Title: Competencies of front-line managers in supported accommodation: Issues for practice and future research

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Author note

The major funding for this project was provided by the Victorian Department of Human Services. There were no restrictions imposed on the publication of the research data. Neither author has a conflict of interest in publishing these findings.

Keywords: competency, group homes, house supervisor, frontline supervisor, outcomes.

Running head: Frontline supervisor competencies
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Abstract

Background: Front-line managers of supported accommodation for people with intellectual disability are assumed to have a key role in the realisation of outcomes for service-users. Yet, their job has been little researched. A job analysis from Minnesota that identified 142 competencies required of effective front-line managers was used to examine what was expected of the equivalent position in Victoria, Australia. Methods: These competencies formed the basis of semi-structured interviews with an extreme sample of 16 high-performing house supervisors and five more senior managers. Results: Ninety-two per cent of the original competences were retained, with changes in language and terminology to reflect the local context. ‘Emergent’ findings highlighted the importance of house supervisors’ ‘orientations’. Conclusions: The findings support the proposition that the front-line manager’s job is underpinned by core competencies and that the role merits further study. Issues of wider significance for human service organisations and researchers are discussed.
Introduction

In Australia, supported accommodation accounts for the bulk of expenditure on disability services and has been a primary policy implementation strategy (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2009). Small group homes for up to six people is the most common form of accommodation, and although the model is less than ideal in terms of individualisation and the separation of housing and support, numbers continue to expand [Author citation and reference removed for blind review]. For example in the state of Victoria, group home service-users increased from 3398 to 4811 between 2007 and 2009 (AIHW, 2007, 2009). The largest service-provider in the state is the Department of Human Services (DHS), which manages over 500 group homes.

Early demonstration programs, such as The Andover Project, produced evidence that people with even the highest support needs can have good ‘quality of life’ outcomes in such settings (Felce, 1989; Mansell, Felce, Jenkins, de Kock, & Toogood, 1987)\(^1\). However, wider implementation has produced variable outcomes and it is clear that opportunities presented by small group community living are not being fully exploited (Kozma, Mansell & Beadle-Brown, 2009). A significant body of quantitative research has identified a broad range of factors statistically associated with good outcomes in such settings but few have been consistently identified as determinants of outcomes (Felce & Perry, 2007). Service-user capacity and staff support practices are most frequently cited as important determinant of outcomes (Mansell, Beadle-Brown, Whelton, Beckett, & Hutchinson, 2008). In turn, it is typically claimed that front-line managers, have a key role in supporting effective staff practices. Reid, Parsons and Green (1989) for example, conceptualise this job as having two main functions: taking specific action to change the day-to-day work performance of staff when it is problematic or less than optimal and maintaining the routine work activities of staff when their performance is appropriate and acceptable. Front-line managers in group
homes are also known as house supervisors, team leaders or house managers. We use the title house supervisor in this paper for consistency and because this is the title used by the DHS group home program.

Although the role of house supervisors is considered in generic texts about managing residential services, such as the one by Seden and Reynolds (2003), there is little research on their work or experiences (Gifford, 2006). Characteristics such as education and experience have been investigated but not shown to be dependably associated with outcomes (Felce & Perry, 2007). Notwithstanding the lack of strong research evidence, we suggest that many people retain a strong conviction that house supervisors play an important part in the realisation of good outcomes, in part due to the influence that the hierarchical supervisor is thought to have upon the satisfaction and performance of subordinates (Kerr & Jermier, 1978).

**Background to study**

The study reported here is part of a larger research project known as [Name of study removed for blind review] that investigated outcomes in group homes managed by the Victorian Department of Human Services. Prior to conceptualising the focus of the project’s sub-components, we undertook ethnographic work involving 130 hours of participant observation in three group homes [Author citation and reference removed for blind review]. This had included speaking to the house supervisors about their job, observing them ‘in action’, and reading formal organisational documents about expectations of their role. In an interim report to DHS, based on the evidence gathered to that point, we raised numerous issues, such as, the house supervisor’s job description did not clearly depict what an incumbent was expected to do and that some house supervisors saw themselves primarily as practitioners who undertook some activities of a managerial kind rather than holding a position that more formally designated as a managerial one. A limited review of the literature suggested that such issues
could have an impact on the performance of the incumbents and the outcomes experienced by service-users (Fournies, 1988; Ford & Hargreaves, 1991). Discussions of the report with the project steering committee and at a workshop of diverse stakeholders underscored the aforementioned conviction that house supervisors have a key role in the realisation of good outcomes and that an investigation of the role should be a priority in the unfolding program of research.

