dilemma of change

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Adding paraprofessional positions to county Extension staffs has created a need to redefine many professional roles. But, some agents have difficulty changing from doing everything themselves to being program managers. The most recent program area to be caught in this dilemma is 4-H.

Many 4-H agents do about the same thing as their program assistants. When both emphasize activities, program quality can't improve as much as if the agents were program managers. Choice of an agent-program assistant team approach may make their work seem the same and the program assistant gets only about half the agent's wages.

A clear division of the tasks of 4-H professionals and program assistants is vital. So is a differentiation in the level of their responsibilities. Both people need to be able to identify their own duties to work effectively toward program goals.

Ohio Study

Problems in dividing 4-H tasks were made clear in a study done in January, 1975, in Ohio. Questionnaires were sent to the 92 4-H agents and 84 program assistants employed at that time, and 87% of both groups responded. The program assistants and 4-H agents agreed that program assistants were primarily responsible for only 1 of 22 tasks.

The tasks used in the questionnaire were taken from the Ohio 4-H program assistant job description, the Kiesow paraprofessional role model,[1] EMIS 4-H agent data, and the Ohio assistant tasks were included. The respondents were asked to rate the degree to which each task was the responsibility of the agent, the program assistant, or both.

The task considered by both groups to be more a program assistant than an agent task was taken from the Ohio 4-H program assistant job description:

Organizes special project clubs to meet particular needs and interests of youth.

The program assistants considered the following task from the Kiesow role model to be more theirs, although the agents thought it was a shared responsibility:

Supervises the organization of local 4-H Clubs.

The 4-H agents thought all remaining tasks were more agent than program assistant responsibilities, while the program assistants thought 7 tasks were shared by agents and program assistants.

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Dividing Responsibilities

A real problem in *dividing* responsibilities is evident in the results of this study. The 4-H agents accepted major responsibility for all but 2 of the 22 tasks, although 13 came from either the Kiesow role model for 4-H program assistants or the Ohio program assistant job description. The program assistants thought they and the agents shared responsibility for several tasks in which both were involved.[2]

Level of Responsibility

Problems with *level* of responsibility are less evident from the study. Yet, they're present and can be directly observed. The conflict between agent's acceptance of major task responsiblity and the program assistant's desire to share responsibility indicates a need to look at authority and delegation.

Authority and Delegation

Authority or power to do the 4-H job in a county is divided among the people who hold 4-H or related positions. Authority comes with each position, and holders of new positions are delegated enough to do their jobs.

Agents and program assistants have positions with different levels of authority and responsibility. Agents delegate authority to program assistants and are responsible only for the authority they keep. They're *accountable* for the authority they delegate. This means that program assistants are responsible for the authority they're given. Ideally, authority is equal to responsibiliti given. The Ohio study shows confusion in delegation of authoril by the overlap in agent-program assistant acceptance of task responsibilities.

Problem Area: Management

An area in which problems with level of responsibility was apparent was management. Both agents and program assistants perform management tasks in their jobs. The level

of management for each position is different and is illustrated by the following models.

In the role of program manager, 4-H agents have responsibility for the tasks of planning, organizing, directing, controlling, and coordinating county 4-H program. The specific behavior involved in each task is:

Planning:	creating ahead of time a systematic method for reaching goals.
Organizing:	determining the tasks necessary to reach a goal and assigning the authority and responsibility for each.
Directing:	supervising; guiding others toward a goal.
Controlling:	preventing, or identifying and correcting deviations from established standards.
Coordinating:	combining and adjusting all tasks to achieve unity and harmony.

The 4-H agent will do each of these tasks. In the first model (Figure 1), the 4-H agent is seen as carrying out all program management tasks about equally. He or she also carries out some activities directly associated with these tasks. The program assistant is seen as carrying out activities that implement the planning, organization, direction, control, and coordination supplied by the agent. At the same time, some lower level management tasks exist for which the program assistant is responsible.

For example, the 4-H agent takes leadership in planning volunteer recruitment and determines the tasks necessary. He
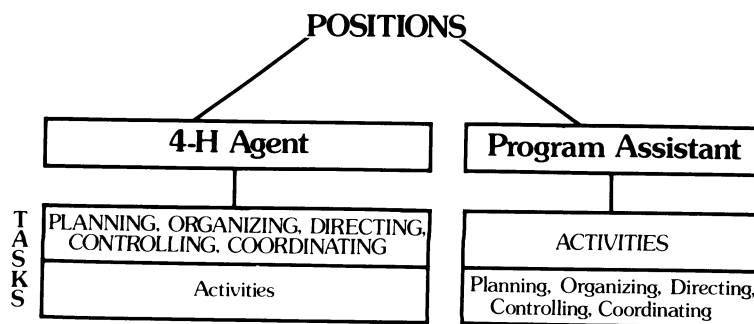

Figure 1. Management responsibility—level 1.

or she assigns such tasks as developing lists of names to contact and contacting prospective volunteers to the program assistant. The 4-H agent then supervises, controls, and coordinates all processes involved in recruitment. The program assistant, in turn, uses such management strategies as planning, organizing, and controlling in completing assigned tasks like locating and contacting prospects.

