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The relationship between leadership preference of county level personnel within University of Missouri Extension and their level of employee engagement

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The relationship between leadership preference of county level personnel within University of
Missouri Extension and their level of employee engagement

By

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A Dissertation
Submitted to the Faculty of
Mississippi State University
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in Agriculture Science
in the School of Human Sciences

Mississippi State, Mississippi

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2022

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The purpose of this study was to describe the perceived leadership style of the University of Missouri Extension Service county staff and their level of engagement and study the relationship between variables. Administrators with University of Missouri Extension Service can utilize this information to better serve Extension Staff and ultimately people throughout the state of Missouri.

The Vannsimpco Leadership Survey was used to measure the perceived leadership style of county level staff. The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) was used to measure work engagement on three constructs: vigor, absorption, and dedication engagement. Demographic characterizes of county level staff was also collected. An online survey utilizing Qualtrics achieved a 44% response rate (N = 448).

University of Missouri Extension county-level staff were female working in the Youth and Family discipline. These individuals were between 51 and 60 years of age and had worked for University of Missouri Extension for less than five years. Participants reported democratic leadership as the most perceived leadership style while laissez-faire leadership was the least perceived style. Autocratic and autocratic-transformational leadership was significantly impacted

by length of service with the Extension service. Participants aged between 41-50 years old showed increased democratic-transformational leadership perceptions. Additionally, an increase in length of service resulted in a decrease in transformational leadership. Research found that county level staff maintained strong levels of engagement while performing their duties. Also, research found there were no significant relationships between perceived leadership styles and levels of work engagement.

The implications from this study include potential in-service trainings to provide county Engagement Specialists with approaches to improve leadership traits and employee engagement. The themes gained from this research may offer definitions of leadership and employee engagement which could be utilized in future research.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this document, in its entirety, to my father, William Fagan Morris.

Luke 15:11–32

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I would like to thank my graduate committee: Dr. Jason Barrett, Dr. Michael Newman, Dr. Kirk Swortzel and Dr. Paula Threadgill for their time and commitment. I appreciate them always being there for me during my progression of this academic continuance. I want to specifically thank Dr. Gary B Jackson for his leadership and mentoring.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The success of an organization is determined by the people who are involved in it. Even with technological advancements, an improving educational system, and the relative sizes of organizations, the ultimate success of any organization is driven by the organization's workforce actively functioning to serve its clientele (Tamunomiebi & Ehior, 2019). Those who hold leadership positions within organizations are attracted to employee commitment as a means to obtaining success.

Organizational success is determined by the level of engagement within an organization (Lockwood, 2007). Kahn (1990) stated employee engagement is the connection of participants of an institution with their roles related to work. Through engagement, these participants display emotional, cognitive, and physical abilities during the function of their responsibilities. Christian, et al. (2011) showed that employee engagement aids leadership in fostering or maintaining a competitive environment.

Success for Extension organizations, such as University of Missouri Extension, is based upon workforce knowledge and engagement by its agents and staff (King & Boehlje, 2013). Abbott (2017), covering multiple disciplines within Extension, found that directors involved in human sciences were prone to exhibit higher levels of engagement compared to county directors involved in agriculture. The application of research-based knowledge through engagement is an essential core of Extension operations (King & Boehlje, 2013).

Extension professionals and specialists with University of Missouri Extension have been active in providing research-based programming to improve the quality of life to residents in all 114 Missouri counties. As expressed in their mission statement, “Through innovations and ideals, Extension has improved the lives of all Missourians through the focus of education, economic opportunities, as well as health” (University of Missouri Extension [UMES], 2021). Extension personnel are partnered with University of Missouri (UM) faculty, commonly referred to as specialists, and local citizens to diagnose and evaluate needs within each community. Utilizing data acquired through needs assessments, Extension personnel in the field connect with educators and specialists on campus to develop educational programs and distribute research-based information. From research to delivery, leadership throughout Extension serves as a conduit for successful programming. Leaders influence success through examples of openness, ethics, inspiration and enabling others to be successful (Cetron & Thomas, 1982).

The University of Missouri Extension is one arm of the tripartite mission of the land-grant university system, that also includes research and teaching. Through Extension, educational content is accessible to citizens within the state to progress (Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities [APLU], 2012). Access to such content is a measure of Extension’s success, and, according to Biro (2014), an institution’s success is directly correlated to employee engagement and the impact of the institution’s leadership. Through engagement, employees positively impact the value that education from the University of Missouri Extension contributes to the state. Engagement provides an encouraging and fulfilling work association through absorption, dedication, and vigor (Schaufeli, et al., 2002). Typically, Extension agents exhibit reduced levels of vigor and absorption compared to larger levels of dedication in the scope of their occupation (Abbott, 2017).

Understanding the connection individual leadership styles and employee engagement can enhance Extension professionals' leadership ability through individual engagement as well as the engagement of those they supervise. In doing so, the value of education will increase as people feel empowered to effect change, improving the lives of Missourians as they take responsibility for their own success. The continued development of services provided by the University of Missouri Extension may be improved through additional efforts to engage Extension personnel in Extension's mission.

This research targeted current and future leaders of University of Missouri Extension to preserve and enhance engagement and leadership. Though employee engagement has been researched in various workforces including hospitals and health care institutions, schools, and business and financial institutions (Hakanen, et al., 2006; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004), research related to levels of employee engagement for Extension professionals is limited. Since Extension's primary mission is engagement, this research on leadership and employee engagement can contribute to that literature.

