

Module 4: Professional Ethics



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In 2012 GFRAS developed the “New Extensionist” document, which details the role that extension plays in an agricultural innovation system, and the strategies and capacities needed (at individual, organisational, and system level) <http://www.g-fras.org/en/activities/the-new-extensionist.html>. Based on this document the GFRAS Consortium on Extension Education and Training emerged to promote the New Extensionist, mainly through training, curricula review, and research on extension.

The Learning Kit contains 13 modules designed for self-directed, face-to-face, or blended learning and can be useful resource for individual extension field staff, managers, and lecturers.

The Professional Ethics module is developed as part of the New Extensionist Learning Kit <http://www.g-fras.org/fr/652-the-new-extensionist-core-competencies-for-individuals.html>.

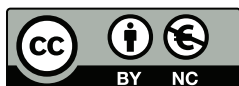
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1. Before you begin

1.1 General instruction

This module should be used in conjunction with the workbook provided. As you read through the module, you will find different visual features that are designed to help you navigate the document.



Figure 1: Icons used to highlight important information throughout the manual

The module makes use of keywords (difficult or technical words that are important for you to understand). To ensure that you receive the full benefit from the module, keywords will be marked the first time they occur and defined in a box containing the keywords symbol. Make sure that you read the definition of any words that you are unsure about.

1.2 Activities

Each session in the module will contain various types of activities to help you become knowledgeable and competent. The module contains three types of activities:

A **pre-assessment** is to be completed before reading through the module overview and introduction, and a **post-assessment** is to be completed once the entire module has been covered. This will measure the degree to which your knowledge has improved by completing the module.

Each session contains one or more **session activities** to be completed, in the workbook, where indicated in the module. These activities measure your ability to recall and apply theoretical knowledge.

At the end of each study unit a **summative assessment** needs to be completed. These assessments are longer than the session activities and will test your knowledge on all the work within the study unit.

1.3 Assessment instructions

Keep the following in mind before doing any of the assessments:

- All assessments are to be completed in the provided workbook.
- The manual contains all relevant information you will need to complete the questions, if additional information is needed, such as the use of online sources, facilities will be made available.
- Work through the activities in a study unit and make sure that you can answer all the questions before attempting the summative assessment. If you find that you are not certain of any part of the training material, repeat that section until you feel confident.
- The summative assessment must be done under the supervision of your trainer at the end of your learning period.

Module 4: Professional Ethics

Module outcomes

Upon completing this topic, you will be able to:

1. Discuss the term ethics and apply a code of ethics and a code of conduct;
2. Explain what a profession is and what is expected from a professional extensionist;
3. Describe what professionalism means in the workplace; and
4. Discuss the fundamental skills needed by professional extensionists.

Module overview

During the last decade, extension and rural advisory services have been increasingly recognised as professions. This module will briefly discuss the concept of ethics and the importance of professional ethics and codes of behaviour in the workplace. This module will look at the meaning of a profession and professionalism and what it means to be a professional. You will learn what qualities and characteristics define a profession and a professional and the importance of professional development. The final part of this module will look at what competencies you will need as a professional extensionist to perform your duties effectively.

Module introduction

Worldwide, there is a tendency for more and more organisations that deliver a service to the public to call their service a professional service that is executed by professionals. Whether or not to recognise extension and rural advisory services as a profession has been an ongoing debate over the past

few decades. During the last decade, an increasing number of countries have indicated that they feel that agricultural extension and advisory services are dynamic professions and have encouraged extension officers to become professionals and experts in their fields.



The process of professionalising agricultural extension can be a long and difficult one and includes:

- The formulation of national policies on extension;
- Broadening the technical mandate of extension;
- Giving extension a similar status to other agricultural disciplines; and
- The formation of governing bodies and codes of conduct and ethics.

Furthermore, it requires that those who wish to be in the extension stream obtain a higher degree in extension and register with a recognised relevant professional body. It also requires training and education in the **soft skills** required to become a professional and to demonstrate professionalism.

Soft skills:



Interpersonal skills that enable someone to interact effectively with other people.