As the 4-H agent moves toward higher levels of managerial behavior, he or she will spend less time directing, controlling, and coordinating program, and more time planning and organizing. Correspondingly, the program assistant will carry out more tasks involving directing, controlling, and coordinating programs, as well as specific activities. As the program assistant assumes a higher level of program management tasks, some of the more specific task activities can be delegated to other paid 4-H staff or to volunteers. The change in management responsibility is illustrated by the second model (Figure 2).

An example of the second model would be: the 4-H agent takes leadership in planning recruitment, determines the tasks necessary, and assigns them to the program assistant. The program assistant then directs, controls, and coordinates the specific activities of volunteers and others who carry out many of the tasks. The program assistant also carries out some tasks, and the 4-H agent exercises overall supervision, control, and coordination of recruitment.

Problems with Management Approach

Several problems accompany adoption of a management approach. Management may not seem rewarding to the agent or program assistant who wants to work directly with youth,

POSITIONS

4-H Agent	Program Assistant	Volunteers & Others

T A S K S

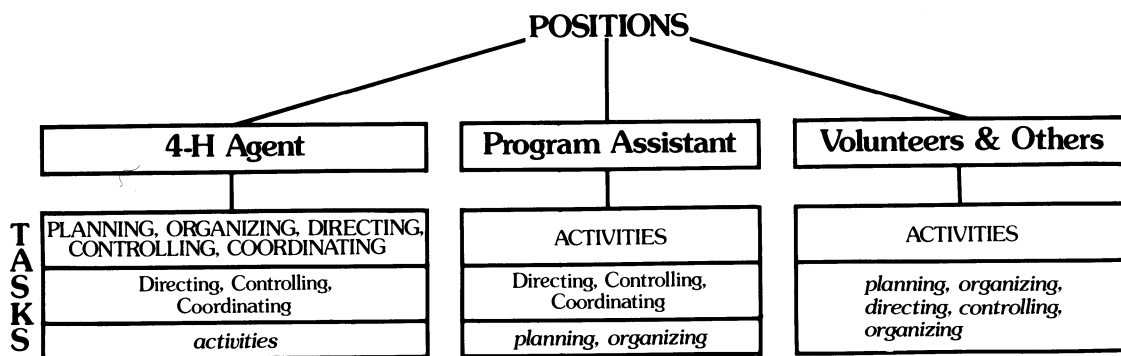|		
PLANNING, ORGANIZING, DIRECTING, CONTROLLING, COORDINATING	ACTIVITIES	ACTIVITIES
Directing, Controlling, Coordinating	Directing, Controlling, Coordinating	*planning, organizing, directing, controlling, organizing*
activities	*planning, organizing*	

Figure 2. Management responsibility—level 2.

and much of management isn't visible to elected officials and clientele. Those who are responsible for raising county funds may want the paid staff to be visible at work, particularly the more highly paid agent.

The impact of management must be made visible. Some important ways a 4-H agent can do this are through leadership of planning committees, contacting local influentials for serving on planning committees, and personally carrying out highly visible management activities, such as directing and coordinating the work of others in public places.

Summary

A continuing need for a division of tasks and for differentiation in level of responsibility between professionals and paraprofessionals exists. The need is present, not only in 4-H, but in all Extension program areas. Whenever a new paraprofessional position is created, attention must be given to these two problems. A clear determination of the tasks of each person will provide the beginning for a constructive, work-oriented relationship. With a firm basis of expectations, strengths can be tapped and disagreements negotiated. Periodic reassessments will need to be made for possible task and authority reallocation.

Footnotes

1. John A. Kiesow, *Role Model for the Paraprofessional Youth Worker in the Extension Service,* (Corvallis: Oregon State University, Extension Service, 1973).

2. Marjory M. Mortvedt and Elaine S. Karr, *Ohio 4-H Agent-Program Assistant Consensus on Tasks, Program Assistant Characteristics, Characteristics of the Work Relationship, and Program Success* (Columbus: The Ohio State University, Cooperative Extension Service, 1975).