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## Are Transformational Directors Required for Satisfied Agents?

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**Abstract:** The purpose of the study reported here was to determine if a correlation existed between directors' leadership style and agents' job satisfaction. A usable return rate of 112 (60.8%) Tennessee agents was achieved. The instrument included a demographic assessment, the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire 5X, and the Mohrman-Cooke-Mohrman Job Satisfaction Survey. Data was aggregated across the state. While the majority of directors were perceived as laissez-faire (N = 64, 73.6%), the majority of agents indicated high job satisfaction (N=61, 56.5%). Cross tabulation of this association indicates that transformational directors have more highly satisfied agents than other styles.

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### Introduction

In uncertain economic times, the significance of effective leadership is more important than ever. Effective leadership of Extension offices not only maintains programming, assessment, and accountability requirements, but also improves upon these as directors maximize their influence through satisfied employees. Historically, successful agents were promoted to county leadership positions. But success in the former position was not always adequate preparation for the other (Rudd, 2001). Training for county leaders has addressed management skills but lacked attention to leadership development (Rudd, 2001).

More recently, a broad spectrum of concerns for attracting, motivating, and retaining county Extension agents have recently been determined (Kroth & Peutz, 2010). While researchers have assumed that job-related components impact a person's job satisfaction (Skalli, Theodossioub, & Vasileioua, 2008), others found that organizational factors such as leadership have been found to be more influential than demographic factors in determining satisfaction (Coomber & Barriball, 2007).

Greater understanding of the relationship between county Extension director's leadership style and county Extension agent's job satisfaction can assist Extension administrators in developing leadership training and county Extension director in-service training. It can also be useful to inform decisions affecting county Extension agent job satisfaction, identify county Extension director selection criteria, and write position descriptions to most accurately reflect job requirements.

Various aspects of leadership's influence on organizations and individuals have been studied. These influences include employee satisfaction, motivation, and performance (House, 1971). Leadership style is an approach that emphasizes behaviors of the leader. The Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ-5X)

(Avolio, Bass, Walumbwa, & Zhu, 2004) was developed based upon Burns' and Bass' work on transactional, transformational, and laissez-faire leadership styles. Early leadership behavior studies focused on the contractual association between a superior and subordinate for either constructive or corrective transactions. This approach seemed to motivate employees to perform as expected and is called transactional leadership. Burns (1978) contrasted transactional and transformational leadership. He deemed transformational leaders as those who engaged followers and moved them to greater than expected effort. Bass (1985) proposed that these two leadership styles were points on a continuum and proposed that transformational leadership augmented the effects of transactional leadership toward increased efforts as well as the satisfaction and effectiveness of subordinates (Bass, 1985).

Herzberg's (1986) motivation-hygiene theory of job attitudes suggested factors that produce job satisfaction (motivation) were unlike factors leading to job dissatisfaction (hygiene). Motivational factors included achievement, recognition for achievement, the work itself, responsibility, and growth or advancement. Examples of hygiene factors are company policy and administration, supervision, relationship with supervisor, and work conditions. The Mohrman-Cooke-Mohrman Job Satisfaction Survey (MCMJSS) assessed self-perceived intrinsic, extrinsic, and general satisfaction (Mohrman, Cooke, Mohrman, Duncan, & Zaltman, 1977) based on Herzberg's (1986) theory.

Studies of job satisfaction of Extension agents have found medium to high satisfaction (Ezell, 2003; Mallilo, 1990; Schmiesing, Safrit, & Gliem, 2003). Data analyzed from a study on reasons for voluntary resignation of Extension agents indicated that the reasons were both lack of job satisfaction and job dissatisfaction according to Herzberg's theory (Strong & Harder, 2009). Among the maintenance issues were salary, stress, abnormal work hours, and work and family balance. In numerous studies, job satisfaction could be explained by at least one demographic descriptor, such as age, work experience, current subject matter responsibility, gender, educational attainment, and race/ethnic background (Long & Swortzel, 2007; Nestor & Leary, 2000; Purcell, 2003; Schroder, 2008; Smerek & Peterson, 2007; Villard & Earnest, 2006).