An important soft skill that professional extensionists require is an understanding of professional ethics. Professional ethics govern relationships with and responsibilities to colleagues and anyone who uses your professional services or those who these services might affect. Professional ethics also refers to the ethical values and principles used to make decisions within a professional organisation. As a professional extension agent, it is important that you remember that good professional ethics are the foundation of a good professional organisation.



Complete the pre-assessment in your workbook.

Study unit 1: Ethics

Study unit outcomes

After completing this study unit, you should be able to:

- Explain what is meant by the term ethics;
- Discuss the importance of ethics; and
- Discuss the importance of a code of ethics and a code of conduct.

Study unit overview

Ethics is broadly defined as the moral rules or principles of behaviour that help us to decide what is right or wrong. This unit will give you a brief introduction to the field of ethics by discussing the basic concepts of ethics. In this unit you will also learn the importance of ethics in the workplace. All organisations are governed by codes of behaviour. In this unit you will learn to distinguish between a code of ethics and a code of conduct and discuss the importance of both.

Study unit introduction

Ethics are moral codes or principles that guide behaviour. Being ethical is not the same as being religious, doing what society feels is acceptable or following the law. Religions typically set high ethical standards and motivate many people to behave ethically. Ethics, however, are not the same as religion and do not only apply to religious people. In many societies people think that being ethical is conforming to what that society feels is socially acceptable. But standards of behaviour can vary between societies and differ from what is ethical. Ethical behaviour is not necessarily the same as following the law, but there is a relationship between ethics and the law. The relationship between ethics and the law is like the relationship between the bricks and mortar in a wall. The solid

bricks represent clearly defined and substantial laws, whereas ethics represent the mortar that fills all the voids between the bricks. It helps to hold the wall together, and give it additional strength. The weaker the mortar, the more likely it becomes that the wall will collapse.

Ethical behaviour and decision making are especially important in organisations that provide services to others. All organisations, regardless of their size, have guidelines on how they would like their members to behave. These codes can range from a set of guiding principles to more strictly enforced rules. Guidelines such as these are very important as they allow everybody in an organisation to be on the same page when faced with difficult choices.

Session 1.1: What are ethics?

Session outcomes

After completing this session, you should be able to:

- Discuss the basic concepts of ethics;
- Describe basic ethical behaviour in the workplace; and
- Discuss the importance of ethics in the workplace.

Introduction

Defining the meaning of ethics can be very difficult and many people have very different views about the meaning of ethics. Ethics is basically concerned with who we are and what we do. An ethical person is generally considered to be a person of integrity with virtues such as compassion, empathy and sympathy. Ethical behaviour is seen as doing what is fair and responsible.

The basic concepts of ethics

Ethics is one of the major fields of study in the subject of philosophy. The study of ethics is further subdivided into several branches of study ranging from highly theoretical and academic branches to less abstract branches, such as applied ethics. Academic branches of ethics, such as **normative ethics**, study and formulate theories that judge what makes something good or bad or behaviour right or wrong. Applied ethics, in contrast, is the application of ethical theories to help choose the most appropriate action given a specific ethical problem in a specific field. Examples of applied ethics include environmental ethics, clinical ethics, business ethics and professional ethics.

Normative



ethics: A branch of ethics that focuses on identifying and defining what represents right behaviour for humans.

Professional ethics involve the personal, organisational, and corporate standards of behaviour expected by professionals and aim to improve professionalism. Professional ethics provide guidelines of behaviour for a professional, not only in their relationship with the people that depend on their services, but also their fellow professionals and employers. Most professions have professional bodies that internally enforce and regulate professional ethical codes of practice. Many countries also have laws regulating the professional ethical standards for certain professions.

Ethical behaviour in the workplace

Ethical behaviour in the workplace basically means being objective and fair in your personal behaviour and performance of your duties. To play an ethical role in your organisation or workplace will mean that you:

- Act in a way that reflects your belief in the fundamental values of ethical behaviour and in the application of these values to your job;
- Conduct your daily activities **objectively** and strive to not be influenced by your emotions or personal prejudices;
- Provide objective and constructive assistance or information to all people you interact with, regardless of your personal feelings; and
- Help the public understand how they can help in achieving objective and ethical behaviour in the workplace.

