible for recruiting individuals for an educational program and provide informal teaching. Almost all studies of Extension employees' satisfaction with work investigated Extension educators as a subject of study; however, no research examines satisfaction with supervisor among Extension program assistants. This study aimed to rectify the oversight in the literature by examining the extent to which OSU Extension program assistants are satisfied with their supervisors and determining if specific demographics are related to satisfaction with supervisor

The supervisor can play an important role in the well-being of an employee because quality of supervision influences the employee's satisfaction with work (Adebayo & Ogunsina, 2011). Wesolowski and Mossholder (1997) suggest that organizations should get a better understanding of processes related to employees' demographic differences in the workplace. Employees' demographic characteristics, such as age, gender, marital status, tenure, and education, have long been studied in connection with a workplace (Wesolowski & Mossholder, 1997). Bengé and Harder (2017) found that the relationships between employees and supervisors influenced the employees' satisfaction with work and work productivity. The research literature indicates that three major surveys have been used extensively to measure employee job satisfaction: 1) Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (Weiss, Dawis, England, & Lofquist, 1967), 2) Spector's (1985) Job Satisfaction Survey, and 3) The Job Descriptive Index (Smith, Kendall, & Hulin, 1969). Scarpello and Vandenberg (1987) viewed satisfaction with supervisor as a possible source of employee attitude toward supervisor's behavior. According to Scarpello and Vandenberg (1987), satisfaction with supervisor indicates the degree of satisfaction with the immediate supervisor and differs from being satisfied with the work environment and the work itself.

Purpose & Objectives

The purpose of this study was to investigate factors that affect satisfaction with supervisor among Ohio State University Extension program assistants. Two research objectives guided this study:

- 1) Describe program assistants' perceptions in terms of satisfaction with their supervisors.
- 2) Determine whether program assistants' satisfaction with supervisor differed based on demographic characteristics

Methods

This study used a census survey design. After removing responses with missing data, the final data set included responses from 149 employees. Most participants were female (87.4%) with an average age of 43 years ($SD = 14.13$), married (63%), with a bachelor's degree (55.5%), and had worked at the Extension for approximately six years ($SD = 7.87$). More than 30% of respondents had children under 18 who lived at home. Respondents were not equally distributed across program areas.

Satisfaction with supervisor was measured using Scarpello and Vandenberg's (1987) SWMSS instrument. Scarpello and Vandenberg (1987) reported an internal consistency coefficient of .95. All 18 items of the original instrument were used in this study to assess Extension program assistants' satisfaction with supervisor. Responses to each item were collected using a five-point Likert scale.

Instrument items included: "The way my supervisor listens when I have something important to say," "The way my supervisor sets clear work goals," and "The way my supervisor treats me when I make a mistake." Table 1 displays all 18 items. Responses to each item were collected using a five-point Likert scale: 1 = *very dissatisfied*, 2 = *dissatisfied*, 3 = *neither satisfied nor dissatisfied*, 4 = *satisfied*, and 5 = *very satisfied*. The Cronbach's alpha for the SWMSS instrument in this study was .963. The reliability coefficient describes the internal consistency reliability of a set of items.

The Cronbach's alpha for the SWMSS instrument in this study was .963. An online survey was used to collect the data using a tailored design method (Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2014).

- A descriptive statistic was utilized to describe the first research objective.
- A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to determine the existence of statistically significant differences in the means between satisfaction with supervisor and the demographic variables.
- An independent *t*-test was conducted to determine if group means for total scores on the measured construct differed for the two groups of respondents (early and late).

Results showed no statistically significant difference between early and late respondents on the measures of employee satisfaction with supervisor

Results

Higher scores indicate greater satisfaction with supervisor. The mean summative score for satisfaction with supervisor was 3.88 ($SD = .94$, $n = 149$). The distribution of the satisfaction with supervisor scores had a high negative skew (-1.01), showing a long-left tail toward lower values. The survey items scoring the highest mean values were (a) The way my supervisor listens when I have something important to say ($M = 4.10$; $SD = 1.09$), (b) The way my supervisor treats me when I make a mistake ($M = 4.07$; $SD = 1.07$), and (c) The technical competence of my supervisor ($M = 4.03$; $SD = 1.06$).

Program assistants were very satisfied with (a) The way my supervisor listens when I have something important to say (47.3%), (b) My supervisor's backing me up with other management (42.5%), (c) My supervisor's fairness in appraising my job performance (41.8%), (d) The way my supervisor is consistent in his/her behavior toward subordinates (41.3%), and (e) The technical competence of my supervisor (41.0%). Survey items having the lowest mean values were (a) The way my supervisor shows concern for my career progress ($M = 3.64$; $SD = 1.23$), (b) The frequency with which I get a pat on the back for doing a good job ($M = 3.64$; $SD = 1.23$), and (c) The way my job responsibilities are clearly defined ($M = 3.71$; $SD = 1.08$). Program assistants were very dissatisfied and dissatisfied with (a) The way my supervisor informs me about work changes ahead of time (22.9%), (b) The way my supervisor shows concern for my career progress (19.6%), (c) The frequency with which I get a pat on the back for doing a good job (18.1%), (d) The way my supervisor is consistent in his/her behavior toward subordinates (16.6%), and (e) My supervisor's fairness in appraising my job performance (15.6%).

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to determine are there significant differences in means of program assistants' satisfaction with supervisor and their demographic characteristics. The assumption of normality was tested, and examination of the residuals and the boxplot showed a normal distribution shape. According to Levine's test, the homogeneity of variance assumption was satisfied. The ANOVA revealed that there were no significant differences in means of satisfaction with supervisor and program assistants' education level ($F = .122$, $df = 4, 142$, $p = .974$), gender ($F = .002$, $df = 1, 145$, $p = .964$), marital status ($F = .625$, $df = 4, 142$, $p = .645$), children under 18 years old living at home ($F = .137$, $df = 1, 145$, $p = .712$), years of service ($F = .599$, $df = 36, 109$, $p = .960$), program area ($F = 1.395$, $df = 3, 144$, $p = .247$), or age ($F = .848$, $df = 43, 96$, $p = .724$).

Implications

This study makes a unique contribution to the research in the field of Extension organization development and employee satisfaction with supervisor. This study used a census survey design. The overall design limited the scope of the study and limits the generalizability of the obtained results because only employees of a single Extension organization in the state of Ohio participated. The results of this study and the previous research cited can provide some direction for organizations similar to OSU Extension. First, human resources development practitioners should assess Extension program assistants' satisfaction with their supervisors on an annual basis. The results of the assessment will help to create a positive organizational climate by fostering a culture that gives program assistance a sense of being respected and appreciated. Second, Extension organizations should cultivate a supportive supervisory environment through providing feedback, inform work changes ahead of time, be consistent in behavior toward subordinates, and show fairness in appraising job performance. Third, Extension administration should offer leadership professional development for middle-level managers that helps increase supervisors' awareness about leadership behaviors' influence and their managerial capacity in working with subordinates, which increases employee satisfaction with supervisors. From research standpoint, there is a need to examine how interpersonal trust among supervisors and subordinates affects employees' career progress.

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