## Methods and Procedures

The purpose of the study reported here was to determine if there was a correlation between the perceived leadership style of the county Extension directors and the level of job satisfaction indicated by the Extension agents that they supervise. An additional purpose was to determine if job satisfaction could be explained by demographics of the respondents. The following research questions were addressed:

1. Is there a correlation between perceived leadership style of county Extension directors and county Extension agents' job satisfaction?
2. Is job satisfaction explained by each agent's age, gender, ethnic background, educational background, current subject matter responsibility, tenure of position, prior profession, and institutional affiliation?

The instrument used to address these questions included three components: eight demographic questions, the MLQ-5X (Avolio et al., 2004), and the MCMJSS (Mohrman et al., 1977). The demographic questions related to professional and personal characteristics to provide a profile of the county Extension agents participating in the research: age categorized by generational delineation, gender, ethnic background, educational background of bachelor's/master's/doctoral degrees, current subject matter responsibility (4-H youth development, agriculture and natural resources, family and consumer sciences, and split position), tenure of position (10 years and less, 11 to 20 years, and 21 years and more), prior profession (business, education, industry, Extension in another state, other, or Extension as a first profession), and institutional affiliation with Tennessee State University or The University of Tennessee.

The MLQ-5X included 36 statements to assess the frequency or degree of leadership behaviors observed in the target leader. The nine behaviors are idealized influence-attributed (IIA), idealized influence-behaviors (IIB), inspirational motivation (IM), intellectual stimulation (IS), individualized consideration (IC), contingent reward (CR), management-by-exception passive (MBEP), management-by-exception active (MBEA), and laissez-faire (LF). Research participants assessed the statements using a 5-point Likert scale (0 = never, 1 = once in awhile, 2 = sometimes, 3 = fairly often, and 4 = frequently, if not always) indicating how often or to what extent they felt the director exhibited the behavior.

The MCMJSS consisted of eight items to assess intrinsic and extrinsic job satisfaction. Intrinsic involves self-esteem/self-respect, personal growth and development, achievement, and expectations. Extrinsic is assessed on respect and fair treatment; being kept informed; amount of supervision by immediate supervisor; and opportunities to participate in goals, methods, and procedures of the organization. A six-point Likert scale (1 = lowest job satisfaction, 6 = highest job satisfaction) was used by the research participants. Overall job satisfaction scores could range from 8 to 48.

County Extension agents who worked full time for The University of Tennessee (N = 160) or Tennessee State University (N = 25) and had not had a change in county Extension director in the 12 months prior to the survey administration received an email message from the researcher. This email informed potential participants of the voluntary and informed consent nature of the study. The link for accessing the online instrument at SurveyMonkey.com was also provided. Participants had 2 weeks from the initial researcher electronic mail to respond. Two follow-up reminders were sent to all potential participants. When the survey closed, individual responses were saved in Microsoft Word. Data was loaded into Microsoft Excel and prepared for analysis in Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), Version 17.0.

Responses for the leadership behaviors were scored using the key provided by the MLQ developers. Scores were summed and averaged, and then assigned a percentile according to a chart provided by the MLQ developers (Avolio et al., 2004). Leadership styles were categorized by selecting the style with the highest percentile. Leadership styles were dummy coded as follows: transformational = 0, transactional = 1, and laissez-faire = 2.

For the first research question, a Cramer's V correlation coefficient was calculated to measure the association between county directors' leadership style as categorized by the researcher and overall job satisfaction of county agents as categorized by the researcher. An  $\hat{\alpha}$  level of .05 was used to determine significance. Prior to this calculation, the researcher categorized the county Extension agents' job satisfaction using the composite score that could range from 8 to 48. Categories were based on the following: 8 to 21.5 were considered "low satisfaction"; 21.6 to 34.5 were considered "medium satisfaction"; and 34.6 to 48 were considered "high satisfaction." Dummy coding was used as follows: low = 0, medium = 1, and high = 2.