Objective: Not influenced by personal feelings or opinions when considering and representing facts.



The importance of ethics in the workplace

Apart from creating a fair and healthy work environment for members or employees, workplace ethics also provide several important benefits to an organisation or business. The following are some of the main benefits for organisations that have a strong commitment to ethics:

- **Increases credibility:** Organisations with a strong commitment to ethics are more respected by society and a good reputation can be a powerful advertisement for any organisation.
- **Creates mutual trust between leaders and members or employees of an organisation:** In organisations that emphasise ethical behaviour, members and decision makers will have the same moral values. This will ensure that all members in an organisation will work together to achieve a common goal.
- **Improves decision making:** Decisions are driven by ethical values. An organisation that is driven by strong ethical values will ensure that all the members' decisions are driven by the same ethical standards.
- **Improves financial performance:** Studies have shown that organisations with clearly stated commitments to ethics have significantly better financial performance and are more profitable in the long run than those that do not.



Complete Activity 1.1 in your workbook.

Session 1.2: Codes of ethics and conduct

Session outcomes

After completing this session, you should be able to:

- Distinguish between a code of ethics and a code of conduct; and
- Discuss the importance of codes of ethics and conduct.

Introduction

Codes of ethics and conduct are becoming more and more important as public interest in how organisations conduct their business increases. These codes of behaviour allow organisations to manage organisation-wide behaviour and maintain a positive public image. These codes are usually associated with larger businesses or organisations but they can help govern member/employee behaviour in any size organisation. In general, a code of ethics is more value-based, whereas a code of conduct tends to be more rule-based, however this distinction is not universally recognised.

Code of ethics

A code of ethics is a document, usually issued by a board of directors, that encourages specific behaviour. This document, sometimes referred to as a value statement, provides guidelines for behaviour during difficult situations. These guidelines are usually more general and non-specific and allow members to make independent judgements about the most appropriate behaviour in a given situation. A code of ethics represents aspirational standards of behaviour that members should strive to uphold, however, this is not necessarily easily measured. A code of ethics can greatly benefit any organisation.

A code of ethics:

- Promotes reputation and enhances trust;
- Encourages and provides guidance for ethical decision-making;
- Makes social integration easier; and
- Legitimises ethics.



Code of conduct

Similar to a code of ethics, a code of conduct is a document issued by the board of directors that encourages specific behaviour. In contrast to a code of ethics, this document outlines specific behaviours that the organisation expects or does not allow. A code of conduct is a **mandatory** set of standards that is strictly enforced. By not following these standards, you could face disciplinary action. A code of conduct contains clearly defined expectations about what actions are expected, acceptable or not allowed in a given situation and does not allow for any independent judgement of members. If a code of conduct is signed by a member, it becomes a legal agreement and can be used as a legal tool.

Mandatory:

Compulsory or required by law.



A code of conduct:

- Ensures that all members of an organisation are aware of exactly what is expected of them;
- Protects all the stakeholders involved in the organisation and enhances trust; and
- Ensures standard behaviour throughout the organisation.



Below are two examples of codes of conduct and ethics of extension advisory services from regions where this service has been professionalised.

Agrology: The application of science to agriculture, bioresources, food and the environment by professionals.



Example 1.1: The **Saskatchewan Institute of Agrologists (SIA)**, regulates the profession of **agrology** in the Saskatchewan province of Canada. They ensure safe, competent and ethical practice of approximately 1,500 agrologists and agricultural technologists in Saskatchewan. The following is taken from their constitution:





BYLAW II: Code of ethics

I. Code of ethics for **Agrologists**

Agrologists will assent and conform to the code of ethics, which is as follows:

The profession of agrology demands integrity, competence and objectivity in the conduct of its members while fulfilling their professional responsibilities to the public, the employer, the client, the profession and other agrologists.

II. Code of ethics for Agricultural Technologists

Agricultural Technologists will assent and conform to the code of ethics, which is as follows:

The agricultural industry integrity, competence and objectivity in the conduct of its members while fulfilling their professional responsibilities to the public, the employer, the client, and other agricultural technologies.