Statement of the Problem

The specific problem facing University of Missouri Extension county engagement specialists and staff is that, in addition to changes in programming needs, there is reduced funding at the federal, state, and local levels (Franz, et al., 2014; Brown, et al., 2006). Due to this decrease in funding, the demand for strong leadership and engagement among county engagement specialists and staff is increasing. Leadership has always been integral in the evolution of Extension. Competent leadership is essential as the demand for Extension resources grow while budgets constrict.

Extension has provided educational content and support to groups and individuals through the traditional model for outreach. Educational programs are developed and approved at the state level and are delivered at the regional or district levels, eventually reaching the county level. In some areas, specialists are placed within communities to deliver needed programming. As Extension programming has expanded, so has the need for more leadership skills and positive engagement. Originally, Extension programming was geared toward agriculture and homemaking programs, with the majority of the population residing in rural areas (West et al., 2009). As the focus of Extension was agriculture a century ago, 42 percent of the population was laboring in the farming segment (West et al., & 2009). That is no longer the case.

Extension has undergone unprecedented transformation during the past 100 years. However, the general problem encountered throughout this transformation is for Extension to meet the needs of its stakeholders (Paxton, et al., 1993). Furthermore, there have been numerous times where Extension has operated with tighter budgets while at the same time developing programs to coincide with state and national concerns. While strong leadership has enabled some land grant universities to be more successful in adapting to these challenges than others, research has shown engagement to be just as important as leadership (Babakus et al., 2017). Work engagement has been revealed to impact turnover rates for some organizations (Babakus et al., 2017). While both leadership and engagement are important in all organizations, there is little research into the University of Missouri Extension's level of employee engagement and leadership.

Because Extension agents are also referred to as change agents, Extension has a foundation of evolving to accept new demands (Seevers & Graham, 2012). Extension continues to deliver research-based information through both state and local offices as well as various

online and social media platforms (Bull, et al., 2004). Through the evolution of programming, stakeholders have expanded to include non-rural clientele. Due to this need, those in Extension leadership roles have focused more programs to reach these metropolitan audiences, creating the need for strong work engagement. This leadership is accomplished through programming in the areas of agriculture and natural resources and community development as well as 4-H and family and consumer sciences (FCS) (Diekmann, et al., 2016).

The University of Missouri, through the Extension Service, positively impacts the well-being for all Missourians. Specifically, University of Missouri Extension:

- Provides research and knowledge in a practical and applicable way
- Utilizes the latest technology and teaching techniques to serve clients
- Develops and use volunteers to help disseminate programs and information
- Engages with communities, participants, and stakeholders (UMES, 2021)

As needs continue to evolve, so will the leaders in Extension.

Developing methods to increase engagement is just as important as leadership. This evolution can only be accomplished through knowledge of the present level of work engagement. Originally, funding for Extension initiated from the Smith-Lever Act of 1914. Additionally, each state provides further resources and funding through land-grant institutions (U.S. Department of Agriculture [USDA], 2014).

Currently, the specific problem is that Extension is funded from the federal and state levels through the Morrill Act of 1862, the Hatch Act of 1887 and the Smith Lever Act of 1914, as well as from county governments and outside sources, such as grants, matching funds and partnerships. Though external funds constitute a major resource to supplement diminishing federal funding efforts to improve programming, especially that which supports leadership

development and engagement for Extension staff (Bennett & Savani, 2011), it is still not enough. To compensate for reductions in budgets, leaders in program areas of Cooperative Extension across America have made efforts to improve programming.

Background of the Problem

Extension is the largest public education system outside of the formal classroom (Bowling & Brahm, 2002). Initially, land-grant universities were formed with the Morrill Act of 1862 to produce instruction in agriculture and mechanical arts for the common person. Later, in 1887, agricultural experiment stations were started with the Hatch Act, generating research-based information to use when teaching students at the land-grant colleges. With the passage of the Smith-Lever Act of 1914, a third role was added to land-grant universities, adding the task of Extension and outreach for agriculture, the mechanical arts, and home economics. This addition included not only those enrolled in higher education, but farmers and homemakers as well (Franz et al., 2010).

The additional funding provided by the federal government for the Smith Lever Act of 1914 was slated for state curricula to be implemented to improve society through education (Collins, 2015). Extension disseminates unbiased researched based educational content through a means where clientele can learn (Rader, 2012). This transfer of information is conducted through meetings, phone conversations, print, and farm and home visits, as well as other sources. Though Extension has not always been successful with initially reaching clientele, Extension has continually evolved, adopting new methods to reach diverse audiences (Jones & Garforth, 1997). Farmers, homemakers, youth, and the general public depend on researched educational content to improve their daily lives (Angima & Stokes, 2019).

Extension programs have aided in transforming agrarian societies during times of need through educational content derived from experiment stations. This knowledge was provided to farmers throughout each state collectively and individually (Gould & Ham, 2002). Researched content from Extension is widely utilized without debate, but history in Extension shows that was not always the standard. During the origination of Extension, there was a lack of organizing in engagement of stake holders (Peters, 2002), which led to trust issues between those who needed education in agriculture and those who provided it (Barnes & Haynes, 2006).