A job analysis is a “a systematic process of collecting data for determining the knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) required to perform a job successfully and to make numerous judgements about the job” (Berman, Bowman, West, & Van Wart, 2001, p.142). Undertaking such an analysis of the house supervisor position was a foundational task that could inform many of the issues we had raised [Author citation and reference removed for blind review]. Such a task had already been completed by Hewitt et al. (2004) in Minnesota, who had also encouraged other organisations operating within a similar social policy context to review their list of 142 competencies. We have argued elsewhere of the continuity seen in the goals and outcomes of group homes in different Western countries [Author citation and reference removed for blind review]. So, rather than ‘reinvent the wheel’, we elected to use the competencies required by ‘front-line supervisors’ to work effectively in Minnesota as a means of making clear what DHS house supervisors ought to be doing in Victoria. The ‘discovery’ of this article curtailed a more extensive review of the literature at the front-end of the research. We have chosen to put other relevant literature that we subsequently read in the Discussion, in order to preserve the integrity of the research process².

The aims of this study at the outset were twofold. Firstly, to describe what is expected of a Victorian DHS house supervisor by reviewing the Minnesotan front-line supervisor competencies. Secondly, to explore the perceptions that house supervisors held about their role by asking questions about issues that had been identified in the earlier ethnographic
fieldwork. A spin-off of using the Minnesotan competencies is that we also completed a de facto validation study, being concerned with their generalizability (external validity) to a different context.

**Methodology**

**Sample**

An extreme sample (Miles & Huberman, 1994) of 16 highly performing house supervisors and five senior managers were identified by the host organisation and invited to participate in the study. The five senior managers had either held the house supervisor position themselves and/or supervised people in the post. Using people who are familiar with the job, either as an incumbent or a supervisor is consistent with job analysis methodology (Dipboye, Smith, & Howell, 1994). DHS managers used undisclosed performance measures to identify the highly performing incumbents, loosely defined by the project’s steering committee as ‘people who were putting the Department’s vision into practice’.

The incumbent house supervisors had a significant amount of experience, both as managers of group homes (mean tenure, 9.2 years) and working with people with intellectual disabilities (mean, 18.3 years), most of which had been working for DHS (mean, 17.5 years). All post-holders had full-time positions and 15 of the house supervisors were female. Half the respondents had qualified as a Mental Retardation Nurse and the other half had the Certificate IV in Disability Work, the minimum qualification for a DHS house supervisor.

The number of service-users in the 16 group homes ranged from two to six. The smallest staff team was five and the largest twelve. Written consent to participate was obtained from all interviewees and ethical approval was given by the Human Ethics Committees of the University and DHS.

**Data collection and analysis**
Using focus group techniques, Hewitt et al. (2004) identified 142 competency statements, which they organised into 14 domains. These competency statements were used as the foundation for semi-structured interviews with participants. A competency from their Program Planning domain is given below as an exemplar:

Frontline supervisors design, implement and monitor behaviour support plans, the use of aversive and deprivative procedures (Rule 40) and psychotropic medications (p.25).

The primary aim of the interviews were to affirm the relevant statements, eliminate any irrelevant statements, add in additional competencies that are required of DHS incumbents, and ensure the wording was both clear and reflected the Victorian context. The interview was piloted with two additional house supervisors drawn from participants in the larger project.

The use of a semi-structured interview also gave the flexibility to probe responses (Brewerton & Millward, 2001). Participants were prompted to share examples of good practice about each relevant competence and talk more about their perceptions and experiences of being a house supervisor.