Agrologist: A professional with knowledge of agrology, who responsibly teaches, transfers knowledge or conducts research.



Example 1.2: The **South African Council for Natural Scientific Professions (SACNASP)** and the **South African Society for Agricultural Extension (SASAE)** has drawn up its Code of Conduct to which registered persons must comply, failing which constitutes improper conduct. In practising their profession, registered Natural and Extension Scientists must:

1. Have due regard to public safety, public health and public interest in general.
2. Have due regard to harmful practices against the environment.
3. Discharge their duties to their respective employers or clients efficiently and with integrity.



4. Conduct themselves in such a way as to uphold the dignity, standing and reputation of the natural scientific professions.
5. Not undertake natural scientific work for which their education, experience or background have not rendered them competent to perform.
6. Disclose to their respective employers or clients in writing:
 - a. Any interest which they may have in any company, firm or organisation, or with any person, and which is related to the work for which they may be or may have been employed; and
 - b. Particulars of any royalty or other financial benefit which accrues or may accrue to them as a result of such work.
7. Not deliberately injure, directly or indirectly, the professional reputation, prospects or business of another registered person.
8. Not knowingly attempt to supplant another registered person after a formal offer of employment has been made.
9. Not advertise their professional services in a self-laudatory manner or in a manner that is derogatory to the dignity of the profession.
10. Not knowingly misrepresent or permit misrepresentation of their own or their associates' academic or professional qualifications, nor exaggerate their own degree of responsibility for any work of a natural scientific nature.
11. Not, without a satisfactory reason, destroy calculations, documentary or any other evidence required for the verification of their work
12. Not personally, or through any other agency, attempt to obtain consulting work by way of touting or bribery.
13. Order their conduct when practising their professions in another country in accordance with these rules in so far as they are not inconsistent with the law of the country concerned; provided that they shall also adhere to the standards of professional conduct in that country.



Complete Activity 1.2 in your workbook.



Complete Activity 1.3 in your workbook.

Concluding remarks

Defining ethics and ethical behaviour is very difficult and is usually a highly academic pursuit. In general, ethics are the moral standards and values we use to guide our decision making. In the professional environment, ethics are concerned with encouraging you to consider and respect all the relevant sides of an ethical problem and to act in an objective manner unswayed by personal prejudices in accordance with the code of your profession. Codes of behaviour, such as codes of conduct or ethics, are very important as they promote a culture of integrity, transparency and accountability throughout an organisation



Complete the summative assessment in your workbook.

Study unit 2: Professions and Professionals

Study unit outcomes

After completing this study unit, you should be able to:

- Describe what a profession is;
- Discuss the characteristics of a profession; and
- Explain what a professional is and discuss the qualities of a professional.

Study unit overview

Simply put, a professional is a person who is qualified to follow a certain profession. This unit will discuss what features define a profession and why it is different from a job or trade. In this unit you will also learn what it means to be a professional. Finally, this unit will help you improve as a professional extensionist by looking at the qualities and characteristics shared by successful professionals.

Study unit introduction

In today's information age, we are overloaded with choice. However, the more choice we have, the more we need a way to choose trusted expertise. We need a way to know that we are choosing a trustworthy individual with the highest level of expertise to help us or provide the specialised skill we need. Professions differ from trades in that professions can assure that a professional member is an expert in his field. A professional has to meet extensive educational, ethical and regulatory requirements set by their profession before they can provide their service to the public. Apart from these requirements, professionals also need to possess personal qualities such as integrity, honesty and reliability to be successful.

Session 2.1: What is a profession?

Session outcomes

After completing this session, you should be able to:

- Define what a profession is; and
- List and discuss the characteristics of a profession.

Introduction

There are many different views about what makes an occupation a profession. Some people believe that occupations are arranged on a **spectrum**. Well-recognised professions (i.e. lawyers and medical doctors) fall on the one end of the spectrum and trades that definitely are not professions (i.e. manual labourers or car salesmen) at the other. **Paraprofessionals** (i.e. paramedics or paralegals) or emerging professions will fall somewhere in between. However, most people agree that a profession performs an essential service to the public, requires extensive knowledge, is governed by a code of ethics and emphasises close relationships with colleagues.

