



## MY MEETING NOTES

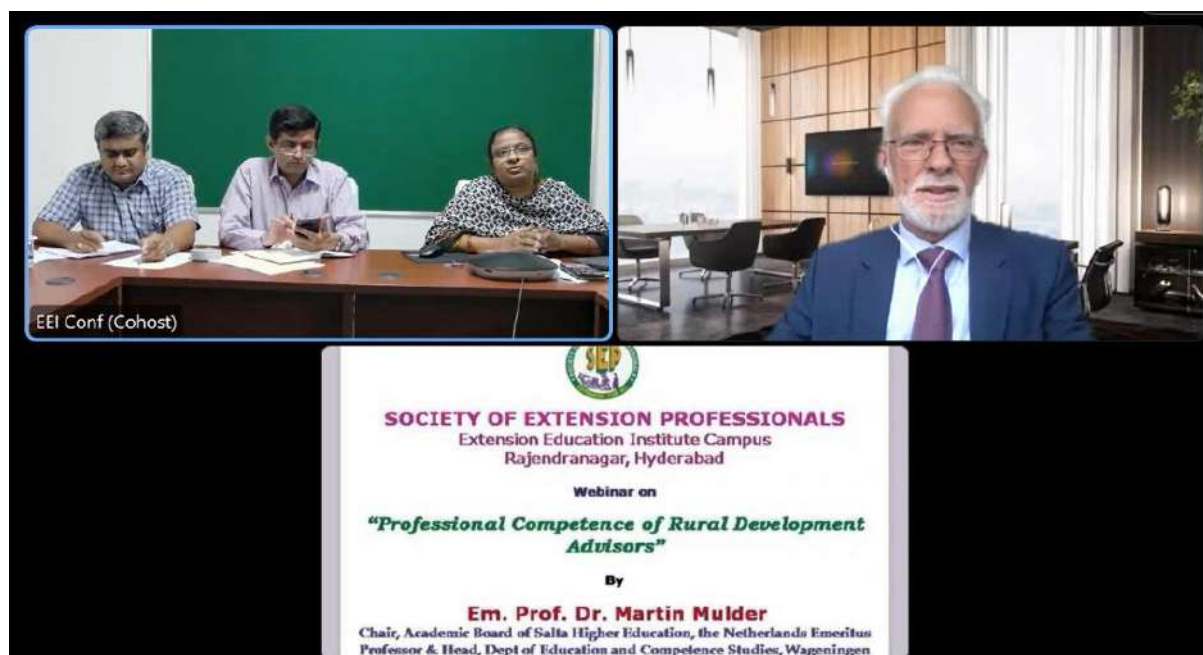
Webinar on  
**'Professional Competence of Rural Development Advisors'**  
organized by the  
**Society of Extension Professionals, Extension Education Institute, Hyderabad, India**  
20 May 2022



*Sejal Agarwal and Bhuvana N attended the webinar on 'Professional Competence of Rural Development Advisors', organized by the Society of Extension Professionals, Extension Education Institute Campus, Hyderabad, India, and they share their learnings from the virtual event in this Meeting Note.*

### CONTEXT

In today's scenario where everything is changing at such a rapid pace, coping with these changes is of extreme importance. Climate change, globalisation, increasing world population, degrading soil, water and air quality, and many other factors are putting extreme pressure on the existing resources necessary for human survival. People from privileged sections may not get much affected by it but the marginalised and poor communities of the world are the most affected ones. Providing necessary support to these communities becomes extremely important if different divides such as rural-urban, gender, digital, etc., are to be tackled. Their problems differ with the different identities they carry. In such situations, rural development advisors play an extremely important role. These people work closely with the marginalised communities for their growth and development. This webinar focussed on the core competencies that are needed for the rural development professionals to help them understand the kind of skills that are needed for them to carry out their work effectively and efficiently. The webinar also highlighted the current status of extension activities in India and how these can be improved.



The webinar was organised by Extension Education Institute, Hyderabad, under the 'Society of Extension Professionals' series on the topic of 'Professional Competence of Rural Development Advisors', with Prof. Martin Mulder as the Guest Speaker. The webinar was attended by more than 50 participants including scientists, faculty and students from ICAR institutes and Agricultural Universities and extension personnel from government and NGO sectors.

## DISCUSSION POINTS

The session started with an introduction to the status of agro-extension advisory services and their competencies in India. Then the guest speaker was asked to throw some light on how to improve the quality of extension service as well as extension research in the country. Prof. Mulder started the session by sharing his experience with conducting extension research in India and other parts of the world, and he dealt with the following topics.

### Publishing Research in Scholarly Journals and Assessment of Research Output

Firstly, before writing any article/research paper, the professional should select the journal and go through the topics in which the journal is interested in! This helps one to mould the writing style to that of the journal.

Viewing Martin Mulder's application(s) - 44% +

K Ponnusamy

SOCIETY OF EXTENSION PROFESSIONALS  
Extension Education Institute, Hyderabad  
Organized by: Extension Education Institute, Hyderabad  
Webinar on  
'Professional Competence of Rural Development Advisors'  
By  
Em. Prof. Dr. Martin Mulder  
The University of Applied Sciences, University of Applied Sciences, The Netherlands

## Getting published; pay attention to:

- The problem statement
- Review of current research
- Current conceptual framework
- Clear research methods
- Adequate data analysis techniques
- Main results first
- Conclusions following research questions
- Theoretical and practical lessons
- Correct and up-to-date reference List

Links to previous studies  
Explanation, rationale, theory, point of view  
Questions, hypothesis, models  
Design  
Subjects, Situations, Treatment or independent variable, Observations or measurement, Data for scoring attributes or changes, Procedure  
Analysis  
Conclusion  
Link to next study

*Methods of Educational and Social Science Research: An Integrated Approach,*  
by David R. Krathwohl. White Plains, NY:  
Longman Publishing Group, 1993, 789 pp.

Martin Mulder (2018). Positioning VET research in international VET-discourses and publishing in academic journals. Contribution to Seminar of the Department of Vocational Teacher Education at OsloMet, Oslo, Norway. Accessible via: [www.mmulder.nl](http://www.mmulder.nl)

Figure 1: Key points before publishing articles

Secondly, while writing the paper or article, the author should focus on the core message they want to give for a specific audience, and therefore the text should be clearly focused. Every article needs to have at least one punch line that can motivate readers to read further, its own Unique Selling Proposition to make it attractive, and the main conclusion must be put forth in one line to catch the

reader's attention. A writer should liaise with the authors and editors so as to make the article express different perspectives, yet keep the core intact. It is suggested to not be over-ambitious and write the article step by step.

Thirdly, the quality of the paper will be assessed based on the abstract/summary, which briefs the reader about the article. One must pay attention to the key pointers – given in Figure 1 – while getting the article published.

### Importance of Theories and Models for Rural Advisory Professionals

Application of ideas behind models and theories, i.e., activity-based learning, constructivist learning, project-based learning, competence theory and others, at field level are crucial for rural advisory professionals. It helps them to comprehend the field situations from different angles. Being competent with the integrated capabilities of knowledge, skills and attitude acts as a condition for effective performance of rural advisory professionals at the work place. Competencies are required for specific activities, known jobs, dynamic roles, IoT (Internet of Things) and the unknown future. The five components of the future competence model (Figure 2) are very crucial for rural advisory professionals.

Competence in VUCA (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, Ambiguous) world talks about two sides of a world: Variable, Unique, Creative, Awesome (VUCA) on the positive side; and Violent, Unjust, Corrupt, Abusive on the negative side. If too much negativity is prevalent all around, it becomes more important for extension professionals to help all the vulnerable and affected people by applying the competent and other relevant theories and models at field level.



Figure 2: A Five-component Future Competence Model

## Global challenges and transformation of the Agrofood Complex

Global challenges such as climate change, inadequate water supply, resource depletion, pandemics, etc., are widespread along with agri-food knowledge systems such as universities, research institutes, NGOs, and human resources composed of entrepreneurs, unskilled and skilled workers, professionals, and so on. These three form a holistic framework where all the three components have to be looked at together to design a framework for intervention. Narrating the example of The Netherlands, Prof. Mulder showed how transformation of farmland has been taking place in the country such as change in crop farming, livestock farming, horticulture, etc., gradually due to various personal and geographical reasons – none or very little farm income, no successors, etc. This is causing them to shut their farm operations and switch to alternate sources of income such as children's nurseries, art centres, etc. There are various agencies that are part of this innovation, as well as system changers such as producers, researchers, NGOs, insurance companies, etc. All these agencies are woven together in a complex network where all of these are trying to put in efforts to bring sustainability in agriculture. For example, Prof. Mulder talked about the buyback scheme of animals launched in The Netherlands due to the large level of nitrogen being emitted on account of increased livestock farming. The scheme faced much resistance from the community. Another example: the Ministry of Agriculture was earlier responsible for agricultural research, education and extension but is now additionally responsible for nature, food policy, and applied agricultural research in addition to the existing items.

A wide range of developmental initiatives is being taken in agricultural extension in India to bring transformation in the agro-food system. But research studies report that these initiatives are unable to reach the poor and marginal farmers. Furthermore, the large population that needs to be covered is a concern, access to and quality of information provided to these farmers is not of good quality either. There is also a need to work in partnership and provide localised content to these farmers that can fulfil their specific needs. There exist various challenges in the extension system such as understaffing, inflexible operations, staff incompetence, traditional dissemination approach, disconnection from research, limited financing, and limited access to farmers. The focus of these extension initiatives has been on productivity, profitability and income generation rather than on farmers' demand for and access to information. Farmers are not involved in the planning and implementation of these initiatives. Their concerns have low political priority and so too with regard to support for extension which also indicates the reason for a low number of extension workers. There is limited investment in building the competence of extension professionals. Given the prevailing loopholes in the system, it is vital to bring transformation in the agricultural extension system so as to address the challenges of agro-food complex in India.

### Competence Profile for Extension Workers

Every agricultural extension instructor/rural advisory professional should have a competence profile based on the method of competence model developed by an HRD professional ([Mclagan 1982<sup>1</sup>](#)). There can be a common profile but it should be differentiated based on farmer population, gender, age, education and motive for participation in the method. There are three types of competencies for these extension instructors - general, technical and course related (Figure 3). Generally, the focus is more on technical competencies, especially where the other two are not much emphasized. General and course-related competencies are equally important and should be a part of their training modules.

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<sup>1</sup>Mclagan PA. 1982. The ASTD training and development competency study - A model-building challenge. Training and Development Journal 36(5):18-24.

General competencies	Course related competencies	Technical competencies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intellectual versatility</li> <li>• Relationship building skill</li> <li>• Self-knowledge</li> <li>• Communication skills</li> <li>• Management skills</li> <li>• Research skills</li> <li>• Knowledge of governmental regulations and policies</li> <li>• Knowledge and skills of new information technology</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presentation skills</li> <li>• Farmers' learning understanding</li> <li>• Feedback skill</li> <li>• Adult training and development</li> <li>• Objectives preparation skills</li> <li>• Performance observation skill</li> <li>• Questioning skill</li> <li>• Coaching skill</li> <li>• Group process skill</li> <li>• Program planning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Farmers' business understanding</li> <li>• Subject matter understanding</li> </ul>

**Figure 3: Types of Competencies for extension instructors**

In addition to the above-mentioned competencies, in recent times, extension professionals must look into several other competencies if they are to address today's field challenges, namely:

1. Individual competence in an open innovation team:<sup>2</sup> Extension professionals must have the skill to focus on individual competence in an open innovation team considering any of the three types of open innovation competencies (Figure 4):

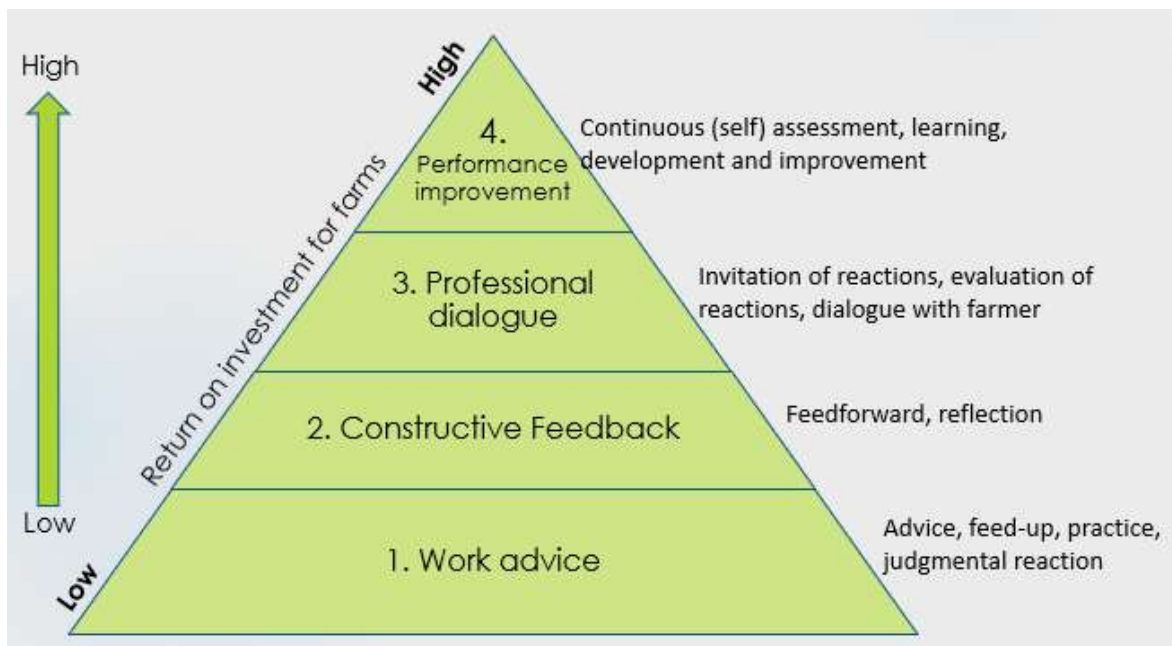
Interpersonal Management	Project Management	Content Management
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Involve</li> <li>• Influence</li> <li>• Handle Conflict</li> <li>• Create learning climate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take on</li> <li>• Prevail</li> <li>• Monitor</li> <li>• Decide mindfully</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clearly communicate</li> <li>• Analyse</li> <li>• Explore</li> <li>• Combine</li> <li>• Compete</li> </ul>

**Figure 4: Types of open innovation competencies**

2. Entrepreneurship competency: Farming is the best example when quoting entrepreneurship competency. Farmers are entrepreneurs by nature. In a study conducted by a PhD student of the speaker with greenhouse farmers on entrepreneurship competencies, the major competence was seen as having learning orientation and a good sense of self-management. It is important for extension professionals to consider the entrepreneurship competence of farmers while they are in the field. When one needs to assess the current competencies of extension professionals, one must look into cognitive, functional, social and meta domains of

<sup>2</sup>An open innovation team is a group of persons of different organizations who cooperate for the benefit of both parties using each other's know how.

competence. They have to understand the learning capabilities of farmers. The speaker mentioned that there are four levels of learning in farming which describes how the advisor engages with farmers (Figure 5).



**Figure 5: Four levels of learning in farming**

### Suggestions for Rural Extension Advisors

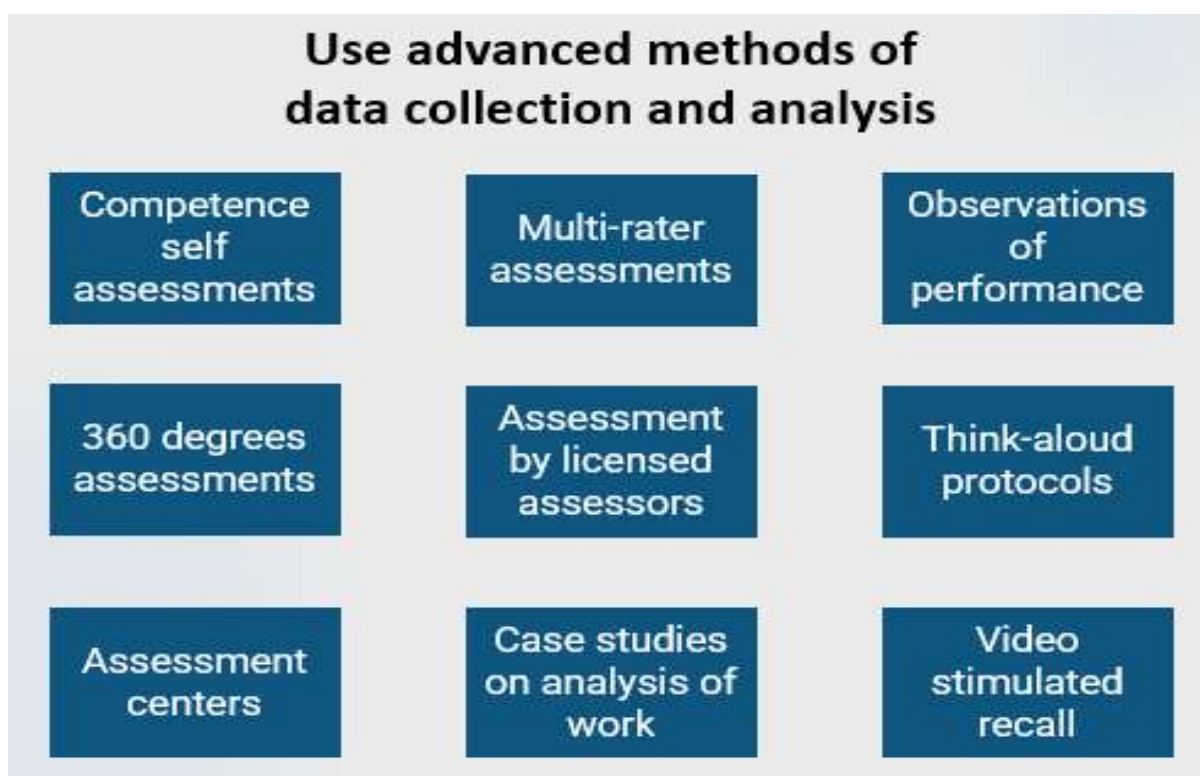
Based on his experience, Prof. Mulder stated that there are four fields of application of competencies for rural professional advisors:

- Refocus Extension Education based on Core Competencies;
- Align Extension Practice to Competence Frameworks of Farmers;
- Implement Competence Management in Extension Organisations;
- Define competence framework for BSc - MSc - PhD students.

Competence is related to performance and every professional, including farmers, have competence profiles. These competencies can be developed with time and hence can be improved upon. Competence development is a complex process and therefore it needs a framework that can provide a holistic view. These frameworks should be developed with future perspective in mind.

The suggestions for students for conducting research and methods used for data collection were shared by the expert based on his experience:

- a. Design research on competence frameworks for all stakeholders in the agri-food sector;
- b. Design research on competence-based rural development practices;
- c. Assessment of the impact of competence-based advice on performance improvement;
- d. Assessment research on the mastery of key competencies of RDA professionals;
- e. Multi-stakeholder competence needs assessments in food production value chains;
- f. Appreciative inquiry on the performance improvement potential in the value chain;
- g. Case studies on performance improvement in practice;
- h. Field experiments on RDA professionals using different levels of practical learning;
- i. Experimental research on learning results of feedback quality;
- j. Impact analysis of the use of Virtual Reality and AI applications.



**Figure 6: Suggestions for data collection and analysis methods**

## OUR LEARNINGS

The session webinar was very helpful for rural extension advisors to understand how they can develop their skills in research and data analysis methods. All the competencies that were discussed gave an insight on how an enabling environment has to be created for these advisors at an individual, organisational and enabling environment level. The Q&A session gave a deeper understanding into the context of the Indian extension system. In The Netherlands, the whole extension system was privatised in the early 1990s, while in India the transition is taking place from a public-to-Public Private Partnership (PPP) model. This transition is very necessary in today's context where each stakeholder – with varying capacity and competence – can work together under an open innovation competence.

Another critical aspect that was highlighted in this session was the problem of having multiple tasks for extension personnel in India that affects the core work of providing extension services. Certification of these personnel has also been a major issue as in many cases, a non-certified extension personnel may be providing incorrect information which degrades the quality of extension services. However, it can also be a case that the experience of these non-certified extension professionals might be of more relevance and enriching than that from the certified ones. So having focussed competence and a certified extension advisor is very important, but a critical assessment of these extension professionals would be required instead of assessing them only on the basis of a certificate. So, there is a need to develop a specific framework for farmers, their groups and extension personnel separately, to map their competencies. With increasing digitisation and given the dynamic nature of content that has to be provided to farmers, it is necessary to facilitate capacity development of both extension workers and farmers so as to help them in taking full benefit of ICT-enabled advisory services. Overall, the discussion was very insightful and provided apt guidance to rural development professionals.

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