Interviews lasted about two hours and in all but two cases where consent was withheld were recorded and transcribed. In addition to the recording, handwritten notes recorded the respondent’s confirmation of each competency, suggestions for rewording, elimination, or addition of any competency. Preceding interviews could inform subsequent ones, as interviewees could be asked about the previous respondents’ suggestions for rewording, elimination or addition, in a cumulative manner. We eventually reached the point of diminishing returns, judging that the information we were getting was not improving the competency statements (Dipboye et al., 1994), so that no further interviews were necessary.

In conducting a job analysis, Dipboye et al. (1994) state that it is better to use more than one method. We had watched house supervisors at work and made detailed fieldnotes of their
work activities during the aforementioned period of participant observation. This experience meant that we conducted the interviews as partial ‘subject matter experts’. Ethnographic data was used to corroborate participants’ self-reports. This iterative process produced the revised competency statements, which were returned to all participants for review, as well as scrutiny by the project’s steering committee.

After the interviews had been transcribed they were analysed using a ‘start-list’ of a priori codes identified from the initial fieldwork (Miles & Huberman, 1994) and the final 141 competency statements. Atlas.ti (Muhr, 2005), a qualitative data analysis tool, was used to facilitate data analysis. Our principal aim was simply to find examples of good practice to illustrate the competencies in a report to DHS. In addition to the relatively simple task of clustering participants’ responses to the a priori codes, the transcripts were also read in a way that did not close off the possibility of other themes from ‘emerging’ in an inductive fashion. As the house supervisors spoke about their role in ways that had not been foreshadowed a number of emergent themes were identified which were clustered under a higher order category of ‘House supervisor orientations’. These emergent themes necessitated a return to the literature (Creswell, 2007).

Findings

Every competency statement from the Hewitt et al. (2004) study was reworded to reflect local language and terminology. For example, ‘house supervisor’ replaced ‘frontline supervisor’; ‘rostering’ replaced ‘scheduling’. Eleven of the original competencies were deleted, ten new ones were added, giving a total of 141. The original organisation of the competencies into 14 domains was retained, although one competency was moved to a different domain. Space does not allow us to list all the competencies, so Table 1 lists the 14 domains, with an exemplar competency. The complete list of competencies is available from the authors.
Differences between the two sets of competencies

Many of the changes made to the original competencies were relatively minor, reflecting local language and terminology. There were, however, three major differences between the DHS competences and the original Minnesotan ones. First was the extent to which DHS house supervisors are responsible for the recruitment of direct support staff to the house they manage, in the ‘Managing Personnel’ domain. Although DHS house supervisors have some responsibility for staff recruitment, this is a weaker role than in some organisations. A number of competency statements relating to recruitment, advertising, background checks, and health assessments were deleted from the revised competencies.

A second major difference related to ‘Coordinating Weekday Daytime Supports’. The DHS house supervisors had a reduced role in relation to their Minnesotan counterparts, primarily because most residents made use of day programs managed by a separate agency. The emphasis in Victoria was on monitoring these programs, whilst in Minnesota there was a stronger emphasis on developing new jobs and securing work for people.

Two competencies in the Minnesotan statements related to behaviour management plans generated much discussion with respondents and produced our third noteworthy difference. The wording in the original began, “Frontline supervisors design, implement and monitor behavior support plans…” (Hewitt et al., 1998, p.25) but was revised in the Victorian competencies to, “House supervisors assist in developing behaviour management plans, and implement and monitor authorised behaviour management plans…” [Author citation and reference removed for blind review]. This minor change of emphasis has implications for the KSAs expected of house supervisors and the strength of relationships that might be expected with external support teams, such as the Adult Behaviour
Consultancy (ABC). Expecting house supervisors to be competent at designing behaviour management plans increases both their responsibility and the KSAs required to do the job, a point discussed later.

**House supervisor ‘orientations’**

‘Emergent themes’ are those that ‘leap out’ of the data as being interesting or important rather than being related to ideas established prior to interviews. Of note here, are emergent findings about the ‘orientations’ of the house supervisors interviewed, which were predominantly given ‘in vivo’ codes. The importance placed on a house supervisor’s personal ‘orientation’ to the job is summed up by this participant, “It’s all of [those competencies] but I think the actual attitude of the house supervisor is the important thing” (HS10). The five emergent sub-categories are illustrated below, each one with an indicative quotation.