Spectrum: A way to classify something in terms of its position on a scale between two extreme points.



Paraprofessionals: A person trained to assist a professional, but not licensed to practice in the profession.

Characteristics of a profession

No matter what service they provide, all professions have certain traits in common. Below are the characteristic features of professions.

- Professions require specialised knowledge and skills that are gained through extensive education and training.
- Professions have regulatory bodies that oversee the entry

of new members and the compliance of members with the specific standards and requirements of the specific profession.

- Professions are governed by a code of ethics or conduct that ensures members adhere to ethical standards set by a regulatory body.
- Professions have some form of examination, certification or licensing requirements that members have to meet before they can perform the service to the public.
- Members of a profession have a high degree of work **autonomy** in the decisions and actions they take to perform their service.

Autonomy:



Freedom from influence or control from the public.



Complete Activity 2.1 in your workbook.

Session 2.2: What is a professional?

Session outcomes

After completing this session, you should be able to:

- Define what a professional is; and
- List the qualities of a successful professional.

Introduction

A professional is someone engaged in a learned or skilled profession. As professionals they are expected to have a special set of skills and expertise in their chosen field that they have acquired through learning, knowledge, training and practice of the relevant skills. These can be demonstrated by qualifications or accreditation of some kind.

Qualities of a successful professional

All professionals have to adhere to certain requirements set by their governing bodies or by the laws governing their profession. These include formal education and certification. However, there are unregulated, 'unofficial' requirements that mark a true professional. These are qualities that successful professionals have in common regardless of their profession.

A professional person will:

- Always pay attention to detail and will take pride in doing a job well;
- Not be satisfied with substandard results, and will seek to put things right as soon as possible;
- Always try to be polite and remain calm when interacting with their customers, superiors or coworkers;

- Always be prepared to acknowledge mistakes, learn from them and take appropriate steps to avoid similar mistakes;
- Show respect to those who consult them in a professional capacity;
- Always attempt to uphold the reputation of the profession;
- Respect authority and the rules of law when managing or employing others; and
- Continuously aim to develop and improve their skills and remain up to date with the latest developments in their field.



Complete Activity 2.2 in your workbook.

Concluding remarks

Similar to ethics, the terms profession and professional are not always easy to define. No matter how we define them, professionals are a very important part of society. These individuals provide essential services that the general public are unable to perform themselves. Through organised societies and regulatory bodies, the public is assured that these services are performed competently and ethically and to the highest standard. This is very important as the public needs to be able to trust the services or advice they receive from professionals. As a professional extensionist, you have a responsibility to uphold all the requirements and standards set by your specific governing body and to provide your expert services to your farmer clients with honesty and integrity.



Complete the summative assessment in your workbook.

Study unit 3: Professionalism in the workplace

Study unit outcomes

After completing this study unit, you should be able to:

- Define professionalism;
- Discuss the importance of professionalism in the workplace;
- Explain professional development; and
- Discuss the benefits of professional development.

Study unit overview

Professionalism is defined by some as the conduct and qualities that distinguish a professional person. This module will look at the common features of professionalism. You will also learn how professionalism is judged and why professionalism is so important in the workplace. An important part of professionalism is professional development and continuous education. This module will discuss the features and benefits of professional development and look at some examples of professional development activities.

Study unit introduction

Professionalism is an important part of the corporate and business environment, however, the principles of professionalism are important for any organisation that deals with people. Professionalism is not necessarily one thing, but rather a combination of qualities. Regardless of the industry or profession, these qualities are the same and include exceptional competence in a field of expertise, good work ethic, good communication and interpersonal skills. A very important part of professionalism is continuous training and education. A true

professional will constantly strive to keep their knowledge and skills up to date. They will always attempt to stay abreast of any new developments or techniques in their field, ensuring that they deliver their services to the highest standards.

Session 3.1: What is professionalism?