For the second research question, simultaneous multiple linear regression was used to determine if job satisfaction could be explained by any of the variables, and an  $\hat{\alpha}$  level of .05 was used to determine significance.

There were several potential limitations of the study reported here. Results were applicable only to Extension agents in Tennessee at one point in time. Demographic variables not assessed could provide other influences on perceptions of both leadership style and job satisfaction. Proper representation among certain demographic groups could not be ensured. Other limitations related to the survey instruments, including the use of the self-report nature of the job satisfaction and the use of a single rater's perceptions of leadership behaviors being used to categorize target leaders.

## Results

Of the 115 (62.5%) surveys that were returned, 112 (60.8%) were usable. Results of the demographic questions indicated that the following.

- Extension was the first professional career (n = 38, 33.0%) of more respondents than for the other categories.
- 4-H Youth Development (n = 50, 44.2%) was indicated by more respondents as their current subject matter responsibility.
- The majority of respondents had a master's or doctoral degree (n = 73, 64.6%).
- Female was the majority gender of the respondents (n = 81, 71.7%).
- The predominant race or ethnic background was white, non-Hispanic (n = 102, 92.7%).
- The University of Tennessee was the primary employer (n = 103, 91.2%).
- For tenure of Extension, the two groups "10 years and less" (n = 47, 42.3%) and "11 to 20 years" (n = 45, 40.5%) were similar.
- Respondents primarily represented generation X (those born from 1965 to 1979) (n=46, 41.4%).
- The overall job satisfaction scores were categorized as being low (N=5, 4.6%), medium (N=42, 38.9%), or high satisfaction (N=61, 56.5%).
- Respondents' leadership behavior scores placed their Extension director into one of the three categories: transformational (N = 16, 18.4%), transactional (N = 7, 8.0%), and laissez-faire (N = 64, 73.6%).
- A Cramer's V correlation (V = .250, p = .033) between Extension directors' leadership style and Extension agents' job satisfaction was found.
- Correlations between job satisfaction and two demographic variables were also found. The first was tenure of Extension work of "10 or less years," which was negative. This meant that increases in job satisfaction could be explained by those working 11 or more years (p=.005). One additional variable might be included in a regression equation because the significance was borderline. This was the demographic variable related to a profession prior to Extension of "none" that was close to

significance (p=.060). Again, this was negative, which meant that the other variables related to profession prior to Extension could potentially be used to explain increases in job satisfaction.

Table 1 shows the cross tabulation results for job satisfaction and leadership style along with the percentage by leadership style.

**Table 1.**  
Cross Tabulation of Job Satisfaction and Leadership Styles

	<b>Low Job Satisfaction N (%)</b>	<b>Medium Job Satisfaction N (%)</b>	<b>High Job Satisfaction N (%)</b>
Laissez-Faire Style	4 (6.35%)	30 (47.62%)	29 (46.03%)
Transactional Style	0 (0.00%)	4 (66.67%)	2 (33.33%)
Transformational Style	1 (6.67%)	0 (0.00%)	13 (86.67%)

## Implications and Recommendations

The crosstabulation of levels of job satisfaction and leadership styles shows that transformational leaders are more likely than transactional and laissez-faire leaders to have employees with high job satisfaction. In Tennessee, the high level of satisfaction of the majority of agents is despite the fact that they perceived their directors to be laissez-faire according to the MLQ-5X assessment tool.

Coupling impending director retirements and budgetary constraints that are likely to continue, in-service training for both current and potential future Extension directors is warranted to increase awareness of the association between certain of their behaviors and outcomes of those behaviors. This provides a twofold benefit: 1) potential directors gain skills for the future and 2) the skills gained by current directors could create work environments with more satisfied and productive employees. Leadership development and other types of in-service training have created significant increases in understanding and competency of Extension leaders who have participated in training (Ladewig & Rohs, 2000). The benefits to such training can include a more satisfied and effective Extension workforce that is able to meet the needs of constituents into the next century.

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