**Passion and vocation.** Supervisors displayed a passion for working directly with people with intellectual disabilities and making a positive difference in their lives.

> I don’t think there’s been a day [in 20 years] that I’ve been unhappy to go to work. Every shift, if there was one thing that I can make even the smallest difference, that might be assisting someone to have an excellent shower, the best shower, then that’s really exciting to me. It seems to be a dirty word to say it’s a ‘vocation’ to work with other people. You have to be fairly passionate about wanting to work with people, to be doing the job. (HS6)

**Stamina and flexibility.** Supervisor’s emphasised the need to have stamina and the flexibility to move between different roles.

> In this work you’re changing your hat all day long. It’s quite mentally tiring. This minute you’re doing the personal care, and then you’re doing breakfast, and then you’re
the driver, and then you’re doing shopping. For the whole day you’re doing lots of different tasks. (HS15)

Calmness. Supervisors identified calmness and the ability to respond to the non-routine as important attributes.

You need to be able to understand a wide range of people, from the residents to the staff you’re dealing with. It’s a very diverse industry in every way. You’re dealing with an incredible range of competencies in your staff; an incredible range of disabilities in your clients. You need to be very calm, just so you can deal with things as they come up, because there’s lots of things that are unpredictable. (HS15)

Tolerance or liking for a degree of freedom. House supervisors valued independence and the degree of freedom given by leading a relatively autonomous work group, characterised by spatial distance from their manager. Those who had acted-up as team manager, the next position in the managerial hierarchy, typically compared their experiences of the two jobs. A key belief was that house supervisors had more ‘power’ or ‘control’ to make things happen for the residents than these more senior managers.

I’ve got this great opportunity to be doing it the way I always thought I’d like to be able to do it. Once you become a team manager it’s really just a lot of personnel-type issues. I’m a person who likes to make things happen and a lot of the stuff for team managers is just dealing with a lot of issues, so I don’t see a lot of outcome. That’s why I probably tend to stay. I get a lot of job satisfaction out of say, getting Pauline that spa, where as a team manager I was just sorting out the argument between staff member A and staff member B. I like to make things happen. (HS4)
Perceptions of work–life balance. The particular conditions of service that go with being a house supervisor suited those interviewed, suggesting they had the temperament for shiftwork.

As a house supervisor, I get job satisfaction. I’ve got flexible working hours. I like roster work. I don’t like to work five days a week Monday to Friday. As a house supervisor you get more pay, more days off, and more holidays [than a team manager]. (HS17)

That the house supervisors in our sample had been in the post for 9.2 years on average would suggest that the position can retain its appeal over time.

Discussion and conclusions

The original Minnesotan competencies were reviewed by experienced and well-regarded incumbent DHS house supervisors and the revised 141 competences were scrutinised for validity by them. Other data sources from the larger research project also contributed to the validity of the findings (i.e. triangulation); having watched house supervisors in practice and read organisational documents that outlined what was expected of them. The 14 domains and specific competency statements represent what is expected of a DHS house supervisor. They underscore the complexity of the position as well as the depth and breadth of the knowledge, skills, and abilities it requires.

Our findings suggest that the Minnesotan competencies have generalizability beyond the original research context, as 92% were retained albeit with changes in language and terminology. Since the original piece of research, Larson et al. (2007) have undertaken a validation study of these competencies, which resulted in five items being dropped (four of these five items were retained in the Victorian competencies.) Consistency in tasks performed by individuals in the same position gives rise to our understanding of a job, where the
significant tasks they perform are sufficiently alike (Dipboye et al., 1994). It seems reasonable to propose that whether an incumbent is a house supervisor in Victoria or the USA, the position is underpinned by core competencies that are transferable not only from one group home to another but also between countries where there are similar social policy goals for people with intellectual disabilities. Although the DHS competencies are primarily of concern to that organisation, the issues that have arisen from undertaking this research have wider significance for human service organisations and researchers with an interest in this area.

**The importance of ‘orientations’**

Our use of competence draws on an ‘outcome model’ that tends to describe what a person in a particular job role is expected to achieve and downplay what people should ‘know’ (Boag, 1998; Hyland, 1993). Arguably, the more complex a job, the more important it is for a person to possess underlying knowledge as to why she should behave in a particular way. Focusing on observable behaviours can also marginalise the affective, attitudinal, interpersonal and environmental variables which influence human behaviour (Thousand, Burchard, & Hasazi, 1986). In their review of the hiring and retention of direct support staff, Hall and Hall (2002) draw attention to the contribution that staff value systems make to their support practices. Our initial definition of a job analysis only highlights the KSAs necessary to carry out a job, whilst Dipboye et al. (1994) draw attention to the specific temperaments or attitudes that are needed in a job, which they call ‘Orientations’, thereby expanding the acronym to KSAOs. Hewitt et al. (1998) partially addressed these issues by including the need to assess knowledge and understanding in the performance indicators for each competency. Although they stressed that contemporary community-based services were based on certain values, ‘orientations’ were implicit in the Minnesotan competency statements.
'Orientations’ were included in an earlier analysis of house supervisor competencies undertaken as part of ‘the Vermont studies’ (Burchard, 1999; Thousand et al., 1986), which were not cited in the Minnesotan research. Thousand et al. (1986) used expert opinion, interviews, job analysis questionnaires, and critical incident techniques to identify the competencies required by staff to work in Vermont’s supported accommodation services. Although the published study predates the Minnesotan one by more than a decade, all of the supported accommodation settings in Vermont were a home to six people or less and the service goals were similar to contemporary services, being guided by Normalization (Wolfensberger, 1972), suggesting they had much in common with contemporary group homes. Burchard (1999) found that although the researchers had a bias towards operationalizable skills, like the present study, the respondents identified items that could only be characterized as attitudes. Twenty-one core competencies for supported accommodation staff were identified, organised under two general headings; Orientations, which referred to interpersonal skills and motivational, attitudinal, or personal characteristics, and Technical skills. Thousand et al. (1986) argued that their findings matched well with Carl Roger’s conclusions about the characteristics of a successful therapist that are essential for developing an effective helping relationship in a therapeutic situation: showing liking, interest, and respect for the client; being able to empathise or see as the client sees; and being able to communicate positive regard to the client.

The emergent findings from the present study similarly highlight the importance of the specific 'orientations’ that may be needed by competent house supervisors and the ‘orientations’ that house supervisors bring to the job. Further research is necessary to identify and explicate the ‘orientations’ required of a competent house supervisor, which in turn should be integrated into any competency framework. Knowledge about prerequisite ‘orientations’ could be useful in recruiting people to the post if they are integrated into the
hiring process, but not at the expense of ‘skills’. Mansell (2005) has commented on the trend towards emphasising values-based training over skilled professional support and the impact that this has had on service performance.

**Implications for recruitment, training, and support**

Identifying house supervisor competencies was not an end in itself. The competencies can be utilised to communicate to DHS house supervisors what they are expected to do and provide a basis for creating an accurate job description, establishing the job’s boundaries and clear performance standards. They can also be utilised by DHS to recruit house supervisors. The organisation can be clear about the KSAOs they require of candidates, and applicants can be given an accurate picture of the job for which they are applying, i.e. a ‘realistic job preview’ (see Larson, O’Nell, & Sauer, 2005).

As part of their national validation study, Larson et al. (2007) asked participants to identify the competencies critical for front-line supervisors to perform competently both at the time of hire and within 90 days of starting a new position. Twenty-seven competencies were identified by 50% or more respondents as being needed by a house supervisor at the time of hire and a further 66 were identified by 75% or more of the respondents as needed within 90 days of starting a new position. Most people come to the position with a ‘mixed competency profile’; novice in some competencies, proficient in others. The competencies therefore also have implications for the support and training of new house supervisors and the development of existing ones. They could, for example, be utilised to develop an assessment tool to identify and detail the gaps between the identified competencies and the actual practice of new and current house supervisors.

**Adapting competences to specific contexts**
Although the house supervisor’s role is underpinned by core competencies, the changes that were made in respect of the Victorian context illustrates that there are likely to be variations between organisations. In some cases certain competencies simply do not apply, whilst in others the tasks will be performed by other employees. Thus, as this research did for DHS, so other organisations can review either set of competencies and tailor them to their own circumstances.

The competencies need further functionalising to more accurately reflect the different levels of intellectual disability of group home residents. For example, a house supervisor supporting people with profound intellectual disabilities will need to think through what the following competency means for people with this level of impairment: “House supervisors seek opinions from staff, residents [bold added] and their family members when making decisions or giving advice about hiring decisions” [Author citation and reference removed for blind review]. Finding ways for people with mild intellectual disabilities to have a say in the appointment of staff is comparatively easier.

**Bounding the job**

Each organisation has to make choices about a job’s boundaries. In Victoria for example, giving incumbents less responsibility for recruiting staff, developing behaviour support plans, and coordinating weekday daytime supports have consequences for the role. Interestingly, the house supervisors interviewed were unequivocal that they would like a bigger say in hiring the staff they have to manage [Author citation and reference removed for blind review]. They suggested that their particular insights into the orientations and skills needed to work with the residents would result in a better ‘staff fit’ and their intimate knowledge of the staff team would result in a more balanced team with a better skill mix, which would result in better service delivery. In addition, if their involvement in recruitment led to a more compatible or stable staff team, then less time would be spent on filling vacant shifts, inducting new casual
staff, and so on. Being involved in the recruitment process may also strengthen people’s responsibility for managing the day-to-day practice of others, whilst not being involved can ‘allow’ supervisors to deflect the responsibility for a poor performance on hiring decisions made elsewhere. On the other hand job enlargement such as this comes at a price. For example, being more involved in the recruitment process requires time to be set aside and increases the knowledge base required for the role of supervisor.

Decisions about what a job entails have consequences for how it is perceived and enacted. A judgement about whether adding or subtracting tasks to a job is a price worth paying can really only be made after the event. It is hard to predict how things will pan out. The ‘recruitment’ example also illustrates the important point that jobs are not static, so the competencies must be reviewed regularly to incorporate new thinking and language about how the house supervisor’s job should be defined. For example, with the shift to individualised funding packages for day-time support in Victoria, house supervisors are likely to become more involved in planning this support. It should also be remembered that a job cannot forever be enlarged or enriched. Fournies (1988) claims that it is rare that a job becomes so big that no one could do it, but in the present study some incumbents did perceive that their job had become ‘undoable’. Individual service-user differences means that the core competencies are not enough on their own to provide the good personalised support that is at the heart of contemporary services. For example, house supervisors may need specific KSAOs to effectively support an individual who uses Auslan or who has Prader-Willi syndrome, thereby extending requisite KSAOs.

**Prioritising job domains**

Decisions must also be made about the proportion of time that incumbents should allocate to particular work domains. Hewitt and Larson (2005) assert that front-line supervisors should do no more than 10-15 hours per week of direct support to maintain the right balance of
supervisory and direct support work. In their explication of practice leadership Mansell and his colleagues argue that house supervisors need to increase the time they spend watching the practice of staff and modelling and coaching them to provide good support (see Ashman, Ockenden, Beadle-Brown, & Mansell, 2010). In the Minnesotan research, participants were asked to rank-order the 14 domains in order of importance. Table 1 retains the ordering from the earlier paper and indicates the subsequent re-ordering from the validation study (Hewitt et al., 2004; Larson et al., 2007). There were disagreements between participants of the two studies about what domains were considered most important for house supervisors. Future research is needed to develop some more grounded guidelines about the relative balance that house supervisors should seek between the different domains. In practice, how people spend their time will inevitably be influenced by fluctuating pressures on the ground.

Is there a link between the competencies and outcomes?

In the introduction we suggested that many people hold a strong conviction that house supervisors play an important part in the realisation of good outcomes, both directly when they work with service-users, and more indirectly through managing the day-to-day practice of support staff and putting in place enabling structures. Findings from the Vermont studies provide some tentative evidence that house supervisor competence is related to independent measures of program quality, although not in a straightforward manner (Burchard et al., 1987). For example, service-users who lived in settings where house supervisors had higher scores on the ‘orientation’ competencies were more actively involved in accessing community activities in more individual ways. In addition, the people living in homes with more frequent opportunities for activities that enabled such community presence (O’Brien, 1987) had higher total scores on a measure of satisfaction. These findings, related to a different set of competencies, suggest that both the Minnesotan and Victorian competencies
would benefit from future research that investigates their relationship with desired service-user outcomes.

**Looking beyond the contribution of the house supervisor**

A systemic understanding of organisations is a reminder that the entire burden for managing a group home does not fall upon a house supervisor’s shoulders. A good house supervisor can be thwarted in her efforts to realise good outcomes if the service is not resourced or structured in a way that makes it possible for incumbents to effectively fulfil the role. The house supervisor is only one of a large number of variables that has been investigated as determinants of outcomes for residents and many of these variables operate in combination with each other (Mansell et al., 2008). None the less, the limited research we have cited suggests a possible association between specific house supervisor variables and service-user outcomes, which underscores that the job itself and house supervisor characteristics merit further study. Clarifying what is expected of house supervisors is an important prerequisite prior to undertaking any further research and an important task for organisations that manage group homes.

**Notes**

1 What constitutes a good ‘quality of life’ is inevitably contested. When the focus is the lives of people with severe and profound intellectual disabilities, objective measures take precedence over subjective ones, typically using a battery of commonly-used measures. Felce (1989) lists improvements in community and family contact; more frequent domestic, self-help, leisure and social activities in the home environment; and improved independent functioning.
2 Undertaking research is not a linear process, although textbooks often suggest that it is, and authors tend to structure their articles in a way that mirrors a linear logic. We wanted to structure this article that mirrored the actual research process.

3 Quotations are followed by a reference number, where HS stands for house supervisor, with an accompanying identifier. Names and places have been changed in quotations where relevant to provide a degree of anonymity.

References


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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competency Area</th>
<th>No. (N=141)</th>
<th>Example competency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Enhancing staff relations (3)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>House supervisors provide formal communication to staff through communication books, memos, and e-mail and by facilitating effective meetings, ‘handovers’, and purposeful interactions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Providing direct support (1)</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>House supervisors communicate effectively with residents using their primary method of communication (e.g., speech, gestures, sign language, communication boards, with the assistance of interpreters).</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Building inclusive communities and supporting residents’ networks (7)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>House supervisors support residents in learning about and participating in adult and community educational opportunities (e.g., gardening, literacy, computer courses).</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Support planning and monitoring (4)</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>House supervisors complete and use formal and informal assessments regarding behaviours, adaptive skills, health, physical development, etc., or assist direct support personnel in this process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Managing personnel (5)</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>House supervisors direct staff to confidential counselling (e.g., Employee Assistance Programs (EAP), Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM)) to assist employees to resolve issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Leading training and staff development activities (6)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>House supervisors coordinate and document staff participation and performance in orientation, in-service training and completion of other alternative self-directed learning and development.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Promoting public relations (12)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>House supervisors accept and mentor students on educational placements at the house.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Maintaining homes, vehicles, and property (14)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>House supervisors consult with maintenance personnel as needed regarding maintenance issues and get quotes from outside contractors when necessary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Protecting health and safety (2)</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>House supervisors ensure that doctor’s document new medications on the treatment sheet and that these are recorded in the house in accordance with policy and procedures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Managing financial activities (8)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>House supervisors manage the Client Expenditure Recording System (CERS) in accordance with policy and procedures (e.g. reconcile monthly ledgers against bank statements, respond to financial audits).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Roster ing and payroll (10)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>House supervisors plan recreational leave (e.g., around holiday periods such as Christmas and New Year) and approve staff leave (e.g., recreational, sick, personal) in accordance with policy and procedures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Coordinating Weekday Daytime Supports (11)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>House supervisors monitor residents’ involvement in external activities (e.g., day programs, paid employment, retirement activities) to ensure that a schedule is created that is based on their individual preferences and needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Coordinating policies, procedures, and rule compliance (9)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>House supervisors follow through on reporting procedures as required by DHS policy and state law when there is an incident or allegation of physical and/or sexual assault.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Office work (13)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>House supervisors read and respond promptly to mail and email.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*a Column 1 in the table retains the rank-ordering in terms of importance from Hewitt et al. (2004). In parentheses in the same column is the subsequent re-ordering in terms of importance from their validation study (Larson et al., 2007).*