Session outcomes

After completing this session, you should be able to:

- Describe the features professionalism;
- Describe how professionalism is judged; and
- Discuss the importance of professionalism in the workplace.

Introduction

Professionalism does not have one simple definition; instead it is a specific style of behaviour. It is exhibited by an individual who upholds moral and ethical values in their professional roles. Professionalism is the commitment to courtesy, honesty and mature responsibility when dealing with other individuals or organisations. Individuals that demonstrate professionalism will have respect for themselves and others. Above all, individuals who exhibit professionalism will have the expert knowledge needed to perform their services competently.

Features of professionalism

Despite the lack of a single, all-inclusive definition of professionalism, there are certain traits and qualities that identify professionalism in individuals across all professions:

- **Specialised knowledge and competency:** Professionals have expert knowledge and skills and professionalism means using these skills to perform services with confidence and competence.
- **Honesty and integrity:** Professionals always try to stay truthful and keep their word.
- **Respect and courtesy:** Professionals are considerate and treat all people with respect.

- **Accountability:** Professionals take responsibility for their actions, even if they have made a mistake.
- **Communication:** Professionals are able to communicate effectively.
- **Continuing education and lifelong learning:** Professionals will continuously identify opportunities for professional development.



How is professionalism judged?

Some people judge professionalism simply on appearance, others judge professionalism only based on having advanced degrees or certificates. Just as there is no simple definition for professionalism, there is also no clearly defined set of standards against which professionalism is judged. However, there are some common criteria used to measure the professionalism of an individual:

- **Attitude and Behaviour:** Your professionalism is firstly judged on how you behave when interacting with others. Are you always considerate when dealing with different types of people? Do you maintain a positive attitude?

- **Communication:** Professionalism can be measured by how well you communicate with others. How do you speak to people and how well do you listen when others speak to you?
- **Image and Appearance:** It may seem superficial, but many times professionalism is judged on initial appearances. Do you follow the appropriate dress code?
- **Competence:** Most of all, professionalism is judged on whether you can competently deliver the services or skills that you claim you can. Do you have the right knowledge, skills and experience?

Importance of professionalism in the workplace

Professionalism is extremely important for the long term success of any individual. A professional attitude and appearance will not only improve your work performance but also your public image. Below are some other advantages of professionalism in the workplace:

- **Maintains accountability:** Professionalism ensures that organisations take responsibility for their actions no matter what the outcome.
- **Promotes respect:** Professionalism ensures that all members are treated with respect, regardless of their background or position in the organisation.
- **Minimises conflict:** Organisations are usually made up of members from diverse backgrounds. Professionalisms ensure mutual respect between members of an organisation and this in turn minimises conflict between members.
- **Establishes boundaries:** Professionalism establishes clear boundaries between what is appropriate behaviour and what is not within the organisation.



Complete Activity 3.1 in your workbook.

Session 3.2: Professionalism and professional development

Session outcomes

After completing this session, you should be able to:

- Explain what is meant by professional development;
- Describe the features of professional development; and
- Discuss the benefits of professional development

Introduction

Professional development or staff development is the process of improving and increasing the knowledge and capabilities of already qualified professionals through access to continuous education and training in the workplace. These educational opportunities can be hosted internally or by an external organisation. Professional development not only provides professionals a way to maintain their competence, it also allows them to keep up to date with the latest developments in their fields and to learn new skills and techniques. Many professional bodies make professional development a requirement for membership and keep track of an individual's professional development activities. Professional development is a documented process. However, professional development needs to be self directed and not driven by an employer. Professional development focusses on learning through experience and can include formal and informal training activities, such as:

- Attending a conference or training workshop;
- Completing an online course hosted by an institution of higher learning;
- Shadowing or assisting an experienced colleague;
- Temporary job swaps within the organisation;

- Learning from coaching, mentoring or teaching; and
- Reading about new technologies, methods or legislation in your field.