Two decades ago, the Kellogg Commission released a report stating that land-grant institutions must evolve its means of dispensing research-based information (Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Institutions, 1999). This study documented the need for Extension to evolve into a true engagement entity (Peters, 2002). It is widely understood that County Extension Directors' (CED) understanding of programming is essential for the success of Extension (Jayaratne, et al., 2010). However, just as challenges exist with engagement, many lack the leadership ability to effectively administer programming (Sanders, 2014).

Leadership is recognized as an individual's ability to address unforeseen situations, adjust to situations, and effect change while leading others (McKee, et al., 2016). Those in leadership roles are continually looking forward. Leaders envision what teamwork can accomplish. They are confident about the future and believe in organizational success. However, goals viewed only by leaders are not enough to move organizations forward.

While there does not exist a simple resolution to promote employee engagement covering all organizations (Lockwood, 2007), leaders have to convey their visions and communicate their thoughts to those they are leading. In doing so, others will have the opportunity to receive and

adopt the changes needed to implement those visions. Programs related to developing leadership are a means to improve skills addressing unanticipated issues and initiating change thus improving engagement of employees. These programs can also positively impact the process of leading others (McKee, et al., 2016).

Leadership programs for Extension employees are vital for Extension personnel to be successful. Those who serve in leadership roles in Extension are often responsible for program implementation, budgets, policy making, and stakeholder relations. They also serve as the liaison between agents and Extension administration (Sanders, 2014). Additionally, due to the retirements of baby boomers, many of whom held long standing leadership roles, there is an even stronger need of leadership development. This transition is highlighted by the need for leadership training for new employees (Moore & Rudd, 2004). Due to Extension's model of promoting from within, scheduling in leadership programs can be of positive benefit (Jayaratne, et al., 2010).

Work engagement plays a significant force in both the quality and quantity of organizational work. However, Lavigna (2013) stated that employee engagement in both the public and private sector was low nationally. Furthermore, only 29% of state employees were engaged compared to 44% of those employed by the federal government (Lavigna, 2013). However, Extension is unique in that funding sources come from federal, state, and local sources. One clear consequence of low work engagement is higher turnover among employees (Schaufeli et al., 2004) with burnout being the foremost cause for employee loss (Bakker et al., 2008).

There is an understanding that the competency and skill set of Extension personnel is of great importance for Extension leaders (Jayaratne, et al., 2010). However, few in leadership roles

possess the competency required to be successful (Sanders, 2014). Numerous issues abound regarding the success of designed and implemented programming. Previous research has shown that some Extension personnel have not had support in their leadership roles which creates problems for employee engagement (Nistler; et al., 2011). Research has also shown that reduced funding has decreased professional development in this area (Narine et al., 2019b). Additionally for agents, leadership development has to compete with other programming deemed more important (Campbell, et al., 2004). This combination of factors has negatively impacted the skill sets related to leadership.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to determine the leadership style preference of the University of Missouri Extension Service county Extension staff and their level of employee engagement and to describe the relationship between both variables. To further understand employees' leadership style preference and employee engagement in University of Missouri Extension, the following questions were asked:

1. What was the leadership style preference of county level personnel (engagement specialists, support staff, field specialists) within University of Missouri Extension?
2. What was the relationship between the leadership style preference of county-level personnel within University of Missouri Extension and the following demographic characteristics: age, gender, number of years with Extension, and programmatic area?
3. What levels of engagement existed among county-level personnel within University of Missouri Extension?

4. What was the relationship between the levels of engagement of county-level personnel with University of Missouri Extension and the following demographic characteristics: age, gender, and years with Extension?
5. What was the relationship between leadership style preference and level of engagement of county-level personnel with University of Missouri Extension?

Significance of the Study

Not much is known about employee engagement and perceived leadership style of University of Missouri Extension county engagement specialists and staff, and the impact that leadership and engagement have on being a successful county Extension office, such as longevity of all specialists and office staff. Through this study, Extension was able to learn more and gain valuable insight on perceived leadership styles and levels of engagement as it related to county-level extension positions. This study provided useful knowledge and new insights related to both leadership traits and styles, which will enhance the level of employee engagement from county-level personnel. Additionally, the results of this research will allow for improvement of future professional development opportunities for county-level personnel in leadership learning.

This study will have potential applications for other areas of Extension, not with just county-level personnel. Extension administrators will be able to utilize the findings of this study to increase leadership and engagement capabilities for Extension personnel. Further, it will serve as an effective means to improve leadership of other Extension personnel through resource development.

Definition of Terms

Availability: Includes three necessary resources, physical, psychological and emotional (Kahn, 1990).

Cooperative Extension: Consisting of over 100 land-grant institutions in the United States providing research-based information through education and application to all citizens (United States Department of Agriculture, n.d.).

County Extension Agent: Extension engagement personnel in the University of Missouri Extension Service serving at the county level engaged in research-based programming in a specific focus area such as agriculture and environment, youth and family, health and safety, and business and community, etc. (UMES, 2021).

County Engagement Specialist (CES): Supervisor of personnel in each county office. Typically, the CES focuses on a program area such as agriculture, 4-H, family and consumer sciences and resource development, etc. The CES also manage administrative functions such as training, supervising and leading the entire Extension program on the county level including budgets and public relations as well as staff (UF/IFAS Extension, 2020b).

Land-Grant University: University so named due to land scripted from the federal government to be sold with the money to be utilized as an endowment. The Morrill Act of 1862 established these universities for education in agriculture and the mechanical arts (The Association of Public Land Grant Universities and Colleges, 2016).

Leadership: When followers are being influenced by those in leadership roles who promote real changes in order to benefit both (Rost & Burns, 1991).

Meaningfulness: When employees have the belief that their production adds both value and significance to the organization (Shuck et al., 2011).

University of Missouri Extension (UME): The University of Missouri, through UM Extension, provides ideas and innovations which improves lives, businesses and people through problem solving Missouri's challenges based upon opportunities related to economics, education and health (UMES, 2021).

Transformational Leadership: When those in position of leadership empower others to look past self-benefits to accomplish group goals (Bass, 1990a).

Vigor: Increased amounts of energy and mental resilience during work which endears one to place energy into work performance and persevere when faced with complications (Leiter & Baker, 2010).

Work Engagement: Mentality that work is both positive and fulfilling and is categorized with dedication, absorption, and vigor (Schuafaeli et al, 2006).

Assumptions

This research assumed that all participants are completely forthright and honest with their answers and that those answers correctly reflected their professional views. The survey questions used in this study were standardized from the Vannsimpco Leadership Survey (VLS) and thus, personal influence of researcher and participants were minimized.

Limitations

- 1) This study was limited to only County Engagement Specialists, field specialists and county support staff and thus, excluded other populations of Extension housed on campus.
- 2) The responses were voluntary and were not returned by all 114 CES's or interims, field specialists or county support staff.

- 3) The responses were gathered solely from county staff.
- 4) The answers were based upon individual perceptions.
- 5) Due to the nature of the subject of engagement, it was hypothetical that CES's already lacking engagement could refrain from completing the survey instruments thus causing the results to become skewed. This would be a non-response bias.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

This chapter provides a review of the pertinent literature concerning leadership and engagement. The literature review offers leadership theories of the trait approach, the behavioral approach, the power influence approach, the situational approach, and the integrative approach. This literature review also provides definitions associated with leadership styles and engagement as well as an analysis related to engagement and demographics. Additionally, this chapter evaluates relevant literature which has been conducted specifically for the use of Extension service.

Leadership Defined

Leadership has been a prevalent subject for institutions, organizations, and employees, leading to several theories related to leadership. Leadership is a crucial element when engaging employees (Liu, et al., 2003). As engagement between leaders and employees is a vital part of organizational success, there exists much debate pertaining to variances between leadership and management styles. For Extension, it is assumed that those in positions of leadership within the organization are also those in managerial positions. The prevailing thought is that to be effective, county engagement specialists must be leaders as well as managers. Kotter (1990b) noted that leaders form the direction of the organization, align people in the organization to initiate change, and provide motivation to overcome problems. Furthermore, Kotter (1990b) noted that

leadership produces change within an organization, and it contributes to management rather than supplanting it.

Yukl (2002) found that those in leadership and management do not differentiate themselves into either category. However, there are those who see leadership as part of management and view them as interdependent upon each other (Kester & Lester, 1997). To be effective as a manager, leaders utilize people and resources to achieve objectives (Seevers, et al., 1997). Lester and Kunich (1997) defined a leader's role as establishing the setting for the organizational culture as well as determining both the mission and vision of an organization. To accomplish this, leaders must provide motivation and inspiration (Lester & Kunich 1997). In Extension, management is branched into five units: organizing, planning, leading, human resources, and controlling (Buford, et al.,1995). The leader's role within Extension consists of compelling individuals to work willingly to accomplish the organizational mission (Buford, et al., 1995).

Full Range Leadership Theory

To understand the concept of leadership, it is important to understand the various theories of leadership as they form the basis for understanding management styles. Scholtes (1999) stated that learning cannot be performed without theory, and that learning cannot take place without application. Kanji and Sa (2002) stated that, when viewed together, different leadership theories offer a multifaceted understanding of leadership. The Full Range Leadership Theory (FRLT) is found in three components of leadership: transactional leadership, transformational leadership, and laissez-faire leadership (Witges & Scanlan, 2014).

Transactional Leadership

Transactional Leadership is a leadership style also belonging to the Full Range Leadership Theory (FRLT). Transactional leaders are those who initiate contact with others for the purpose of exchanging things of value. This exchange includes paying employees' wages for their labor, effort, and skills (Roueche, et al., 1989). Where transformational leadership pursues improved mental aspects of leadership, transactional leadership focuses on the followers and their self-interest (Spencer, et al., 2012).

Prasad and Junni (2016) found that both leadership styles provided positive impacts on organizations; however, transactional leadership is more successful when placed in a dynamic environment. Transactional leadership includes the association between those who lead and those who follow as a transaction. The success of the leader-follower relationship is based on ranked leadership roles and the acceptance of these roles by subordinates (Tavanti, 2008). Those in leadership positions provide something of value and the follower receives value in return. This form of leadership differs from transformational leadership in that it does not contain the same amount of individual connection.

Cropanzano, et al., (2003) stated transactional leaders typically do not form working relationships consisting of social or emotional roles as noted in the Social Exchange Theory. Also, these leaders typically do not encourage employee motivation, such as gains from social and psychological support and other occupational resources obtained from the Job Demand Resources Theory (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

Transactional leadership is not without criticism, arguably due to its universal approach related to the construction of leadership theory (McCleskey, 2014). Additionally, transactional leadership uses a one-size-fits-all approach which encapsulates all users. Transactional

leadership can create an adverse perception that difficult work responsibilities are relegated to an individual or only a few (Bass & Avolio, 1994). However, transactional leadership does provide for less workplace apprehension. This lack of confidence allows for attention to be placed towards organizational goals which consists of improved quality and increased output (McCleskey, 2014).

Transformational Leadership

Transformational Leadership is a leadership style belonging to the Full Range Leadership Theory (FRLT). Transformational leaders persuade others to seek their own paths while leaving long-term influence on their own followers (Bass, 1990). Transformational leaders exhibit inspiration, personalized consideration, idealized guidance, and intelligent stimulation (Bass, 1990). Idealized guidance is the perceived influence that those in leadership utilize to encourage followers (Avolio & Bass, 2004). In idealized guidance, leaders are idolized. Motivation from inspiration is due to leaders sharing goals with a joint understanding that the vision is correct and achievable (Avolio & Bass, 2004). However, Zelenik (1977) argued that individual leadership is based upon personal history and motivation, and a separation of leaders can be noticed based on how information is processed and acted upon. He also believed that training leaders to become better managers may inhibit their leadership development.

Extension directors are typically transformational leaders and are traditionally more effective. Abbott (2017) found that extension employees feel pride in their job, found it valuable to invest their energy in their work, and found it easy to become engrossed in their work. Additionally, Abbott (2017) also found little difference in engagement among agriculture agents and those in the health and human science field.

Avolio and Bass (2004) stated that through intelligent stimulation, transformational leaders aid in followers mental processing of innovation and modern means of conducting business. However, Avolio and Bass (2004) also stated that personalized considerations were allowing individual concerns to be shared as well as permitting all individuals to be unique. Due to possible relationships and connections with individuals, transformational leaders are inclined to be highly involved as employees. However, leaders can be those who do the right things but not necessarily do things right (Bennis & Nanus, 1985).

While personalized consideration may relate more to the Social Exchange Theory, transformational leadership supplants simple understandings and exchanges to satisfy the advanced needs of all followers (Cropanzano, et al., (2003, Abbott, 2017). Leadership styles are not significantly altered by years of service or program areas nor are styles impacted by gender. However, there are minute differences reflected by age (Abbott, 2017). Those in leadership positions simply influence follower commitment (Yukl, 1989), while managerial staff employ authority. The vision transformational leaders hold inspires followers (Bass, 1990). This visualization is accomplished through inspiration, personalized consideration, idealized guidance, and intelligent stimulation.

Laissez-faire leadership

Laissez-faire is the third leadership style in the Full Range Leadership Theory (FRLT). Those who possess the laissez-faire style leadership exhibit constant nonattendance and fail to contribute when needed (Eagly, et al., 2003). The laissez-faire leadership style can be termed by avoidance. In this form, organizational leaders administer in a passive role and do not respond to problems when presented (Lawal, 2015). Further, Yukl (2010) stated that laissez-faire leadership was representative of passive leadership and that it relinquished valid responsibilities. According

to Broom (2003), laissez-fair leadership is associated with passive avoidance behavior. Broom's (2003) self-reported styles of leadership research of deans in the field of nursing programs noted 77 percent were transformational. The remaining 21 percent were transactional and only two percent were passive avoidant (Broome, 2013). Additionally, in this leadership role, leaders do not afford clear attainment of goals, refrain from decision making opportunities, and evade confrontation (Bass & Avolio, 1990).

Laissez-faire leadership enhances both an important and undesirable connection in regard to motivation toward extra effort (Webb, 2003). Bass (2008) states laissez-faire leadership negatively correlates with effective outcomes among different conditions, among different leaders, and displays different outcomes. Because of this, laissez-faire leadership is expected to inspire follower motivations associated with a measured relationship (Kuvaas, et al., 2012). Typically, those who exhibit laissez-faire leadership lack confidence in their own ability to lead. These types of leaders often avoid responsibility of leading by avoiding subordinates through means of self-work or not having time (Bass, 2008).

Other Important Leadership Theories

For decades, studies have been conducted to try and explain leadership; these studies have tried to define effective leadership through numerous approaches. Yukl (2002) placed leadership theories into five approaches: the behavioral approach, the power influence approach, the trait approach, the situational approach, and the integrative approach. Previous research within these five approaches has allowed for an enhanced understanding of leadership and how each approach enhances our understanding about leadership (Nahavandi, 2000). These five approaches are briefly discussed in the following sections.

The Trait Approach

The trait approach to leadership attempts to understand personality characteristics as they relate to effective leadership (Ones, et al., 2005). Research conducted utilizing the trait approach to leadership stressed detailed attributes of those in leadership roles (Holsinger & Carlton, 2018), including traits such as values, skills, motives, and personality (Yukl, 2002). The premise behind trait leadership studies is that those in leadership roles possess specific traits that those not in leadership roles do not possess. Such studies showed that natural leaders are born and not made (Peretomode, 2021).

Leadership research performed in the 1930s and 1940s is considered that of Trait Leadership (Bass, 1990). Conversely, research performed during that era neglected to generate a list of traits held exclusively by successful leaders (Yukl, 2002). However, Baptiste (2018) found leadership to be associated with different traits in different people and that the list of traits was too vast to be of any significance. Due to the failure to produce a list of traits which added value to successful leaders, researchers began utilizing other approaches. However, because of transactional processes related to leadership, trait leadership has garnered new interest in researching leadership (Bryman, 1992). Though the trait approach is not singled out as the only factor in successful leadership, it is viewed as one of the elements (Nahavandi, 2000).

Mott (2002) claimed that professional learning equates to professional knowledge. Germain (2012) stated that values can be intrinsic and that people who exhibit determined, motivated, and outgoing qualities are effective experts. Germain (2012) also stated knowledge is not teachable regarding the trait approach, but skills can be taught. Mumford (2000) stated that skills involving problem resolution, judgement, and information can be acquired through training. Germain (2006) found that personality traits were characteristics of proficient

educators. Winter (1998) posited that those motives offer direction related to behavior, but traits offer the style of behavior.

The Behavioral Approach

Due to the lack of definitive results with the trait approach, scholars began utilizing the behavioral approach in leadership research. Through this method, researchers scrutinize how leaders truly performed their jobs (Yukl, 2002). Under the behavioral approach, research is divided into two categories: the responsibilities, activities, and functions of work performed by leaders and recognizing successful leadership performance (Yukl, 2002). Like the trait approach, the behavioral approach only recognizes one variable related to leadership: face to face communication (Ostrom, 1998). Because this approach stresses behaviors alone, it ignores other variables such as situational elements. In turn, this approach becomes more simplistic and provides a limited insight of the intricate understanding of leadership (Nahavandi, 2000).

The Power-Influence Approach

The power-influence approach to leadership focuses on the influence that leaders project onto others (Yukl, 2002). Research related to this approach typically focuses on leadership and the amount of influence and power the leader holds, the degrees of power, and if and how that power is utilized (Yukl, 1989). Influence and power both have the ability to influence not only followers, but also peers, supervisors, and even those not employed within an organization (Yukl, 2002). According to Bradford and Cohen (1984), a close relationship with a supervisor affords more respect from subordinates. Additionally, this respect for the supervisor allows for favorable work from a subordinate which may not be performed otherwise. This close connection translates into more production from those in the workforce. With this increased

productivity, higher accomplishing subordinates increases power for the supervisor as the supervisor can execute required tasks (Bradford & Cohen 1984).

The Situational Approach

The situational approach to leadership stresses the importance of related factors in researching leadership. Yukl (2002) identified certain factors to describe the characteristics of situational leadership: the authority utilized by leaders, the style of work implemented from the leader's division, the features of those that follow, the style of the organization, and the style of the outside environment. However, there are several factors that must be understood when clarifying what makes an organizational leader successful (Bennis, 1961). These influences include the association among leaders and followers as well as strategy of tasks that allow for an individual's self-actualization. Furthermore, Bennis (1961) stated that, for leadership to be effective, there must be a balance between those that make up the organization and the organization itself. This equilibrium must be performed so that both parties can achieve satisfaction at the highest level.

The situational approach concentrates on the study of leadership regarding subordinates. Typically, research performed on the situational approach can be considered in one of two subgroups: the effort to determine what degree of leadership processes are similar or different among various styles of organizations, management levels, and cultures, or an effort to recognize features of a situation that enhance the connection of leader qualities to leader success (Yukl, 2002). The situational approach to leadership consists of directives and accommodating dimensions. Additionally, those directives and dimensions must be properly applied for research (Northouse, 2019).

The Integrative Approach

Theories of leadership relating to transformational leadership make excellent examples of an integrative approach to leadership. This theory reflects the leader-follower relationships and the results garnered by relationship (Bass, 1990). Additionally, this theory also allows for results to be larger in range because they comprise power, behavior, situational variables as well as leadership traits (Yukl, 1989). Research in leadership effectiveness utilizing the integrative approach often contains several leadership variables, including behavior, influence processes, situational variables, and traits (Yukl, 2002). When performing research related to leaders and leadership, it is important to include more than one category of leadership variables (Bass, 1990). Bass (1990) further stated that there needs to be a full accounting of behavioral, cognitive, and interactional explanations.

Autocratic Leadership

An autocratic leadership style is one that decreases inputs from workers allowing for leaders to input all decisions for everyone (Bass & Stogdill, 1990). Although an autocratic transactional leadership style offers a hybrid form of leadership making the leader solely responsible for decisions, it provides clear motivations and deterrents for followers depending upon the job at hand (Vann, et al., 2014). Further, Vann et al., (2014) state that autocratic transformational leadership is another hybrid form of leadership with the leader consolidating control of the decision-making procedure. These leaders utilize feedback to obtain goals and objectives.

Democratic Leadership

Democratic leadership allows leaders to allocate responsibility while offering encouragement and engagement around employee thoughts (Gastil, 1994). Vann et al., (2014) stated that democratic transactional leadership allows for follower input in the decision-making process. However, this hybrid leadership style requires an outline of enticements and discouragements (Vann et al., 2014). Democratic transformational leadership is a hybrid leadership involving subordinates being included in making decisions with the leader providing direction as a mentor.

Perceived Leadership

Perceived leadership styles utilizing the Full Range Leadership Theory (FRLT) have been applied to other organizations. Transformational leadership was utilized by Fisher (2013) to gauge social service groups. Utilizing the FRLT, Fisher asked 29 groups in a mentoring program at his institution to participate. He attained over 79 percent response rate as data was received from 23 groups. He found that leadership reported high amounts of transformational leadership but lower levels of transactional leadership. Miloloža (2018) found that smaller enterprises seemed to excel under laissez-faire leadership. However, Judge and Piccolo (2004) found that the lack of rudimentary leadership competence negatively impacts the job satisfaction of subordinates. Additionally, they found the lack of rudimentary leadership competence negatively influences satisfaction with the leader and impacts their commitment toward the organization.

Sager (2009) found that leadership styles were mostly correlated with production, attendance, and worker turnover rates. In some manner, most research performed on leadership relates to organizational commitment with little in the way of perceived leadership style (Sager, 2009). Fleener; et al. (2010) noted that perceived leadership from an employee perspective

within an organization differs among each employee. Additionally, Atwater and Yammarino (1997) stated that leadership is based upon actions, which are observed by employees, and their perceptions of those actions.

Okonkwo, et al. (2015) stated that perceived leadership styles can forecast an employee's commitment. Research conducted by Abasilim, et al. (2018a) on perceived leadership styles found a positive correlation among employee commitment and transformational leadership. However, the same research concluded a negative correlation existed between transactional and laissez-faire leadership in regarding employee commitment.

Leadership styles play an important role in the success or failure of an organization. Equally important is the perception of leadership styles by employees of the organization. In a study relating teachers to supervisors, Waters (2013) found that participants perceived supervisors as transformational in their leadership style instead of transactional. However, it was also found that transformational leadership was not dominant. Kottkamp; et al., (1987) acknowledge that leaders in open settings, such as warehouses and factories, were perceived as democratic transformational leaders. Additionally, leaders in closed settings, such as offices, were perceived as transactional and even display controlling leadership.

Ways of Measuring Leadership Preferences

Vannsimpco Leadership Survey

Different leadership instruments have been used over the years to measure leadership style preferences (Johnson, et al., 2004). House and Aditya (1997) reported that most research studies focused more on supervisory leadership. The Vannsimpco Leadership Survey (VLS) has

the unique ability to incorporate a more comprehensive examination related to different leadership traits from both supervisors and non-supervisors.

The Vannsimpco Leadership Survey (VLS) was selected to be used for this research to evaluate the leadership style preferences of Extension personnel (Vann & Simpson, 2014). The VLS is based upon the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) developed by Bass and Avolio (2004), which is an instrument commonly used to assess leadership styles. The MLQ considers efficiency, satisfaction, and extra effort as basic outcomes (Avolio & Bass, 2004), but it is written from the vantage point of an administrator (Vann & Simpson, 2014).

The VLS assesses individuals on leadership styles, including transformational, transactional, autocratic transformational, laissez-faire, autocratic transactional, democratic transformational, and democratic transactional, and condenses them into realistic and applicable groupings. Because most leaders utilize a fusion of leadership styles, the VLS allows researchers to categorize leaders more definitively, leading to a decrease in institutional bias (Vann & Simpson, 2014).

Theoretical Frame Theories

Job Demands-Resources Theory

The Job Demand-Resource (JD-R) Theory describes how two distinct working conditions impact employee engagement (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). This theory encompasses literature pertaining to worker burnout. Additionally, it involves characteristics of two psychosocial work environments including occupation burdens and resources. According to Demerouti, et al. (2001), these burdens consist of social, physical, and management style of the organization, which can create stresses, involving family and emotional conflicts, as well as simple fatigue. Furthermore, Demerouti, et al. (2001) state that occupational resources comprise social, mental,

physical and other job aspects to both support and inspire workforces, including performance feedback, shared support, and decision input. Also, Crawford, et al. (2010) noted that occupation burdens transform into job burnout and that positive employee engagement was related to allocated job resources. LePine; et al. (2005) stated that conflicts can hinder occupational demands, which can lead to a decline in performance.

Occupational demands can also lead to serious health issues, not just work fatigue and burnout. These demands can initiate processes through which increased daily workload evolves into prolonged overload (Demerouti, et al., 2001). When this happens, continuing exhaustion can result in serious health problems, including mental and physical harms, such as heart disease. Conversely, proper job resources can initiate motivation and thus produce positive work engagement (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Demanding and emotional occupations need to be complemented with emotional occupation resources (De Jong & Dormann, 2006). Research shows that positive occupational resources can lower the effect of negative occupation demands (Bakker, et al., 2010). Other research has shown that those who lack available resources, such as time, knowledge, money, and a complacent home life, were vulnerable to losing even more resources (Hobfoll, 1989). Adding to this, Hobfoll (2001) stated that losses follow losses in a spiraling motion, and these spiraling losses will follow the initial losses. Further, he stated that each loss results in the reduction of resources for meeting the next set of challenges. During a study researching traumatic stressors, Heath, et al. (2012) established that when exposed to political violence, people lost important measures including social resources.

Employee performance goals are met when employees are provided with job resources. These resources include education, growth and professional development leading to engagement (Bakker, et al., 2007). Occupation resources stimulate employee motivation through engagement,

which in turn produces employee commitment to the organization (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). When it comes to research in employee engagement, the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Theory has been one of the most studied theories (Demerouti & Bakker, 2011). This model was utilized to study more than 2,000 educators from Finland. From a 52 percent response rate, researchers established burnout consisting of poor health was contributed to job stress, and that work engagement was related to support from supervisors, education, and occupational control (Hakanen, et al., 2006). Schaufeli & Bakker (2004) performed a study utilizing the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model consisting of insurance company workforces. Their study established that available resources could impact employee engagement. Better employee engagement can benefit from increasing resources related to specific occupations, including participating in management, team building exercises, and improving social support systems (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

Social Exchange Theory

Social Exchange Theory is based upon a cost versus rewards relationship. This theory holds that employee relationships at the workplace comprises the interchange of socio-emotional benefits (Cropanzano, et al., 2003). Due to these relationships, employees put forth more output and hold positive attitudes pertaining to the organization, thus providing for more success (Cropanzano, et al., 2003). Cropanzano, et al., (2003) posits that the Social Exchange Theory holds that positive benefits provided by one will be returned by the recipient. Due to this, the relationship created in the workplace could develop into an exchange (Strom, et al., 2014). The concept supporting Social Engagement Theory includes the thought that if rules of the concept are followed, common exchanges of trust, commitments, and reliability will form (Saks, 2006).

Because of this, Saks (2006) advocated how this theory explains the reasoning of employee work engagement.

Researchers utilizing Social Exchange Theory to study organizations have been provided an influential framework for describing work behavior (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Through social exchange, workers participate in many interdependent exchanges which, in turn, create obligations from exchange parties (Emerson, 1976). Generally, productive social exchanges displace conflict within the workplace and negate negative work behavior (Liao, et al., 2004). Additionally, positive social exchanges increase the sharing of knowledge and job performance (Hansen, 1999). Human resource policies play a pivotal role in shaping employee perceptions, behaviors, and attitudes (Wright & McMahan, 1994).

Lee and Bruvold (2003) found that organizational investment into employee development facilitates greater obligations from employees towards the organization. Additionally, management practices can have an impact on employee discretionary effort. These practices are designed to motivate employees in different ways. To utilize the motivational process, organizations link resources with both individual and organizational outcomes through employee engagement (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004)

Occupation resources improve productivity and can inspire and produce progressive engagement for employees (Llorens, et al, 2007). This commitment can lead to motivation, which, in turn, can increase job performance. Human resources within an organization play an integral role in employee success. Employees will reciprocate the utility of particular human resources that are practiced on them (Kinnie, et al, 2005). In turn, employee satisfaction can be viewed as a predictor of positive behaviors, such as innovative behavior (Scott & Bruce, 1994).

By nature, humans display rational thought processes. To achieve specific objectives, people will endeavor to control their environments to maximize their own wellbeing (Gardner, et al., 1995).

The Social Exchange Theory recognizes that associations among people are interdependent (West & Turner, 2007); thus, the sub-criteria of all systems were either directly or indirectly related (Yang, et al., 2008). Additionally, Grefen and Ridings (2002) stated that when an exchange of relationships takes place, rewards are expected. However, the Social Exchange Theory itself states that each party assumes that the other party has cooperative intentions (Grefen & Ridings, 2002).

The Job Demands-Resources Theory and the Social Exchange Theory related to employee engagement are found extensively in literature. The Job Demands-Resources Theory establishes two employee work environments which impact employee performance: occupational resources to inspire and encourage the workforce and occupational burdens that create stress and pressure. Research on this theory suggests that an organization that provides less demands and more resources have employees affecting positive engagement in the organization (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). The Social Exchange Theory holds that relationships formed in the workplace are beneficial in that favors will be returned when performed for a different party. Research in this theory offers insight as to why work relationships allude to more engagement.

Employee Engagement

Employee engagement is defined as the connection, both as emotional and intellectual commitment to an institution (Shaw, 2005) or the extent of optional effort demonstrated by employees to perform their job (Frank, et al., 2004). Kahn (1990) defined employee engagement as collectively unifying an organization's members to harness their work roles by physically,

cognitively, and emotionally expressing themselves during normal routines. Additionally, employee engagement serves as a contradiction of employee fatigue (Schaufeli, et al. 2002).

Employee engagement has also been defined as constructive and rewarding, which aids in developing a positive mental state (Schaufeli, et al., 2002). Additionally, it has been defined as energetic involvement which increases an individual's feeling of professional worth (Maslach & Leiter, 2008). With countless definitions, it can be difficult to fully ascertain employee engagement as each study relies upon different procedure. Additionally, if employee engagement cannot be unanimously defined and measured, there is little faith in the acknowledgement that is being managed or that resources to develop it are successful (Ferguson, 2007).

Engagement has been conducted in diverse ways. Definitions related to engagement are often very similar to each other and to other well-known, understood constructs (Robinson, et al. 2004). Contrary to the similarities among the various meanings, Saks and Gruman (2014) advocate Kahn's (1990) description includes additional information when compared to Schaufeli, et al. (2002). Additionally, Kahn's (1990) definition does provide understanding for the connection between engagement and employee performance in the workplace. Because of this, Kahn's (1990) definition bodes well for researching self-rated leadership style and employee engagement.

Research into engagement has shown that employee work environments coupled with leader behavior provide for correlation to how employees relate work engagement levels (Shuck & Reio, 2011). Researchers have advised that understanding how workplace interactions combined with correct administration practices by organizations impact engagement (Brown, 2014). Since employee engagement is understood as being a constructive workplace mindset (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003), and thus a component of work-related experiences, research has

also found an associating connection between it and a reduction in turnover, especially with valuable employees (Saks, 2006). Furthermore, research has also shown productive relationships occur among employee engagement and both transformational and transactional leadership (Nelson & