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PURDUE EXTENSION: EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP STYLE

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By

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A DISSERTATION IN PRACTICE

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Abstract

The purpose of this quantitative study was to assess the Purdue Extension county directors' level of engagement and leadership style and to examine the relationship between these two variables. The study aimed to inform a professional development training program for all Purdue Extension county extension directors. Survey data were collected from 86 Purdue Extension county extension directors. Analyses were conducted using descriptive statistics, t-tests, one-way analysis of variance, and hierarchical linear regression. Within the study, it was found that the levels of employee engagement among Purdue Extension county extension directors were average, bordering on high, and that these levels of engagement did not differ when demographics, such as gender, age, and years of service were taken into account. Additionally, it was found that participants scored higher than the norm for transformational leadership styles and lower than the norm for transactional leadership styles. The researcher discovered that there were no significant differences in transformational and passive-avoidant leadership by demographic factors, such as gender, age, years of service, and program area; however, there was a significant difference in transactional leadership among the county extension directors aged 22-35. Finally, the results indicated that transformational leadership significantly predicts employee engagement. As such, a focus should be made to build transformational leadership skills in order to increase employee engagement. Therefore, the researcher proposes to implement a professional development program specifically designed for county extension directors ages 22-35 that builds transformational leadership skills.

Dedication

This dissertation work is dedicated to my husband, my children, and my parents.

My husband, Jason has been my greatest cheerleader throughout graduate school. My

children, Ariel and Ashton have been a constant source of love, joy, and laughter. My

parents, Barry and Bev Miller are excellent examples of hard work and dedication. They

have always given unconditional love and have encouraged me to follow my dreams.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The Introduction

Individuals are the heartbeat of successful organizations. Despite the importance of increasing technology, equipment, and capacity of organizations, the people who make up the workforce are really the key to success. Leaders and managers are interested in employee engagement as a way to drive organizational success because employee engagement is a critical component to organizational success (Lockwood, 2007). Employee engagement is defined by Kahn (1990) as the connecting of members of an organization to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and reveal themselves emotionally, cognitively, physically, and while performing their duties. Research indicates that employee engagement helps employers to improve or maintain their competitive advantage (Christian, Garza, & Slaughter, 2011).

For service organizations like Purdue Extension whose success is determined by the service and knowledge of their workforce, employee engagement is critical to their mission. Purdue Extension delivers research-based educational programs to Indiana residents through a network of community-based Purdue Extension professionals located in all 92 counties in Indiana (Purdue Extension, 2014). These professionals, who have at least a master's degree, are called Extension Educators. They partner with Purdue University faculty, who are called Extension Specialists, and local constituents to assess the needs of the community. Using the information obtained from a needs assessment, educators, together with faculty who are experts in their field, develop new and relevant educational content on topics related to agriculture and natural resources, health and human sciences, 4-H youth development, and community development. Extension

educators use the materials to deliver non-formal educational programs and initiatives in local communities to improve quality of life.

One of the Extension educators within the local Purdue Extension office, called the County Extension Director, has additional administrative responsibilities at the local office (A. Snodgrass, personal communication, January 6, 2016). In addition to providing overall leadership to the county extension educators and the county Extension program, the county extension directors play a key role with internal and external organizational stakeholders. The primary responsibilities of the county extension directors are fiscal management, personnel management, and public relations for the county Extension program (A. Snodgrass, personal communication, January 6, 2016). The service of county extension directors would be enhanced if they are enthusiastic, involved in their work, and working with partners in a positive way.

Purdue Extension is part of a larger land-grant university system that includes universities in every state and territory of the United States, as well as the District of Columbia (Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities, 2012). The Extension system provides a broad segment of the population with a practical education that has direct relevance to their daily lives (Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities, 2012). Extension professionals across the country are looking for research-based solutions to develop effective county-based leaders to provide oversight of the educators who deliver the relevant information to local residents (J. Henderson, personal communication, October 14, 2015). This study addressed employee engagement and leadership style among Purdue Extension county extension directors, and it was based on a theoretical framework consisting of the Social Exchange theory and the Job Demands-

Resources theory to explain employee engagement and the Full Range Leadership theory to explore leadership styles. The results of this study can contribute to the enhancement of Extension education across the country.

Organizational leadership plays a significant role in employee engagement and organizational success (Biro, 2014). Employee engagement directly affects the quality of education that Purdue Extension delivers to local communities. Given the connections identified between employee engagement and leadership, it stands to reason that understanding the relationship between one's own leadership and employee engagement will enable Extension professionals to lead in ways that increase both their own engagement as employees and the engagement of the educators they supervise. This, in turn, will improve the quality of education and, therefore, benefit the residents of Indiana. The continued growth and success of Purdue Extension may be enhanced by greater efforts to engage employees in the mission. Thus, this research aimed to inform the development of a leadership-training program for Purdue Extension leaders to improve and maintain their leadership and engagement.

Employee engagement has been studied in a variety of workplace settings, including schools, healthcare organizations, and financial service organizations (Hakanen, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2006; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004), although studies specific to the employee engagement levels of Extension professionals have not yet been identified. The mission of Purdue Extension is engagement; thus, this study on employee engagement and leadership can make a contribution to the literature.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this quantitative study was to assess the Purdue Extension county directors' level of engagement and leadership style and to examine the relationship between the two variables.

Research Questions

For a service organization like Purdue Extension, employee engagement is essential to their mission. In order to study employee engagement and leadership style within Purdue Extension, the following overarching questions were explored:

1. What are the levels of employee engagement among Purdue Extension county extension directors?

2. Do the levels of employee engagement among Purdue Extension county extension directors differ by gender, age, years of service, and program area?

3. What are the leadership styles of Purdue Extension county extension directors?

4. Do the leadership styles of Purdue Extension county extension directors differ by gender, age, years of service, and program area?

5. What is the relationship between employee engagement and leadership style of Purdue Extension county extension directors, controlling for other factors such as gender, age, years of service, and program area?

Significance of the Dissertation in Practice Study

The researcher provides oversight of staff development for Purdue Extension professionals. Annually a two-day face-to-face training is designed and delivered for all

Indiana county extension directors by Purdue Extension administration. This professional development opportunity offers program updates, professional networking, and skill building. The Purdue Extension Leadership Team, which includes this researcher, typically determines the agenda with input from the direct supervisors of the county extension directors, called District Directors. This research study serves as a needs assessment for the development of evidence-based solutions for leadership development for the county extension directors.

Over the last several years Purdue Extension employees have experienced many changes in county extension directors' leadership and other personnel, as employees have retired or left the organization (J. Henderson, personal communication, December 7, 2015). As the baby boomer generation retires, Purdue Extension anticipates more turnovers in the county extension director positions across the state. County extension directors can be appointed without previous experience or leadership training. As a result, a large number of the county extension directors may lack experience and leadership training (J. Henderson, personal communication, December 7, 2015). This study will help inform a leadership-training program for county extension directors with evidence-based solutions for increasing employee engagement within the leaders. It seems that engaged leaders will likely lead to engaged employees and more engaged leaders are less likely to leave the institution.

The College of Agriculture at Purdue University, the administrative home to Purdue Extension, has leadership development as a goal in the 2015-2020 Strategic Plan (Purdue University, 2015). One of the leadership initiatives in the strategic plan is to support leadership growth and development for the students, faculty, and staff within the

College of Agriculture to make leadership contributions at the university, local, and state level. This study informs the tactics to address the leadership goal and initiatives within the college strategic plan.

The Director of Purdue Extension, Dr. Jason Henderson (personal communication, October 14, 2015), reported that some of the members of the National Extension Directors Association, which supports a national conference for mid-level managers in the Cooperative Extension system, expressed concern with the limited focus on leadership training for mid-management professionals demonstrated at previous Cooperative Extension mid-managers national conferences. As a result, the larger Extension system is looking for research-based solutions to effectively develop the knowledge and skills of mid-level managers within Cooperative Extension across the country. This study provides evidence of the leadership style and traits that contribute to employee engagement among leaders in the Cooperative Extension system. The findings may be used to develop professional development strategies that foster and grow those traits.

This research aimed to fill a gap in the literature. It presents one of the first attempts to understand the concept of a leader's level of employee engagement and leadership style at the individual level within the cooperative system. This study is, therefore, necessary to add to the scholarly research and the overall generalizability of employee engagement literature.

Aim of the Study

The study aimed to inform a professional development training program for all Purdue Extension county extension directors.

Methodology

Survey designs provide a numeric description of social investigations (Creswell, 2014). In an effort to maintain validity, the author used two established quantitative tools: the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) and the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ).

Purdue Extension has 92 county Extension offices located across the state of Indiana. The population for this study was the current (2016) county extension directors who serve as the leaders of the 92 offices. All county extension directors were asked to complete a survey that was sent to them through email.

The survey instrument for the study consisted of a consent question and three sections. The first section contained questions designed by the researcher to measure the following employee demographic characteristics: gender, age, years of service, and program area. In the second section of the instrument, the UWES was used to measure employees' work engagement (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2011). The UWES has been used in research studies to collect quantitative data from employees regarding their sense of work engagement (Slatten & Mehmetoglu, 2011). The third section of the instrument consisted of the MLQ (Avolio & Bass, 2004), which measures various leadership styles by identifying the prevalence of characteristics of each leadership type (Avolio & Bass, 2004). The MLQ is based on the Full Range Leadership theory, including three leadership styles: transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire.

 The dependent variable is employee engagement, and the independent variables are gender, age, length of service, program area, and leadership style. Descriptive statistics were calculated on all variables, including tests of normalcy. To examine how

demographic differences relate to employee engagement and leadership style, t tests and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) were conducted. Several models were analyzed using multivariate regression techniques to learn more about the relationship between several independent variables and employee engagement.

Limitations, Delimitations, and Personal Biases

I am the Associate Director and Program Leader of Purdue Extension; thus, I had an interest in the outcome of the research as a leader in the organization. I was interested in identifying training strategies that increase employee engagement and develop strong leaders. I also provide oversight to the program area of Health and Human Sciences and overall Purdue Extension staff development, and I have a relationship with many of the research participants. I needed to clearly communicate to them that the aim of the study was to inform the development of a leadership-training program. The county extension directors needed to see the research as an opportunity to make positive changes in the organization by identifying ways to potentially improve leadership and engagement within Purdue Extension.

This study utilized only Purdue Extension county extension directors who served the 92 county extension offices as they play a key leadership role in the organization. The actual number of county extension directors fluctuates regularly with turnover and transfers. County extension directors need to be engaged and inspiring leaders for the other extension educators and staff who work at the county office. The engagement and leadership at the county level is essential to the funding and local stakeholder support. The results from this study will benefit Purdue Extension, and caution should be used in generalizing the results to other cooperative extension systems. This study is one of the

first to explore employee engagement and leadership style among county extension

leaders and can contribute valuable information for future studies in Cooperative

Extension. To avoid any conflict of interest, I did not include all of the Purdue Extension

educators in this study because I provide feedback to some of their annual evaluations.

This study targeted only the county extension directors; that is, the extension educator in

each county Extension office who has the team leader role. I do not provide feedback to

the annual evaluations of the county extension directors, so there was no conflict of

interest.

The electronic survey collection tool consisted of 67 questions for the

participants, and the lengthiness of the survey may have reduced the response rate. A

low response rate is a potential limitation of the study for statistical significance tests to

be performed, if too few respondents participate. To mitigate this potential limitation, the

Director of Purdue Extension endorsed the value of the study and the benefits to the

participants, such as the feedback they would receive related to their leadership

behaviors. In addition, email reminders were sent that highlighted the benefits of

participation, including improved training strategies to help them do their job better. All

of the data collected were self-reported; therefore, I had to assume that the county

extension directors were being truthful in their responses.

Limitations of this study included the methods and aim. The quantitative nature

of this study provided numerical data to answer the research questions but lacked the

detailed and in-depth data that qualitative data provide to better understand the

connections between employee engagement and leadership style. The aim of this study

was to develop a professional development training program; yet, according to Macey

and Schneider (2008), not all investments in training of leaders in organizations with the goal of increasing employee engagement will improve engagement levels.

I was committed to separating my professional role and my researcher role with Purdue Extension for this study. I was open to what the data would show, and I made every effort to avoid biases that could have affected my reading of the data.

The Role of Leadership in this Study

Much like employee engagement, leadership has many definitions. Bass (1990a) suggested that leadership has three perspectives: leadership as a group process, leadership as a personality perspective, and leadership as a behavior. For this study, leadership is understood as the process that takes place between leaders and followers.

Leadership is a popular topic for organizations and employees. Many leadership theories are discussed in the literature. One theory that has considerable attention is Full Range Leadership theory (Judge & Piccolo, 2004). The Full Range Leadership theory suggests that leaders can display various leadership styles such as transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire.

The Full Range Leadership theory provided a theoretical framework for this research to help explain how leaders can have a variety of leadership styles. The leadership style of the Purdue county extension directors may vary among various groups. Thus, it was important to use a leadership theory that encompassed a wide range of leadership styles.

Summary

The literature on employee engagement suggested that there are multiple ways to encourage employee engagement within organizations, with no single solution meeting

the needs of all organizations (Lockwood, 2007). No literature specific to employee engagement levels of Extension professionals has been found, yet engagement is the mission of Purdue Extension as Extension professionals build and maintain relationships with stakeholders that are central to the work of community-based education.

The literature also indicated that organizational leadership is essential in employee engagement (Biro, 2014). This study was based on the assumption that if leaders are engaged in their work then they will foster engaged followers. This assumption is based on logic, as well as on a study by De Jong and Den Hartog (2007) that found leaders influence employees' innovative behaviors.

This research fills the literature gap by assessing the individual employee engagement of Purdue Extension county extension directors and by identifying the leadership traits that relate to leaders' employee engagement so that Purdue Extension can better train for engaged leaders.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This study sought to assess the employee engagement and leadership style of Purdue Extension county extension directors and to examine the relationship between their employee engagement and leadership style. Employee engagement and leadership are popular topics with both managers and scholars. Despite the popularity of both topics, there is not a consistent definition, measurement, and theory for the study of employee engagement (Saks & Gruman, 2014) or leadership (Hernandez, Eberly, Avolio, & Johnson, 2011). Therefore, the literature review presents definitions and theories related to employee engagement and leadership and a review of how employee demographics relate to employee engagement. In addition to the literature review, background on Purdue Extension and the county extension directors provides an overview of the professional practice setting. The author concluded this section with a summary of the literature review of employee engagement and leadership.

Employee Engagement

Kahn (1990) defined employee engagement as the connecting of members of an organization to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and reveal themselves emotionally, cognitively, and physically, and while performing their duties. According to Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá, and Bakker (2002), employee engagement is the opposite of burnout. Schaufeli et al. (2002) defined employee engagement as a positive, fulfilling, work-related mental state that is characterized by vigor, commitment, and absorption. In addition, Maslach and Leiter (2008) defined engagement as an energetic state of involvement with fulfilling activities that enhance one's sense of professional

worth. Despite the similarities in the definitions, Saks and Gruman (2014) suggested that Kahn's (1990) definition is more encompassing than that of Schaufeli et al. (2002). Kahn's description highlighted the connection between engagement and work role performance, and it included the notion of personal agency and the agentic self (Cole, Walter, Bedeian, & O'Boyle, 2012). Thus, Kahn's definition fits well with the study of individual employee engagement and self-rated leadership style.

One theory of employee engagement is the Social Exchange theory. This theory suggests that when an employee forms relationships at work, the social exchange relationships involve the exchange of socio-emotional benefits (Cropanzano, Rupp, & Byrne, 2003). As a result of the relationships, the employee makes extra effort and has more positive organizational attitudes that aid employers' success. The theory focuses on workers' commitment and attachment to the organization (Cropanzano et al., 2003). Social Exchange theory suggests that when someone does something that benefits another, the receiving person will do something that is of equal value in return (Cropanzano et al., 2003). Therefore, the relationship between employees at work may develop into one of exchange (Strom, Sears, & Kelly, 2014). A belief that supports the theory is that shared commitments, trust, and reliability will develop overtime, if both employees do not break certain rules of exchange (Saks, 2006). Saks (2006) suggested that the Social Exchange theory may explain why employees choose to engage at work.

A second theory to consider when studying employee engagement is the Job Demands-Resources theory (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). The Job Demands-Resources model is based on burnout literature and demonstrates two different work conditions affecting employees. The two psychosocial work characteristics include job resources

and job demands. Job demands may include physical, social, or organizational aspects of the job that cause strain and stress for the employees, such as fatigue, workload family struggles, and emotional conflicts. Job resources include physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of the job that support and encourage employees, including social support, performance feedback, and decision participation (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001). According to Crawford, LePine, and Rich (2010), job demands lead to burnout and job resources are positively related to employee engagement.

Job resources help employees complete tasks and meet their work performance goals by providing professional development, learning, and growth that lead to engagement (Bakker, Hakanen, Demerouti & Xanthopoulou, 2007). Job resources motivate employees' motivation in the form of engagement that leads to organizational commitment (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

The Job Demands-Resources theory is one of the most tested theories that relates to engagement research (Demerouti & Bakker, 2011). The Job Demands-Resources model was used in a study among 2,038 Finnish teachers, by mailing the questionnaires, with a 52% response rate. The researchers found that job demands, such as work overload and time pressure, are related to poor health through burnout and that job resources, such as job control, access to information, and supervisory support, are related to work engagement (Hakanen et al., 2006). Another multi-sample study using the JD-R model was used with employees of an insurance company (n = 381), a pension fund company (n = 507), occupational health and safety service (n = 202), and a home-care institution (n = 608). The study found that engagement is predicted by available

resources (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Increasing job resources, such as participative management, increasing social supports, and team building, eventually lead to greater job engagement (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

As Purdue Extension professionals feel overloaded without adequate resources, they may feel overwhelmed and experience burnout (Purdue University County Extension Directors' Meeting, personal communication, September 29, 2014). Job resources help encourage and foster positive engagement for employees (Llorens, Schaufeli, Bakker, & Salanova, 2007), which might motivate them to enhance their job performance. Given that the Job Demands-Resources theory examines two different work conditions that may have been affecting Purdue county extension directors (i.e., job resources and job demands), the researcher believed that the Job Demands-Resources theory was appropriate for use in this study to help in understanding Purdue county extension directors' engagement.

Both the Social Exchange theory and the Job Demands-Resources theory have contributed to the literature about employee engagement. The Social Exchange theory provides a framework that explains that when employees form relationships at work, they expect the favor will be reciprocated when they do something for another party. This theory may explain why some employees develop relationships at work and are more engaged. The Job Demands-Resources theory demonstrates two work conditions affecting employees: job demands that cause strain and stress for the employee and job resources that support and encourage employees. This theory may explain why employees who have more job resources and less job demands are more positively engaged in the workplace.

Leadership

Leadership is a popular topic for organizations and employees, and many leadership theories are discussed in the literature. Leadership is a critical component in the engagement of employees (Liu, Lepak, Takeuchi, & Sims, 2003). The study of leadership requires a clear definition as the word has many meanings. For this study, leadership is understood as the process that takes place between leaders and followers (Bass, 1990a). This study examined the role of the leader in employee engagement. This section discusses the Full Range Leadership theory (Avolio & Bass, 2004) as a framework to look at how leaders interact with followers and how that interaction relates to the leaders' employee engagement. The Full Range Leadership theory, developed by Avolio and Bass (2004), uses three leadership styles: transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire.

Bass (1990b) described transformational leaders as people who motivate others to follow their self-interest and make a lasting impact on their followers. Transformational leadership factors include idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Bass, 1990b). Idealized influence is the influence that leaders have over followers (Avolio & Bass, 2004). Followers view the leader in an idealized way. Inspirational motivation is when leaders share goals and mutual understanding of a vision that is right and attainable (Avolio & Bass, 2004). Intellectual stimulation is when transformational leaders help followers think about innovation and new ways of doing business (Avolio & Bass, 2004). Individualized consideration means sharing in others' concern and treating each person as a unique individual (Avolio & Bass, 2004). Transformational leaders may be more engaged as

employees because of their relationship and individual connection with their followers in the workplace. Individualized consideration seems to connect to the Social Exchange theory (Cropanzano et al., 2003). Transformational leadership goes beyond basic agreements and interactions to meeting higher needs of the followers. Transformational leaders have a vision and inspire others to embrace the vision (Bass, 1990b) through leadership factors, including idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration.

Transactional leadership was described by Burns (as cited in Roueche, Baker, & Rose, 1989) as, "one person taking the initiative in making contact with another for the purpose of an exchange of valued things, such as paying wages to employees for their efforts and skills" (p. 4). Transactional leadership is a relationship between leaders and followers as an exchange: the leader gives something and the followers get something in return. This leadership style does not exhibit the same level of personal connection that transformational leadership style exhibits. Thus, transactional leaders may not form the relationships at work that involve the exchange of social-emotional benefits as suggested by the Social Exchange theory (Cropanzano et al., 2003). Transactional leaders may not stimulate employees' motivation through job resources, such as psychological and social support, as suggested by the Job Demand-Resources theory (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

The third type of leadership style in the Full Range Leadership theory is laissez-faire. According to Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, and van Engen (2003), a person with the laissez-faire leadership style displays frequent absence and lack of contribution during critical stages. Broom (2013) described this leadership style as passive-avoidant

behavior. It seems that this leadership style would demonstrate little personal engagement.

Broome (2013) explored self-reported leadership styles of deans of nursing programs throughout the United States using the Full Range Leadership theory. The study attempted to survey 655 deans; 344 returned the completed survey for a 52.5% return rate. Seventy-seven percent of the deans' highest scores were classified as transformational, 21.0% of the scores were transactional, and 2.0% were on the passive-avoidant scale (Broome, 2013). The relationship between self-reported leadership and their employee engagement levels was not explored in this study.

The Full Range Leadership theory has also been used to explore leadership styles in small grassroots organizations. Fisher (2013) explored transformational leadership among grassroots social service organizations using the Full Range Leadership theory. Twenty-nine organizations were asked to participate in the leadership study, and 23 different organizations provided data, which is a 79.3% organizational response rate. The leaders of the grassroots organizations displayed relatively high levels of transformational leadership and low levels of transactional leadership. Purdue Extension may also be considered a grassroots organization. The MLQ, the most commonly used measure of the Full Range Leadership theory, was used in this study to provide insight on the leadership styles of Purdue's county extension directors.

The Full Range Leadership theory provided a framework for the research to help explain how different leaders can have different leadership styles. The self-reported leadership behavior of the Purdue county extension directors may vary across the state.

Thus, it was important to use a leadership theory that encompassed a wide range of leadership styles.

Demographic Characteristics

Employee characteristics influence work performance and work engagement. Characteristics such as gender, age, length of service, and program area affect how employees engage or disengage in the workplace (Employee Engagement Research Report Update, 2013; Pitt-Catgouphes & Matz-Costa, 2008). Understanding how these demographics are associated with employee engagement is important for organizational success. According to the Employee Engagement Research Report (2013), engagement increases with time in current role, time with current employer, and with age. Therefore, as employees become more vested and/or more senior in the organization, they increase their employee engagement. This report is based on an online survey with 7,068 responses from around the world in 2012 (Employee Engagement Research Report, 2013). The survey consisted of 27 multiple-choice items. The study found very little difference in employee engagement between genders in western economies.

Another demographic characteristic is program area. Program areas within Purdue Extension are similar to departments within other organizations. A global study of various organizations, conducted by BlessingWhite (2011), found that employees in different departments exhibited various levels of employee engagement within the same organization. Employees in departments that are closest to the clients and essential to delivering on the organization's strategy exhibited more engagement than other departments. Purdue Extension is divided into four program areas, including Health and Human Sciences, Agriculture and Natural Resources, 4-H Youth Development, and

Community Development (Purdue Extension, 2014). In addition to potential variation in how program areas interact with clientele, each program area differs in job expectations, leadership, training, and resources. Understanding how the program areas are associated with employee engagement is paramount in developing effective internal systems to support Extension professionals within each program area.

Leadership Style and Employee Engagement

Leadership with the specific intent to increase employee engagement is called performance management (Mone & London, 2009). There is evidence to suggest that performance management is a driver of employee engagement in organizations (Mone & London, 2009). Mone, Eisinger, Guggenheim, Price, and Stine (2011) have conceptualized the relationship between five performance management activities associated with performance management and employee engagement. Mone et al. (2011) suggested that the performance activities, such as setting performance and development goals, providing ongoing feedback and recognition, managing employee development, conducting mid-year and year-end appraisals, and building a climate of trust and empowerment, predict employee engagement either directly or indirectly.

These performance management activities provide support for characteristics and traits of leaders that are positively associated with high levels of employee engagement (Mone et al., 2011). Mone et al. (2011) conceptualized these performance management activities based on a study in a large corporation and other research without specifically testing each of these activities to employee engagement levels. While at face value these actions could be representative of multiple leadership styles, it could be argued that some are more applicable to transformational leadership than to transactional or laissez-faire

leadership. Bass (1990b) suggested that transformational leadership happens when leaders extend and promote the interests of the employees they lead, create awareness and acceptance of the organizational mission, and encourage their employees to work toward the common good. Bass (1990b) identified four different components of transformational leadership. These components include idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Bass, 1990b).

Idealized Influence is a term used to describe leaders who act as strong role models for their followers and encourage them to share common visions and goals by providing a clear vision and a strong sense of mission (Bass, 1990b). Inspirational Motivation is descriptive of leaders who communicate high expectations in simple ways and inspire followers through motivation to become part of the shared vision that is meaningful and challenging (Bass, 1990b). Intellectual Stimulation refers to leaders who challenge their followers' ideas and stimulate them to be creative and innovative. Individualized Consideration refers to leaders who provide a supportive climate and spend time teaching and coaching followers to become independent (Bass, 1990b).

The components of transformational leadership align with the performance activities that Mone et al. (2011) associated with increasing employee engagement through performance management activities. For example, inspirational motivation would include setting performance goals and providing employee feedback. The characteristics of individualized consideration match the leadership activity identified by Mone et al. (2011) of building a climate of trust and empowerment.

It seems the transactional leadership style would be less likely to implement the performance activities outlined by Mone et al. (2011), such as ongoing feedback and

recognition. Transactional and laissez-faire leaders may conduct annual evaluations that simply check off boxes of task completed but do not provide the inspirational motivation that transformational leaders provide. Leadership that lacks empowerment and regular feedback and recognition might be less likely to promote high levels of employee engagement. The laissez-faire leadership style does not exhibit the traits outlined by Mone et al. (2011) but instead, demonstrates lack of involvement and avoidance suggesting that laissez-faire leaders would be less likely to be engaged in their work or to foster engaged employees.

Carasco-Saul, Kim, and Kim (2015) conducted a review of empirical and conceptual studies that examined the relationship between leadership and employee engagement. Based on the review of many studies, they found that "transformational leadership has a positive relationship with employee engagement at the individual level" (Carasco-Saul et al., 2015, p. 56). Research suggests that transformational leadership style results in decreased turnover and increased productivity similar to positive employee engagement (Macey & Schneider, 2008; Walumbwa & Hartnell, 2011). Shuck and Herd (2012) suggested that transformational leadership might be the theory to conceptualize employee engagement in a leadership context. They suggested that as a result of cognitive and emotional engagement in a leadership context that employee engagement occurs. This study used the Full Range Leadership theory that includes transformational leadership style as a framework for the research on Purdue Extension county extension directors.

Literature about the Professional Practice Setting: Purdue Extension

Purdue University has three core missions: discovery, learning, and engagement, and Purdue Extension is one of the primary delivery methods for the engagement mission of the University. Purdue is 1 of 110 land-grant universities in the United States with a mission to focus on making higher education available to everyone (Akridge & Jamieson, 2012). Land-grant universities provide a two-way relationship with stakeholders to ensure that student learning and research discoveries are focused, relevant, and impactful (Akridge & Jamieson, 2012).

As part of the national Cooperative Extension system, Purdue University has a responsibility to actively partner with the broader community to apply the university's knowledge and expertise for their mutual benefit and to solve issues facing the globe. Purdue Extension conducts research and delivers knowledge to the people of the United States and around the world. Local issues inform Purdue Extension's research program to answer important questions related to improving the quality of life for Indiana's residents. The Purdue Extension system includes faculty, staff, and specialists located on Purdue University-West Lafayette campus, in addition to more than 500 Extension professionals who live and work in all 92 Indiana counties. With the help of trained volunteers and numerous program partners, Purdue Extension extends the reach to transform Indiana communities. Purdue Extension is a partnership funded by county, state, and federal governments. This partnership is essential to the success of the organization. Purdue Extension has a county-based model that delivers educational programming focused on local needs.

The History of Extension

The United States Congress created the Cooperative Extension Service system as a way to get the knowledge of the university to the average person. Congress passed the Morrill Act in 1862 (Morrill Act of 1862), which gave federal land in each state for the establishment of a university to provide education to residents on topics such as agriculture and mechanics. These universities and colleges are known today as Land-Grant Universities. After the Morrill Act, Congress realized that educational functions of the land-grant universities should connect with the research capabilities of these universities. As a result, the Hatch Act was passed in 1887 (Hatch Act of 1887) to provide for the establishment of research centers where research on agricultural, mechanical, and related problems in rural America could be conducted.

The Smith-Lever Act of 1914 (Smith-Lever Act of 1914) provided the authority to establish the system of Cooperative Extension services to inform local people about current knowledge and research related to agriculture and home economics by bringing the knowledge to the people in their homes through demonstrations. As a result, the Smith-Lever Act established Extension offices in every county in Indiana.

Purdue Extension Mission

The mission of Purdue Extension is to transform lives and livelihoods through research-based education (Purdue Extension, 2014). Purdue Extension brings scientific, research-based information, knowledge, and education to the residents of Indiana through non-formal education. The vision of Purdue Extension is to be a leader in providing relevant, high-impact educational programs that transform the lives and livelihoods of individuals and communities in Indiana and the world.

Purdue Extension delivers research-based educational programs on topics related to agriculture and natural resources, health and human sciences, 4-H youth development, and community development. Purdue University employs professionals who have at least a master's degree to work in local Extension offices. These professionals, called Extension Educators, live in the communities and partner with Extension specialists and local constituents to assess the needs of the community. Using the information obtained from the needs assessments, educators and specialists partner with researchers on the Purdue campus, who are experts in their field, to develop new and relevant educational content that can be delivered at the local level by extension educators. These high impact programs on topics such as farm management, childhood obesity, area planning, and positive youth development meet the needs of local people. The educators evaluate the programs they deliver and report program impact to all partners and stakeholders.

In addition to delivering educational content at the local level, one of the extension educators within each county extension office, called the County Extension Director, has additional administrative responsibilities at the local office. The county extension director role is to provide overall leadership to the county extension educators and to the county Extension program. The primary responsibilities of the county extension director are fiscal management, personnel management, and public relations for the county Extension program. It is these county extension directors who will be the participants in this study.

Summary

Employee engagement and leadership styles are popular topics in professional practice settings and in the research literature. However, the connection between one's

leadership style and employee engagement in the leader role has not been addressed. Further, little is known about the leadership styles and employee engagement levels of Purdue Extension county extension directors. As Purdue Extension plans to develop and engage county-based extension directors, we must use data-driven information to inform training objectives if we want to enhance employee performance of these leaders and, ultimately, the performance of their followers.

The literature review provides a discussion of two theories that relate to employee engagement and one theory that covers a range of leadership styles to help explain why some employees are more engaged in their work than others and to describe various factors that contribute to a range of leadership styles. The Social Exchange theory and the Job Demands-Resources theory show that relationships and job resources may contribute to positive employee engagement. These theories help explain why organizational leaders who have reciprocal relationships and adequate job resources may be more engaged in the workplace. The Full Range Leadership theory encompasses three leadership styles: transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire. The Full Range Leadership theory provided a framework to assess the various factors that contribute to the three leadership styles. The factors associated with transformational leadership style closely align with performance activities and emotional engagement that are consistent with employee engagement; this might explain why transformational leaders are engaged employees.

The literature suggests that transformational leadership has a positive effect on employee engagement (Carasco-Saul et al., 2015). Yet, much of the research has been done using the data from those that follow the leader versus self-reported data from the

leader. Thus, this research contributes to the literature related to employee engagement and leadership styles at the individual level. In the next section, the details of this quantitative study to explore the relationship between employee engagement and leadership style within leaders are provided.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this quantitative study was to assess the Purdue Extension county directors' levels of engagement and leadership styles and to examine the relationship between employee engagement and leadership style within leaders.

Aim of the Study

The study aimed to inform a professional development training program for all Purdue Extension county extension directors.

Theoretical Framework

This study utilized the Social Exchange theory and the Job Demands-Resources theory to explain employee engagement and the Full Range Leadership theory to explore leadership styles. These models were used to explore the level of employee engagement of the Purdue Extension county extension directors and to identify one of three leadership styles with which each county extension director most identified. The relationship between the county extension directors' level of engagement and leadership style was explored. The relationship and connection between employee engagement and leadership informed leadership development for Purdue Extension.

Methodology

This research used a postpositivist viewpoint. According to Creswell (2014), postpositivist research seeks to identify and evaluate the causes that impact outcomes. Postpositivist approaches assume there is an objective reality that can be measured through the behavior of individuals and that the scientific method can test or verify hypotheses about the world (Creswell, 2014). This quantitative, non-experimental,

descriptive study utilized a survey method for data collection leading to data analysis.

Quantitative research examines the statistical relationship between independent and

dependent variables (Creswell, 2014). The dependent variable in this study is employee

engagement. The independent variables for leadership style include whether a leader

reports transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire behaviors. The secondary

independent variables are gender, age, years of service, and program area. This research

sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the levels of employee engagement among Purdue Extension

    county extension directors?

2. Do the levels of employee engagement among Purdue Extension county

    extension directors differ by gender, age, years of service, and program

    area?

3. What are the leadership styles of Purdue Extension county extension

    directors?

4. Do the leadership styles of Purdue Extension county extension directors

    differ by gender, age, years of service, and program area?

5. What is the relationship between employee engagement and leadership

    style of Purdue Extension county extension directors, controlling for other

    factors such as gender, age, years of service, and program area?

Overview of the Data Collection

The study sample included all Purdue Extension county extension directors who

worked in the 92 county offices. The county extension directors were chosen for this

research study because they play a key leadership role within Purdue Extension. The

county extension director leads the Purdue Extension educators, support staff, and program assistants who work at the Purdue Extension county offices. The primary responsibilities of the county extension director are fiscal management, personnel management, and public relations for the county Extension program. The data collection survey was sent to each county extension director via email.

Instrument for Data Collection

The web-based survey instrument consisted of three sections. The sections included questions to determine employee demographics (Appendix A), the UWES, shown in Appendix B, and the MLQ (not shown in an Appendix because it was purchased from Mind Garden and is not to be published). In addition, a consent question was asked first to determine whether or not individuals would provide informed consent to participate in the survey.

The study measured four employee demographic characteristics, including gender, age, years of service, and program area. The variable of gender was measured as binary with 1 = Female and 0 = not Female (used as male). Age was measured using categories, with 1 = 22-34, 2 = 35-44, 3 = 45-54, 4 = 55-64, and 5 = 65 and over. Length of service was measured in categories, with 1 = Less than one year, 2 = 1-5 years, 3 = 6-10 years, 4 = 11-15 years, and 5 = 16 and above. Program areas included 1 = Agriculture and Natural Resources (ANR), 2 = 4-H, 3 = Health and Human Sciences (HHS), 4 = Community Development, 5 = ANR/4-H, 6 = HHS/4-H, and 7 = HHS/ANR.

To measure employees' work engagement, the UWES was used (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2011). The instrument is widely used in research studies to collect quantitative data from employees regarding their sense of work engagement (Breevaart, Bakker,

Demerouti, & Hetland, 2012; Hakanen et al., 2006; Slåtten & Mehmetoglu, 2011). The

UWES consists of 17 items scored on a 7-point frequency scale with 0 = Never and 6 =

Always (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2011). The UWES is divided into subscales, including

vigor (six items), dedication (six items), and absorption (five items) (Schaufeli & Bakker,

2011). The UWES yields a total score that ranges between 0 and 6. A sample item is

"At my work, I feel bursting with energy." Cronbach's alpha for the instrument were

assessed as 0.90 and subscale alphas exceeded 0.80 (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2011).

The MLQ was used to measure leadership styles (Avolio & Bass, 2004). There

are two questionnaire forms of the MLQ: the self-rating form, where the leaders rate

themselves as leaders, and the rater form, where the followers rate their leader (Avolio &

Bass, 2004). This study used only the self-rating form to measure the leader's self-

reported leadership style. The instrument measures various leadership styles by

identifying characteristics of each type (Avolio & Bass, 2004). The tool consisted of 45

items to evaluate how frequently, or to what degree, the county extension directors

believed they engaged in various leadership behaviors with their other team members

(Avolio & Bass, 2004). The county extension directors completed the MLQ as self-

raters. The items were scored using a 5-point Likert-type scale, including 0 = Not at all;

1 = Once in a while; 2 = Sometimes; 3 = Fairly Often; 4 = Frequently, if not always. A

sample item is "Talks optimistically about the future." Average scores were calculated

for each leader trait, and each individual was categorized (transformational, transactional,

or laissez-faire leadership style) as their highest scoring trait. The self-rater MLQ

assessed how the county extension directors perceived the frequency of leadership

behaviors, as well as the leadership behaviors they believed they should have been

exhibiting. Mind Garden called this questionnaire the Actual vs. Ought. Participants

received a personalized report that reviewed their scores and provided feedback. For the

purposes of this study, only the anonymous "actual" raw data was used. The "ought"

data was reported only to each county extension director in a personalized report for

professional development purposes.

Before survey administration, survey items were beta-tested with a small group of

participants, the dissertation committee, and the Purdue Extension Leadership Team.

 This was to ensure that the survey and process would be clear to the participants.

Participants for the Study

The author sought permission from the Director of Purdue Extension and the

Extension Leadership Team for their district/area county extension directors to participate

in the research study. After the author had obtained permission from the Director of

Purdue Extension and the Extension Leadership Team to engage the participants, the next

step was to obtain permission from the Creighton University and Purdue University

Institutional Review Boards to conduct the study.

The central Purdue Extension administration office at Purdue University

maintains an email list of all Purdue Extension county extension directors, and this was

made available to the researcher. A unique link for the web-based survey was sent to all

county extension directors using their Purdue email address.

The main hurdle to overcome in the study was the author's relationship with

many of the sample members, although the author did not directly supervise any of them.

The aim of the study, to inform the development of a leadership-training program for the

entire Purdue Cooperative Extension, needed to be clearly communicated. Further,

individual scores on leadership style and employee engagement were in no way to be

used for reprisal or reprimand but, instead, were to be used in aggregate to help guide

development strategies for all county extension directors. Because the survey was

coming from the author, who is in a leadership position with Purdue Extension, the

participants needed to know that participation in the survey would not affect their

employment status and that their responses would be anonymous. The demographic data

would be used only at the aggregate level as a way to explore the relationship between

leadership and engagement and no attempt would be made to identify individual

respondents.

Procedures

Following a successful defense of the proposal in the spring of 2016, permission

to conduct the study was sought from the Institutional Review Boards of Creighton

University and Purdue University. After permission had been granted, the author and the

Purdue Extension Director jointly sent an email and a unique link for the web-based

survey, which included the informed consent verbiage as question number one, to all

Purdue Extension county extension directors via their Purdue email account (Appendix

C). County extension directors who did not consent to participate on question number

one were thanked for their time and flagged as "responded" so they would not be

contacted again, and consenting participants continued to the survey. The email stated

that their participation was voluntary and that there were no penalties for refusal to

complete the survey. The author gave the participants approximately three weeks to

complete the survey and during that period sent a weekly follow-up email to remind non-

respondents of data collection. Mind Garden provided the email addresses of non-

respondents; however, the researcher did not examine the raw data of early respondents, and so confidentiality was maintained.

Financial Issues Influencing Data Collection

The MLQ tool had to be purchased from the publisher, Mind Garden, for use in this research (Avolio & Bass, 2004). Mind Garden customized the MLQ to include the UWES, the four demographic questions, and the Institutional Review Board informed consent question. The web hosting and customization of the survey instrument cost $350. Each survey data license cost $5 and included individual reports for the county extension directors of their perceived leadership style versus what they believed their leadership style ought to have been. The total cost of the surveys was $810. The Director of Purdue Extension agreed to pay for the customization, the data licenses, and the individual reports out of Purdue Extension funds that are designated for professional development for county extension directors. The author needed to work closely with the Purdue Extension business office to manage the logistics of paying for the MLQ. After the county extension directors had completed the online survey, they each had access to a report that provided feedback on how they perceived the frequency of the leadership behaviors they exhibited, as well as the leadership behaviors they believed they should have been exhibiting. The researcher did not have access to the individual reports; only the participants had access to their individual report. The county extension directors can use these reports to target their professional development. Above and beyond the scope of this study, the researcher could use the aggregated raw data to explore future training needs of the county extension directors.

Data Analysis

The dependent variable in the study is employee engagement, and the independent variables are gender, age, length of service, program area, and leadership style. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used for the statistical analysis. Once the data file had been obtained from the Mind Garden website, the researcher determined that the data were normally distributed and satisfied the assumptions of parametric tests. If the data had not been normally distributed, then the data would either have been transformed or a non-parametric test would have been used. Descriptive statistics were calculated on all variables, including means, standard deviations, and ranges. To examine how demographic differences relate to employee engagement, if parametric tests are appropriate, t tests and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) will be conducted by looking at gender and employee engagement, age category and employee engagement, years of service category and employee engagement, and program area and employee engagement. Several models were analyzed using multivariate regression to learn more about the relationship between several independent variables and employee engagement. The multiple regressions allowed for exploration of the unique relationships of variables controlling for others in the model. Neither regression nor correlation analyses can be interpreted as establishing cause-and-effect relationships (Creswell, 2014). They can indicate only how or to what extent variables are associated with each other (Creswell, 2014). An alpha of .05 was used for all tests of significance.

Ethical Considerations

One of the researcher's greatest ethical concerns for the dissertation process and study was her status as Associate Director of Purdue Extension. She had an interest in

the outcome of the research as a leader within Purdue Extension. She was interested in

learning how to best support and build leadership and employee engagement within

Purdue Extension.

The researcher had a relationship with many of the research participants. She

needed to communicate clearly that the aim of the study was to inform the development

of a leadership-training program and that there were no penalties for refusal to participate

in the study. The researcher highlighted the benefits of participating in the study for the

county extension directors, including an opportunity to participate in a leadership

assessment and to develop and implement an individual professional development plan.

The researcher also helped Purdue Extension professionals see the research as an

opportunity to make positive changes in the organization. Clear communication with the

Director of Purdue Extension, the Extension Leadership Team, and the County Extension

Directors about the study's purpose and confidentiality of responses were essential for a

successful dissertation in practice.

Reflective Practices

The researcher reflected on her dissertation journey throughout the process. She

kept a log on her computer and documented her reflections after each milestone and

chapter of the dissertation. The researcher documented her thoughts and feelings after

the proposal was completed and had been accepted by the dissertation committee, after

completing the Institutional Review Board process with both institutions, after

completion of each chapter, and during and after data collection.

Summary

The methods outlined in this section were intended to provide a clear picture of how the researcher implemented a quantitative study to assess the employee engagement and leadership style of Purdue Extension county extension directors and to examine the relationship between the county extension directors' engagement and their leadership style. The methodology, data collection, planned procedures, and data analysis came together to describe the proposed dissertation in practice.

The study used a quantitative design and utilized a survey method for data collection. The study sample included all Purdue Extension county extension directors who supervised the 92 county offices across the state of Indiana. A link to the web-based survey instrument was sent via email. The survey instrument consisted of three sections. These included a section to determine employee demographics, a section to measure the level of employee engagement, and a section to measure leadership style of the county extension directors. Once the data had been collected, they were analyzed using the various statistical methods mentioned earlier to learn more about the relationships between employee engagement and leadership style.

The review of literature suggested that transformational leaders have a positive relationship with employee engagement (Caresco-Saul, Kim, & Kim, 2015) and that transformational leadership styles were positively associated with employee engagement (Macey & Schneider, 2008; Walumbwa & Hartnell, 2011). Based on the literature review and the proposed methodology, it seemed that the county extension directors with a high level of employee engagement would likely have a transformational leadership

style and county extension directors that exhibited transactional leadership style would likely score lower on employee engagement.

The study considered the Social Exchange theory, the Job-Demand Resources theory, and the Full Range Leadership theory to explain the relationship between employee engagement and leadership style at the individual level. Thus, the methodology was designed to measure and test the variables of employee engagement and leadership style in the Purdue Extension county extension directors to test the relationship statistically. The results of the study informed a professional development training program for all Purdue Extension county extension directors in an effort to increase the leaders' engagement and overall organizational success.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this quantitative study was to assess the Purdue Extension county directors' levels of engagement and leadership styles and to examine the relationship between employee engagement and leadership style within leaders. This chapter details the results of the analyses as described in Chapter 3. First, sample characteristics will be described. Next, a detailed analysis of the results will follow. These results will be organized by research question. Finally, a brief summary will conclude the chapter.

Composite Scoring and Reliability

In order for the study variables to be used in the analysis, composite scoring needed to be performed. The variables representing the scales and subscales of employee engagement, transformational leadership, transactional leadership, and passive/avoidant leadership were calculated by summing the corresponding survey items together and then dividing by the number of items used in each subscale to create a mean composite score. Cronbach's alpha was then used to compute reliability scores for all composite scores. According to George and Mallery (2016), scores > .9 are Excellent, > .8 Good, > .7 Acceptable, and scores lower than that are questionable. The employee engagement subscales (vigor, dedication, and absorption) had acceptable to excellent reliability. For the MLQ, only transformational leadership, management by exception (active), and inspirational motivation achieved acceptable reliability. However, the MLQ has been a widely used measure for over 20 years, in a variety of populations with acceptable internal reliability (see, for example: Bass & Avolio, 1993; 2000; Avolio & Bass, 2004; Bass, Avolio & Atwater, 1996; Dvir, Eden, Avolio & Shamir, 2002; Eagly, Johannesen-

Schmidt & van Engen, 2003). Additionally, the MLQ is a benchmark measure of

leadership, first developed to address the lack of a comprehensive range of leadership

styles which are not captured by other measures (Avolio & Bass, 2004). This instrument

has undergone near constant refinement since its creation in 1985, based upon peer

critiques and factor analyses (Avolio & Bass, 2004). The measure is valid internally, as

tested through multiple iterations of confirmatory factor analyses, as well as valid

externally, through correlations with related measures and constructs (Avolio & Bass,

2004). The instrument has been shown to measure similarly across genders, races, and

populations (Avolio & Bass, 2004). Furthermore, Cronbach's alpha tends to

underestimate reliability values for scales with lower amounts of items (Tavakol &

Dennick, 2011). Due to its unique measurement range, validity, and consistency across

populations, the instrument was kept. Table 1 presents the relevant survey items as well

as the Cronbach's alpha coefficients for each composite score.

Sample Characteristics

Originally, 88 potential participants were contacted. A response rate of 98%

resulted in a final sample of 86 participants. Of these participants, 61 (70.9%) were

female, and 25 (29.1%) were male. Thirty-one of the participants were in the 55 and over

age range ($n = 31$, 36%), with 19 (22.1%) participants falling into the 45-54 age category,

14 (16.3%) who were 35-44, and 22 (25.6%) who were 22-34. Four (4.7%) participants

had been serving the Purdue Extension for less than one year, 21 (24.4%) for 1-5 years,

10 (11.6%) for 6-10 years, and 15 (17.4%) for 11-15 years. The majority of participants,

however, had been serving the Purdue Extension for 16 or more years ($n = 36$, 41.9%).

Most participants served in the 4-H Youth Development program area ($n = 26$, 30.2%),

Table 1

Cronbach's Alpha Coefficients for Composite Scores

Composite Score	Survey Items	α	No. of items
Idealized Influence Attributes	MLQ 10, 18, 21, 25	.60	4
Idealized Influence Behaviors	MLQ 6, 14, 23, 34	.35	4
Inspirational Motivation	MLQ 9, 13, 26, 36	.74	4
Intellectual Stimulation	MLQ 2, 8, 30, 32	.67	4
Individual Consideration	MLQ 15, 19, 29, 31	.57	4
Contingent Reward	MLQ 1, 11, 16, 35	.44	4
Management by Exception (Active)	MLQ 4, 22, 24, 27	.71	4
Management by Exception (Passive)	MLQ 3, 12, 17, 20	.56	4
Laissez-Faire	MLQ 5, 7, 28, 33	.51	4
Vigor	UWES 1, 4, 8, 12, 15, 17	.70	6
Dedication	UWES 2, 5, 7, 10, 13	.90	5
Absorption	UWES 3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 16	.83	6
Transformational	MLQ 10, 18, 21, 25, 6, 14, 23, 34, 9, 13, 26, 36, 2, 8, 30, 32, 15, 19, 29, 31	.85	20
Transactional	MLQ 1, 11, 16, 35, 4, 22, 24, 27	.63	8
Passive Avoidant	MLQ 3, 12, 17, 20, 5, 7, 28, 33	.61	8

while 21 (24.4%) served in Agriculture and Natural Resources, 18 (20.9%) served in Health and Human Sciences, four (4.7%) served in Community Development, and 17 (19.8%) served in multiple program areas. Table 2 presents the frequencies and percentages of these sample characteristics.

Assumptions

Prior to each analysis, the assumptions of the analysis were assessed. For Research Question 2, the assumptions of normality and homogeneity of variances were assessed. Skew and kurtosis values of the variables were examined to determine normality. As reported by Kline (2010), skew values between -2.00 and 2.00 and kurtosis between -7.00 and 7.00 suggest that the data are not skewed. All variables used

in this analysis had skew and kurtosis values well within this range (skew: -1.34 to 0.37,

kurtosis: -1.50 to 2.70), suggesting that the data are not extremely skewed and that the

assumption was met. Levene's test was used to examine the homogeneity of variance

assumption. For each analysis, Levene's test was not significant (p = .920 to .078),

indicating that the assumption was met.

Table 2

Frequencies and Percentages of Sample Characteristics

Variable	n	%
Gender		
Male	25	29.1
Female	61	70.9
Age		
22-34	22	25.6
35-44	14	16.3
45-54	19	22.1
55 and over	31	36.0
Years of Service to Purdue Extension		
Less than one year	4	4.7
1-5 years	21	24.4
6-10 years	10	11.6
11-15 years	15	17.4
16 or more years	36	41.9
Program Area		
Agriculture and Natural Resources	21	24.4
Health and Human Sciences	18	20.9
4-H Youth Development	26	30.2
Community Development	4	4.7
Multiple	17	19.8

For the analyses used to answer Research Question 4, no variable in this analysis

had skew or kurtosis values that indicated non-normality (skew: -1.34 to 0.77; kurtosis:

-1.50 to 2.7), suggesting that the assumption was met. Homogeneity of variances was

assessed through Levene's test, which was not significant for any variable (p = .918 to

.130), except for passive-avoidant (p = .022 to .020). However, considering that the

majority of variables met the homogeneity of variance assumption, and that the *F* test is robust against violations of assumptions (Howell, 2013), this analysis was continued.

For the regression used to answer Research Question 5, normality was established through skew and kurtosis values, as discussed previously. This normality was confirmed through a Normal P-P plot, which showed data that generally conformed to the normality line (Stevens, 2009). Linearity and homoscedasticity were examined through a scatterplot of the residuals. Despite several outliers, the scatterplot exhibited linear trends, data that generally clustered around the middle of the plot, and no distinct pattern, all of which indicated that these assumptions were met (Stevens, 2009). Absence of multicollinearity was determined by variance inflation factor (VIF) values. All VIF values were below 10, indicating that the assumption was met (Stevens, 2009).

Detailed Analysis

Research Question 1. What are the levels of employee engagement among Purdue Extension county extension directors?

This research question was explored using descriptive statistics. Means and standard deviations for total employee engagement as well as the subscales of employee engagement were calculated. Vigor corresponds to energetic investment in one's work, dedication corresponds to a sense of pride and meaning in one's work, and absorption refers to the ability to be concentrated on their work in a positive manner (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004b). The possible scores for the UWES employee engagement scale ranged from 0 to 6, with higher scores representing higher vigor, dedication, absorption, or total engagement. According to the UWES manual (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004b), scores can be categorized into five groups, ranging from *very low* to *very high*.

In vigor, participant scores ranged from 2.30 to 5.70, with a mean score of 4.38 ($SD = 0.77$). This corresponds to *average* vigor. Employees who have average vigor show an average amount of energy, zest, and stamina when working (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004b). For dedication, participant scores ranged from 1.40 to 6.00, with a mean of 4.93 ($SD = 0.87$), which is considered *high*. Employees with high dedication feel their work is meaningful, stimulating, and interesting (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004b). In absorption, participant scores ranged from 1.50 to 5.80, with a mean of 4.64 ($SD = 0.87$), which is also considered *high*. Employees with high absorption are happily immersed in their work and they are into their work in a way that time passes quickly when they are working (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004b). For the total or average of these subscales scale, participant scores ranged from 1.80 to 5.80. The mean for this total average scale was 4.63 ($SD = 0.77$), which corresponds to *average* employee engagement, bordering on *high* engagement. Overall, this indicates that employees are generally passionate about their work, find it meaningful and interesting, and are able to be immersed in their work (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004b). Table 3 presents all score ranges, means, and standard deviations.

Table 3
Descriptive Statistics for UWES Employee Engagement

Variable	Min.	Max.	*M*	*SD*
Vigor	2.30	5.70	4.38	0.77
Dedication	1.40	6.00	4.93	0.87
Absorption	1.50	5.80	4.64	0.87
Total Average	1.80	5.80	4.63	0.77

Research Question 2. Do the levels of employee engagement among Purdue Extension county extension directors differ by gender, age, years of service, and program area?

This research question was examined using an independent samples t-test and a series of one-way analyses of variance (ANOVA). In these analyses, the independent variables corresponded to gender, age, years of service, and program area. The dependent variable corresponded to employee engagement (UWES total average). The total scale was used in order to see if there were any global differences in employee engagement. If any demographic differences existed based on the total scale, the subscales of UWES would have been examined. The assumptions of these tests were met.

The results of the independent samples t-test comparing differences in gender were not significant, $t(84) = -0.95$, $p = .343$. The results of the ANOVA comparing differences in age was not significant, $F(3, 82) = 0.65$, $p = .584$. The results of the ANOVA comparing differences in years of service was not significant, $F(4, 81) = 0.23$, $p = .920$. This indicates that levels of total employee engagement did not differ by gender, age, or years of service. Thus, directors have similar levels of employee engagement regardless of their gender, age, or years of service. As such, there might not be any need to investigate demographic differences as influencers of employee engagement.

The results of the ANOVA comparing differences in program area were significant, $F(4, 81) = 3.13$, $p = .019$, $\eta^2 = 0.15$. The eta squared (η^2) statistic, a measure of effect size, indicates that this is a small effect (Morgan, Leech, Gloekner, & Barrett, 2012). The eta squared statistic can be defined as the proportion of variance accounted for by a particular variable (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). As such, program area accounts for approximately 15% of the variance in employee engagement. Pairwise comparisons indicated that there was a significant difference between levels of engagement between

Agriculture and Natural Resources and Health and Human Sciences (mean difference: -0.80, $p = .011$). These results may be due to the fact that health and human sciences educators tend to have a background in human and behavioral sciences, suggesting that they would have a higher interest in that field to begin with. There were no other significant comparisons. Table 4 presents the mean employee engagement levels by program area.

Table 4
Employee Engagement by Program Area

Group	n	M	SD
Agriculture and Natural Resources	21	4.31	0.93
Health and Human Sciences	18	5.11	0.40
4-H Youth Development	26	4.52	0.74
Community Development	4	4.88	0.75
Multiple	17	4.62	0.72

Note. $F(4, 81) = 3.13$, $p = .019$

Research Question 3. What are the leadership styles of Purdue Extension county extension directors?

This research question was examined through descriptive statistics. Means and standard deviations were calculated for each of the subscales of the MLQ. Scores on the MLQ can range from 0-4, with higher scores corresponding to higher frequencies of that particular leadership style or behavior. Norms obtained from a study of 27,285 individuals (Avolio & Bass, 2004) are reported in Table 5 for context. These norms were obtained from the MLQ manual and are used for context purposes only.

The participants in the present study scored an average overall transformational score of 3.06 ($SD = 0.42$), which is higher than the norm. They scored an average of 2.97 ($SD = 0.58$) for idealized influence attributes, which is close to the norm. For idealized influence behaviors, participants scored an average of 2.96 ($SD = 0.59$), which is slightly

higher than the norm. For inspirational motivation, participants scored an average of 3.05 (SD = 0.64), which is higher than the norm. Participants scored an average of 3.02 (SD = 0.53) for intellectual stimulation, which is higher than the norm. For individual consideration, the average score was higher than the norm, at 3.31 (SD = 0.44).

For transactional leadership, participants scored an average of 2.11 (SD = 0.47), which is lower than the norm. Participants scored higher than the norm for contingent reward (M = 2.96, SD = 0.54), and lower than the norm for management by exception (active) (M = 1.31, SD = 0.74). For passive-avoidant leadership, participants scored an average of 0.80 (SD = 0.44), which is close to the norm. Participants had an average management by exception (passive) score of 1.10 (SD = 0.56), which is higher than the norm. Finally, participants scored lower than the norm on laissez-faire, for an average of 0.54 (SD = 0.49).

County extension directors scored highest on transformational leadership styles and lowest on passive-avoidant style. For the subscales, participants scored the highest on individual consideration and the lowest on laissez-faire. Table 5 presents the ranges, means, and standard deviations of these scores, with the normative scores. These findings indicate that Extension leaders are closer to the effective leader end of a leadership range than they are to the ineffective end of the range, which is represented by the passive-avoidant leadership style (Avolio & Bass, 2004).

Table 5

Descriptive Statistics for Subscales of the MLQ

Variable	Min.	Max.	*M*	*SD*	Normative *M*	Normative *SD*
Transformational	1.60	3.90	3.06	0.42	2.85	0.75
Idealized Influence Attributes	1.50	4.00	2.97	0.58	2.94	0.76
Idealized Influence Behaviors	1.00	4.00	2.96	0.59	2.77	0.72
Inspirational Motivation	1.00	4.00	3.05	0.64	2.92	0.76
Intellectual Stimulation	1.30	4.00	3.02	0.53	2.78	0.71
Individual Consideration	2.00	4.00	3.31	0.44	2.85	0.78
Transactional	1.00	3.00	2.11	0.47	2.27	0.79
Contingent Reward	1.50	4.00	2.96	0.54	2.87	0.70
Management by Exception (Active)	0.00	2.80	1.31	0.74	1.67	0.88
Passive-Avoidant	0.00	2.00	0.80	0.44	0.84	0.71
Management by Exception (Passive)	0.00	2.80	1.10	0.56	1.03	0.75
Laissez-Faire	0.00	2.00	0.54	0.49	0.65	0.67

Note. Norms obtained from Avolio and Bass (2004).

Research Question 4. Do the leadership styles of Purdue Extension county extension directors differ by gender, age, years of service, and program area?

A series of independent samples *t*-tests and ANOVAs were utilized to examine this research question. The dependent variables corresponded to transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidant leadership. The total leadership scales were used as a preliminary assessment to see if any significant differences existed between demographic factors. If any significant differences had existed, then the subscales would have been examined. The independent variables corresponded to gender, age, years of service, and program area. The assumptions of the analyses were assessed and were met.

The independent samples *t*-test comparing gender differences in transformational leadership was not significant, $t(84) = -1.93$, $p = .058$. The ANOVA comparing differences between age groups was not significant, $F(3, 82) = 0.24$, $p = .868$. The

ANOVA comparing length of service was not significant, $F(4, 81) = 0.93$, $p = .450$. The ANOVA comparing program area approached significance but was not significant, $F(4, 81) = 2.48$, $p = .051$. Based on these findings, there are no statistically significant differences in transformational leadership scores between demographic groups. However, it should be acknowledged that the statistical significance for the analyses involving gender and especially program area were close to the designated $p < .05$ cutoff.

Because the statistical significance was close to the designated $p < .05$ cutoff, the means were investigated. Females had a higher mean transformational score ($M = 3.11$, $SD = 0.40$) than males ($M = 2.92$, $SD = 0.43$). Additionally, those in the Health and Human Sciences program area had the highest transformational leadership score when compared to other program areas ($M = 3.27$, $SD = 0.45$). A *post hoc* power analysis was conducted using G*Power to determine whether the sample size achieved allowed for sufficient statistical power. For the independent samples *t*-test, achieved power was only 0.27. For the ANOVA comparing program areas, achieved power was only 0.64. As such, the statistically close results may be non-significant due to a lack of power.

The independent samples *t*-test comparing gender differences in transformational leadership was not significant, $t(84) = 0.64$, $p = .525$. The ANOVA comparing differences between lengths of service was not significant, $F(4, 81) = 2.25$, $p = .071$. The ANOVA comparing differences between program area was not significant, $F(4, 81) = 0.25$, $p = .908$.

The ANOVA comparing age groups was significant, $F(3, 82) = 4.75$, $p = .004$, $\eta^2 = 0.17$. The eta squared (η^2) statistic indicates that this is a small effect (Morgan et al., 2012), accounting for up to 17% of the variance in transactional leadership. Pairwise

comparisons indicate that there is a significant difference between 22-34 year olds and each of the other three age groups: 35-44 year olds (mean difference: 0.46, p = .022), 45-54 year olds (mean difference: 0.46, p = .009), and those aged 55 and over (mean difference: 0.34, p = .050). The youngest group had the highest average transactional leadership. No other age groups were significantly different from each other. Assessment of the subscales of transactional leadership indicated that there are no significant differences at that level (p = .055 to .097). See Table 6 for the means and standard deviations by age group. These results indicate that the youngest group of leaders may benefit the most from skill development related to transformational leadership.

Table 6
Transactional Leadership by Age

Group	n	M	SD
22-34	22	2.40	0.42
35-44	14	1.95	0.43
45-54	19	1.95	0.43
55 and over	31	2.07	0.46

Note. $F(3, 82) = 4.75$, p = .004

The independent samples *t*-test comparing differences in passive-avoidant leadership scores between genders was not significant, $t(84) = 1.38$, p = .173. The ANOVA comparing age groups was not significant, $F(3, 82) = 0.53$, p = .662. The ANOVA comparing lengths of service was not significant, $F(4, 81) = 1.81$, p = .135. The ANOVA comparing program areas was not significant, $F(4, 81) = 1.12$, p = .353. There are no significant differences in passive-avoidant leadership between demographic variables, indicating that despite participants' differing characteristics, their levels of passive-avoidant leadership were similar.

Overall, the analyses for Research Question 4 indicated that there were no significant differences in transformational and passive-avoidant leadership by demographic groups. There was one significant difference in transactional leadership for age group, in which the youngest age group differed from each subsequent age group. However, this can be considered a small effect.

Research Question 5. What is the relationship between employee engagement and leadership style of Purdue Extension county extension directors, controlling for other factors such as gender, age, years of service, and program area?

This research question was assessed using a hierarchical linear regression. In this analysis, the dependent variable was UWES employee engagement (total average). The predictor variables were transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidant leadership. The covariates in this analysis were age, gender, years of service, and program area. As three of these covariates were categorical with more than two levels, they needed to be dummy coded. Dummy coding for age resulted in three dichotomous variables with age group 22-34 as the reference category. Dummy coding for years of service resulted in four dichotomous variables with less than one year as the reference category. Dummy coding for program area resulted in four dichotomous variables with ANR as the reference category.

First, the covariates were assessed in step one of the model. Next, the predictors were added in step two. The regression equation for this second model is:

$$Y = b0 + bX1 + bX2 + bX3 + bX4 + bX5 + bX6 + bX7 + bX8 + bX9 +$$
$$bX10 + bX11 + bX12 + bX13 + bX14 + bX15 + \varepsilon$$

where *y* is the dependent variable, *b0* is the intercept, *x1-15* are the explanatory variables,

and ε is the error term *b0* is the intercept. All assumptions were met for the test.

The results of step one of the regression, which included only the covariates, were

not significant ($F(12, 73) = 1.33$, $p = .219$, $R^2 = .180$), indicating that the covariates

collectively do not predict employee engagement. Individual significance was found for

program area HHS ($B = 0.84$, $p = .006$). This indicates that those who worked in Health

and Human Sciences would have 0.84 units more employee engagement when compared

to those who worked in Agricultural and Natural Resources (see Table 7). These results

indicate that further study and investigation are needed to determine what training, or

skills, the Health and Human Sciences professionals have, that is different from that of

the Agriculture and Natural Resources professionals, that may be influencing the

difference in the levels of employee engagement among the two groups.

Table 7
Results of Step One of the Hierarchical Linear Regression with Subscales of Leadership Styles Predicting Employee Engagement while Controlling for Demographic Factors

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p	VIF
Gender (ref: male)	-0.11	0.21	-0.06	-0.51	.610	1.4
Age (ref: 22-32)						
35-44	-0.04	0.31	-0.02	-0.14	.890	2.01
45-54	0.22	0.31	0.12	0.71	.478	2.52
55-54	0.25	0.33	0.16	0.77	.445	3.80
Length of Service (ref: less than one year)						
1-5 years	0.19	0.42	0.11	0.45	.651	4.97
6-10 years	0.01	0.46	0.00	0.02	.986	3.34
11-15 years	-0.27	0.48	-0.13	-0.56	.578	4.92
16+ years	-0.26	0.46	-0.17	-0.57	.570	7.81
Program Area (ref: ANR)						
HHS	0.84	0.29	0.45	2.86	.006	2.17
4H	0.21	0.24	0.13	0.88	.381	1.79
CD	0.46	0.45	0.13	1.01	.318	1.38
Multiple program areas	0.32	0.26	0.17	1.23	.223	1.63

Note. $F(12, 73) = 1.33$, $p = .219$, $R^2 = .180$

In step two of the regression, the leadership styles were added to the model along with the covariates. This did not result in a significant model ($F(15, 70) = 1.54$, $p = .116$, $R^2 = .25$), indicating that collectively, leadership styles do not significantly predict employee engagement when controlling for the covariates. However, examination of the coefficients indicates that when controlling for the covariates, transformational leadership was significantly predictive of employee engagement ($B = 0.59$, $p = .021$). This indicates that every one unit increase in transformational leadership would correspond to a 0.59 unit increase in employee engagement. This suggests that those who exhibit more transformational leadership also exhibit more employee engagement. See Table 8 for the full results of this analysis.

Table 8
Results of Step Two of the Hierarchical Linear Regression with Leadership Styles Predicting Employee Engagement while Controlling for Demographic Factors

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p	VIF
Gender (ref: male)	-0.11	0.21	-0.06	-0.50	.062	1.48
Age (ref: 22-32)						
35-44	-0.20	0.33	-0.10	-0.60	.548	2.33
45-54	0.08	0.32	0.05	0.26	.796	2.87
55-54	0.20	0.33	0.12	0.59	.560	4.03
Length of Service (ref: less than one year)						
1-5 years	0.19	0.43	0.11	0.44	.664	5.37
6-10 years	-0.04	0.46	-0.02	-0.09	.932	3.38
11-15 years	-0.11	0.47	-0.05	-0.22	.823	5.11
16+ years	-0.13	0.46	-0.08	-0.28	.782	8.14
Program Area (ref: ANR)						
HHS	0.59	0.31	0.31	1.92	.059	2.44
4H	0.11	0.24	0.06	0.46	.650	1.86
CD	0.36	0.45	0.10	0.80	.429	1.42
Multiple program areas	0.20	0.26	0.11	0.78	.440	1.71
Transformational	0.59	0.25	0.32	2.36	.021	1.70
Transactional	-0.05	0.21	-0.03	-0.25	.805	1.48
Passive-Avoidant	0.10	0.22	0.06	0.44	.660	1.47

Note. $F(15, 70) = 1.54$, $p = .116$, $R^2 = .25$

Summary

This chapter detailed the results of the statistical analyses performed to answer the research questions. The results for Research Question 1 indicated that respondents had average vigor, high dedication, high absorption, and average to high total average employee engagement. This indicates that participants felt an average amount of energetic investment in their work, a high sense of pride and meaning in their work, and a high sense of the ability to get absorbed into their work. The results for Research Question 2 suggested that there are no significant differences in employee engagement by gender, age, years of service, indicating that participants were similar in their engagement despite demographic differences. There was a small difference between the Agriculture and Natural Resources and the Health and Human Sciences program areas, where the Health and Human Sciences program area directors exhibited greater employee engagement, possibly due to the fact that those in the Health and Human Sciences tend to have a background and vested interested in the field of study. As such, a focus should be made to determine what difference in training the directors of these two program areas might receive.

The results for Research Question 3 revealed that leadership style scores generally were clustered around the norm, with only slight differences. The results also revealed that directors scored the highest on transformational leadership, suggesting that directors are generally more effective or transformational than not. Avolio and Bass (2004) explained that leadership has a range of effectiveness. The ineffective end of the range is represented by passive-avoidant leadership style, and the effective end of the

range is represented by a transformational leadership style. Because directors scored the

highest on transformational leadership, that suggests that directors are generally more

effective.

     The results for Research Question 4 indicated that leadership styles do not differ

significantly by gender, years of service, or program area, but that there are small

differences by age. The youngest group exhibited the highest transactional leadership,

suggesting that young leaders may especially benefit from professional development

centered around providing skill training related to transformational leadership behaviors.

As transformational leadership tends to represent more effective leadership (Avolio &

Bass, 2004), skill training related to transformational leadership behaviors would make

this young group more effective leaders.

     The results for Research Question 5 indicated that while controlling for

demographic factors, only transformational leadership significantly predicts employee

engagement. As such, a focus should be made to build transformational leadership skills

in order to increase employee engagement. These results will be discussed in terms of

the existing literature in Chapter 5, along with the strengths and limitations of the study,

and directions for future research.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

Employee engagement and leadership style are important factors to consider for organizational success, and this is no different for Purdue Extension, a service organization that provides educational services to Indiana communities through a well-educated workforce (Lockwood, 2007). Purdue Extension directors are tasked with leading teams of educators, who provide community-based education at local offices across the state of Indiana (Purdue Extension, 2014). As such, the engagement of the Purdue Extension staff is essential to organizational success, which is contingent upon effective team leaders—who all have various leadership styles. Leadership styles play an important role in employee engagement and overall organizational success (Biro, 2014).

The purpose of this quantitative study was to assess the Purdue Extension county directors' level of engagement and leadership style and to examine the relationship between the two variables to fill a gap in the literature by understanding the relationship between one's own leadership and employee engagement. Developing leadership skills in county extension directors will enable Extension professionals to lead in ways that increase both their own engagement as employees and the engagement of the educators they supervise. This, in turn, will improve the quality of education and, therefore, benefit the residents of Indiana. Additionally, the results of this study provide direction to inform the development of a leadership-training program for Purdue Extension leaders to improve and maintain their leadership and engagement.

Proposed Solution

The proposed solution centers on developing professional development training for Purdue Extension leaders that targets county extension directors, aged 22-35. The goal of the training will be to build and support the transformational leadership skills of county extension directors. Additionally, the researcher plans to enhance other leadership training and resources that focus on the county extension directors related to building strong interpersonal and human development skills. There is a distinct focus on behalf of the researcher to build these transformational leadership skills in particular due to the fact that within this study, transformational leadership style was significantly predictive of employee engagement when controlling for age, gender, years of service, and program area. The focus on the age range of county extension directors, 22-35, is similarly important as the results indicated that this group was more likely to have a stronger transactional leadership style than any other age group.

As Purdue Extension builds the transformational leadership skills of the youngest age group of county extension directors, the personal level of employee engagement should increase. When this occurs, the researcher believes that those skills will be transferable to the other extension educators that work on their team. Within the study, it was determined that employee engagement levels were slightly higher in county extension directors in the program area of health and human sciences than in the area of agriculture and natural resources. These results may be due to the fact that health and human sciences educators tend to have a background in human and behavioral sciences, which suggests that they may have greater training and skills in the area of human development that translates to stronger employee engagement. As such, it is suggested

that county extension directors be provided professional development opportunities that assist in developing soft skills such as teamwork, motivation, and leadership traits, as these are essential to building employee engagement. Essentially, future research should be conducted to determine the connection between leaders and the employees of their teams. Whereas this study examined the employee engagement of leaders, future studies should compare the leadership styles of county extension directors with that of employee engagement within the same Purdue Extension office.

Support for the Solution

Extension directors, in partnership with the Extension Leadership Team, have discussed the need for leadership training programs with a focus on county extension directors with limited leadership skills. In January of each year, Purdue Extension offers a two-day training for all county extension directors. Although this annual training may seem like the best time of the year to implement a leadership training for county extension directors, the data from this research suggest that a leadership training should target those county extension directors who are between the ages of 22 and 35 rather than all the county extension directors attending the January training. Purdue Extension is accustomed to face-to-face trainings, which are typically held in a central location. Technology can also be used for the trainings. Thus, a request should be made for Purdue Extension to offer an additional professional development training that is separate from the traditional training that targets all county extension directors.

The extension director has professional development dollars that are budgeted each year for professional development of extension educators. These funds could be requested to support the cost of bringing the targeted subset of county extension directors

together for training. The researcher will need to request professional development dollars from the extension director and gain the support of the district directors to encourage county extension directors to participate in the professional development opportunity.

Factors and Stakeholders Related to the Solution

Purdue Extension embraces lifelong learning, and as a part of an academic institution, developing staff through continuing education is a priority for Purdue Extension. Extension educators have access to continuing education daily through seminars, webinars, journal clubs, and professional meetings. Thus, a leadership development program would be a welcomed and embraced opportunity for Purdue Extension leaders.

Policies Influencing the Proposed Solution

Each year during the county extension directors' annual performance evaluation, individuals involved in leadership roles within the Purdue Extension system are required to establish professional development goals for themselves. As such, leadership development training would be a beneficial goal for those educators who meet the criteria for this leadership training. During annual evaluations, the direct supervisors of the aforementioned educators can encourage their participation and development of their leadership skills.

Potential Barriers and Obstacles to Proposed Solution

One barrier to the leadership development is the educators' time. County extension directors have multiple demands on their time; thus, adding an additional training to their already busy schedules would be a challenge. In order for this training to

be successful, Extension educators will need to be encouraged by their supervisors, their

program leaders, and the extension director to make their own personal leadership a

priority for themselves and the organization. Once extension educators have completed

the training, extension directors will need to encourage them to practice and utilize their

new skills.

Financial/Budget Issues Related to Proposed Solution

The training of county extension directors to enhance their leadership skills will

cost Purdue Extension resources in the form of staff time, travel, and training expenses.

The researcher will seek permission to present the leadership development program to the

Purdue Extension director and the Extension Leadership Team to gain their support. The

researcher will ask for support of staff time to commit to leadership development,

resources to support travel to face-to-face training, and resources to support a training

facility and meals during training in addition to any supplies, such as books, audio visual

needs, folders, and other miscellaneous training supplies. These types of trainings and

costs are budgeted for each year; thus, the resources are available, and they just need to

be requested and allocated to this specific training. The researcher has already talked

with the Extension director about seeking these resources, and the director has provided a

verbal agreement to provide the resources needed to develop leadership with Purdue

Extension.

Other Issues or Stakeholders Related to Proposed Solution

As a leader, the researcher believes that leadership development is a high priority

and valued skill for others in the organization. Thus, the researcher needs to be aware

that professional development opportunities—such as the proposed solution—may not be

a priority for others. Other leaders will have priorities for the county extension director's time. These priorities include training on content knowledge and focusing specifically on knowledge related directly to delivery of their educational efforts such as agriculture and natural resources, health and human sciences, 4-H youth development, and community development. The researcher will need to share the benefits of enhanced leadership skills and communicate how the leadership skills can work in combination with the content knowledge.

Change Theory

The current study is situated within change theory through the proposed solution as well as the theoretical underpinnings of Social Exchange theory (Cropanzano et al., 2003), Job Demands-Resources theory (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004), and Full Range Leadership theory (Avolio & Bass, 2004). Social Exchange theory contends that when employees form relationships at work, they engage in a social exchange wherein they receive socio-emotional benefits in exchange for efforts that aid in organizational success (Cropanzano et al., 2003). Job Demands-Resources theory contends that different work environments affect employees in different ways, from invigorating them to burning them out (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Finally, Full Range Leadership theory asserts that leaders have a variety of leadership styles, based on their personal philosophies and personalities, which determine interaction with the employees and their engagement (Avolio & Bass, 2004).

The proposed solution builds upon change theory in that by combining the previous theoretical underpinnings, the researcher was able to determine an effective solution in assessing the Purdue Extension county directors' level of engagement and

leadership styles. The researcher proposes to implement a professional development training for Purdue Extension leaders that targets county extension directors, aged 22-35. The training will build and support the transformational leadership skills of county extension directors. At the same time, emphasis should be placed on building strong interpersonal and human development skills by enhancing other leadership training and resources available to the county extension directors. The researcher believes that implementing this change within the organization will benefit not only Purdue Extension and its employees, but also the individuals who interact with Extension educators. By effecting this change within the organization, the researcher will give county extension directors the opportunity to change their leadership styles. This will have an impact on extension educators, affecting their workplace and contributing to the social exchange inherent within the workplace. This social exchange, in turn, affects the job demands of extension educators, who are more likely to burn out when poor leadership is on display within the organization.

Implementation of the Proposed Solution

The researcher plans to implement a leadership development program for Purdue Extension county extension directors. The researcher will be the lead trainer for the training. Training materials and content will include Full Range Leadership Development materials. Transformational leadership, a key facet of Full Range Leadership Development that focuses on genuine motivation and loyalty building, is included within this. Transformational leadership differs from both transactional leadership, which is based on contingent rewards, and laissez-faire leadership, which is a

passive approach to leadership. The training will involve a combination of face-to-face and online learning.

Leader's Role in Implementing Proposed Solution

The researcher will follow the Cafferella model for program planning as she develops the training. The goal of the leadership-development training is to equip county extension directors with the transformational leadership skills needed to effectively lead a county extension office team to deliver high impact educational programs in their communities. The training leader will need to effectively communicate the goal of the training, the expected outcomes, and the logistics related to implementation of the training to the participants and the Extension leadership team. The leader will need to plan, implement, and evaluate the training.

Building Support for the Proposed Solution

After seeking support from the Extension director and the Extension leadership team, the leader will need to cultivate organizational support by establishing interest and excitement about leadership development. Each of the county extension directors took the leadership survey and received a report with feedback. The proposed solution would build on their findings from their personal survey. In the long term, leaders need to promote an organizational culture that embraces leadership development. This can be accomplished by using the first set of county extension directors that go through the training as champions for this professional development.

Additional Considerations for Implementation and Assessment

Once the training is developed and implemented, the leader will need to assess its effectiveness using a process evaluation and using the MLQ survey tool to reevaluate his

or her leadership style. The process evaluation will be used to assess the process of the training and the MLQ will be used to assess the leadership style of the participant. The results of the evaluations will be used to make changes, adjustments, and improvements to the training before a second implementation.

Global/External Implications for the Organization

As with any organization, there are always external factors to consider. For a public institution those external factors could include changes in priorities, cuts in funds, reductions in staff, and reductions in travel resources. The external factors could also result in positive implications, such as additional partnerships, great resources, more staff, and new opportunities as a result of strong leadership skills.

Implications

Practical Implications

This research has served as a training and development needs assessment for the Purdue Extension county extension directors. The findings from this dissertation will contribute to developing the leaders within Purdue Extension who, in turn, may have an impact on the national land-grant system. With the ever-changing workforce, a leadership development program and strategy to improve leadership skills and employee engagement will benefit the county extension directors at Purdue Extension and other leaders across the country that work within a cooperative extension system.

As county extension directors and other leaders within Purdue Extension and other land grant universities become stronger, communities throughout the nation will benefit from the community-based education initiatives that Cooperative Extension offers. The author plans to share the findings of this research with staff development

professionals within Cooperative Extension nationwide. The author plans to submit an abstract for several Cooperative Extension conferences and publish this research in Cooperative Extension journals.

Implications for Future Research

Within the current study, the researcher examined the leadership style of the county extension director from a self only perspective. Future researchers should explore the leadership style of the county extension directors from the perspective of others in the organization, such as their supervisors, their subordinates, and their co-workers. Within this study, the researcher examined the employee engagement of leaders. Further research should be done to compare the leadership styles of county extension directors with that of employee engagement within the same Purdue Extension office. It would also be interesting to learn if these results are consistent with other county extension directors at other land-grant universities. Conducting the same study at another university and comparing the results could help inform a greater leadership development that focused on regional or national leadership within the cooperative Extension system.

Implications for Leadership Theory and Practice

As the Associate Director of Purdue Extension, the author must demand high standards for herself as well as encourage others to "devote themselves to excellence" (Lowney, 2003, p. 91). Leaders must role model the behaviors they want in an organization. Leaders involved in implementing leadership theory and researching informed solutions to challenging real world problems need to remember that change is difficult and takes time. Leadership matters in organizational change, but leaders must

remain flexible and adaptable, because regardless of how much planning occurs, rarely does anything turn out as planned (Burke, 2011).

Summary of the Study

Within the study, it was found that the levels of employee engagement among Purdue Extension county extension directors were average, bordering on high, and that these levels of engagement did not differ when demographics, such as gender, age, and years of service, were taken into account. Additionally, it was found that participants scored higher than the norm for transformational leadership styles and lower than the norm for transactional leadership styles. Finally, the researcher discovered that there were no significant differences in transformational and passive-avoidant leadership by demographic factors, such as gender, age, years of service, and program area; however, there was a significant difference in transactional leadership among the county extension directors aged 22-35. Therefore, the researcher proposes to implement a professional development program specifically designed for county extension directors ages 22 - 35 that enables participants to reach their greatest potential in the Purdue Extension organization.

The goals of the professional development program are to enhance the knowledge and skills needed to develop as a strong leader in Purdue Extension and to offer a forum for Extension professionals to network and converse with their peers about leadership opportunities that have an impact on their personal and professional lives. Purdue Extension should commit attention and resources to the new possibilities through the development and implementation of the proposed county extension director professional development program. This will ensure that Purdue Extension has professionals trained

and ready to assume and maintain leadership roles well into the future. It will also provide encouragement to these leaders as they realize that Purdue Extension is investing in their future career. According to Caffarella and Daffron (2013), "changes in individuals, organizations, and the wider community are the driving force and one of the underlying themes that link together all types of education and training programs for adults" (p. 21). Purdue Extension is committed to professional development for all extension professionals; growth and innovation of Purdue Extension; and improving the lives of individuals, families, and communities.

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Appendix A

Demographic Questions

Please check the appropriate box for each of the following questions:

1.   Gender: □ Male   □ Female

2.   Age: □ 22-34,   □ 35-44,   □ 45-54,   □ 54- 64,   □ 65 and over

3.   Length of service to Purdue Extension: □ Less than 1 year,   □ 1-5 years,   □ 6-10 years,   □ 11-15 years,   □16+years

4.   Program Area: □ ANR, □ HHS, □ 4-H, □ CD, □ ANR/4-H, □ HHS/4-H, □ HHS/ANR

Appendix B

Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES)

The following 17 statements are about how you feel at work. Please read each statement carefully and decide if you ever feel this way about your job. Indicate how often you feel this way (from 0= Never to 6= Every day).

Please write the number in the space before each sentence that best describes how frequently you feel the following:

1. _____ At my work, I feel bursting with energy.

2. _____ I find the work that I do full of meaning and purpose.

3. _____ Time flies when I'm working.

4. _____ At my job, I feel strong and vigorous.

5. _____ I am enthusiastic about my job.

6. _____ When I am working, I forget everything else around me.

7. _____ My job inspires me.

8. _____ When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work.

9. _____ I feel happy when I am working intensely.

10. _____ I am proud of the work that I do.

11. _____ I am deeply involved in my work.

12. _____ I can continue working for very long periods at a time.

13. _____To me, my job is challenging.

14. _____I get carried away when I'm working.

15. _____At my job, I am very resistant, mentally.

16. _____It is difficult to detach myself from my job.

17. _____At my work I never give up, even when things do not go well.

Appendix C

Email to Participants

Dear Purdue Extension County Extension Director:

We are conducting research on employee engagement and leadership style within Purdue Extension. The purpose of this study is to assess if there is a relationship between employee engagement and leadership style. The intent of the study is to inform the development of a leadership-training program for Purdue Extension county extension directors to improve and maintain employee engagement. We are seeking your cooperation and 15-20 minutes of your time to fill out the survey found in the link below. The study requires that you be a county extension director of Purdue Extension.

Your participation is voluntary, and there are no penalties for refusal to complete the survey. Participation in the survey will not affect your employment status in any way. No names should be put on the survey in order to ensure confidentiality. Once you complete the on-line survey you will have access to an individual report that provides feedback on how you perceive the frequency of leadership behaviors you exhibit, as well as the leadership behaviors you believe you should be exhibiting. Each report includes a leader's workbook. Only you will have access to your individualized report.

If you have any question or concerns regarding this research, feel free to contact Angie Abbott at (765) 496-8252 or abbottar@purdue.edu. We appreciate your time and willingness to help with this survey.

Please click here to complete the survey. (Insert link to survey).

Sincerely,

Angie Abbott   Jason Henderson
Doctoral Candidate   Director of Purdue Extension
(765) 496-8252   (765) 494-8489
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