Personal benefits of professional development

Professional development is one of the most important ways that you can keep your skills and knowledge up to date. However, you can also gain great personal benefits from professional development. Professional development activities can help you uncover and highlight gaps in your knowledge and skills you might not have been aware of. Participating in professional development activities can make you aware of trends in your profession and can help you with your career development. Many professional development activities help you improve your CV or interview skills, which can greatly improve your future employability. Professional development activities can also improve your professional standing with clients and employers. Finally, well-chosen, self-directed professional development activities can help you have a fulfilling and rewarding career.



Complete Activity 3.2 in your workbook.

Concluding remarks

A single definition for the term professionalism is hard to pin down. Instead, you have to look at professionalism as a combination of different attributes. These attributes include a combination of hard skills (i.e. formal degrees and certificates) and soft skills such as a good work ethic, communication, teamwork and attitude. As a professional extensionist, you have to strive toward mastering as many of these attributes as possible. Many of these skills can be gained through participating in professional development activities that will not only improve the service you provide to your clients, but also help you to have a rewarding and fulfilling career.



Complete the summative assessment in your workbook.

Study unit 4: Competencies required by professional extensionists

Study unit outcomes

After completing this study unit, you should be able to:

- Discuss the core competencies required by professional extensionists; and
- Discuss the bylaws that are important for professionalism.

Study unit overview

Professional extension agents need certain characteristics and skills to provide effective extension services. In this unit, you will learn what fundamental skills are required by extensionists to provide professional extension services. This unit will also discuss the concept of continuous professional development and why it is an important part of providing professional extension services.

Study unit introduction

Competency can be defined as the ability to integrate and apply your knowledge, skills and values to perform the activities required by an occupation to a defined standard. Agricultural extension requires a number of competencies and they can broadly be divided into two groups. Technical skills and competencies include subject matter specific skills such as knowledge about soil management or pest management. Soft skills or process skills help extension workers perform their tasks well. A number of these competencies are fundamental for the success of extension services. These competencies are known as core competencies and without them professional extension services would not be able to function effectively.

An important part of being a professional extensionist is to comply with all the requirements and regulations of your organisation. Professional organisations frequently require that their members participate in some form of continuous professional development. This ensures that all individuals within the organisation maintain and develop their skills.



Session 4.1: Core competencies required by extensionists

Session outcomes

After completing this session, you should be able to:

- Discuss the core competencies needed by professional extensionists.

Introduction

In today's agricultural environment, extension agents are judged not only on their technical skills and practical capacities but also on how they serve their clients, how well they listen to their clients and whether they have a good relationship with their clients. Professional extensionists should focus on improving their technical skills as well as non-technical or process skills such as communication, critical thinking, teamwork, entrepreneurship and leadership. Extensionists should be proactive about developing their soft skills if they are to become true professionals.

Core competencies needed by professional extension workers

Apart from the diverse technical subject matter skills that allow extensionists to meet their clients' needs, there are certain soft skills that are considered vital for effective extension. The following competencies are essential for professional extensionists:

- Programme planning and implementation: An extension agent needs to be able to plan an extension programme to the last detail. They also have to be able to help their clients to understand how to do and use meticulous planning.
- Communication: Good communication skills are one of the most important skills in extension. Extensionists have to be

able to effectively communicate agricultural innovations to clients, but also effectively listen to their needs. Extension agents should also be able to communicate confidently with other stakeholders such as investors or government officials.

- **Leadership:** Extensionists have to be able to effectively lead, coordinate and facilitate different stakeholders involved in the agricultural extension environment.
- **Organisational management:** Professional extensionists need to have excellent organisational skills and be able to mobilise and monitor their resources effectively.
- **Programme monitoring and evaluation:** There is always competition for resources in the agricultural extension environment. An effective extension agent will need to be able to monitor and evaluate the success of extension programmes in order to avoid previous mistakes and to report to stakeholders whether programmes have had the desired effects.
- **Sensitivity to diversity and multiculturalism:** Many extension agents will work in developing countries with many different races, religions and ethnicities. Professional extensionists have to be familiar with these differences and value the diversity of their audience.
- **Education and informational technology: **Information and communication technologies (ICTs)****, such as mobile phones and tablet computers, are becoming very important in agricultural extension. These ICTs are an effective way to communicate with a large number of users and extension professionals should ensure that they are familiar with them. They should also try to encourage their clients to use these ICTs.



Complete Activity 4.1 in your workbook.

Session 4.2: Important bylaws for professionalism

Session outcomes

After completing this session, you should be able to:

- Explain Continuous Professional Development; and
- Discuss the importance of CPD for extension professionals.

Introduction

Professional organisations, including professional extension advisory services, usually have several guiding documents:

- A constitution outlines the fundamental rules governing the conduct of the organisation.
- Operating procedures are operational guidelines for the management of the board of directors and various committees within the organisation.
- Bylaws are regulations that provide a framework for the operation and management of the organisation.

Common bylaws of agricultural extension organisations include regulations about membership, codes of ethics and conduct, field of practice and discipline. Some of the bylaws of organisations are in place to help improve the professionalism of their members. One of the most important bylaws for professionalism is **Continuous**

Professional Development (CPD).

Continuous Professional Development

CPD is an internationally recognised method professionals use to maintain and enhance their knowledge and skills. It consists of different categories of learning activities. Active learning activities involve structured, participation-based study (i.e. attending

a training course, conference, workshop, seminar, lecture, e-learning course, etc.), whereas passive learning activities are less structured (i.e. reading relevant news articles, case studies and industry updates and listening to podcasts). A number of these CPD activities are accredited and carry CPD credits. Many professional organisations require that members complete a certain number of accredited CPD activities within a certain timeframe.

CPD is very important for professional extensionists as it allows them to stay relevant and up to date with new agricultural technologies and innovations. CPD not only allows you to develop the technical skills but also the non-technical soft skills you need for agricultural extension such as project management, conflict resolution, professional ethics and technical writing. In an agricultural environment that is changing faster and faster, it is important for professional extension agents to develop skills that will meet their farmer-clients' changing needs.



Complete Activity 4.2 in your workbook.

Concluding remarks

In today's fast changing agricultural environment, the needs of farmers are constantly evolving and as such the knowledge and skills of professional extension agents need to evolve and expand. Professional extension agents should focus on maintaining and developing their technical and non-technical process skills. As a professional extensionist, these soft skills will help you to work effectively with a wide range of people from different and diverse backgrounds.



Complete the summative assessment in your workbook.



Complete the post-assessment in your workbook.

Glossary

Definitions

Word	Definition
Agrologist	A professional with knowledge of agrology, who responsibly teaches, transfers knowledge or conducts research.
Agrology	The application of science to agriculture, bioresources, food and the environment by professionals.
Autonomy	Freedom from influence or control from the public.
Mandatory	Compulsory or required by law.
Normative Ethics	A branch of ethics that focuses on identifying and defining what represents right behaviour for humans.
Objective	Not influenced by personal feelings or opinions when considering and representing facts.
Paraprofessional	A person trained to assist a professional, but not licensed to practice in the profession.
Soft skills	Interpersonal skills that enable someone to interact effectively with other people.
Spectrum	A way to classify something in terms of its position on a scale between two extreme points.

Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Description
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
SIA	Saskatchewan Institute of Agrologists
SACNASP	South African Council for Natural Scientific Professions
SASAE	South African Society for Agricultural Extension

Resources

The following resources were used in writing this manual.

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 - Terblanche S.E. 2017. Professionalism In Rural Advisory Services - Scoping study

- Velasquez, M. et al. 2015. What is ethics? [ONLINE] <https://www.scu.edu/ethics/ethics-resources/ethical-decision-making/what-is-ethics> [Accessed 20 Apr 2017]

Other modules of the New Extensionist modules are:

1. Introduction to the New Extensionist
2. Extension Methods and Tools
3. Extension Programme Management
- 4. Professional Ethics**
5. Adult Education for Behavioural Change
6. Knowledge Management for RAS
7. Introduction to Facilitation for Development
8. Community Mobilisation
9. Farmer Organisational Development
10. Value Chain Extension
11. Agricultural Entrepreneurship
12. Gender in Extension and Advisory Services
13. Risk Mitigation and Adaptation

Other related modules developed by GFRAS are on:

- Evaluation of Extension Programmes
- Policy Advocacy for RAS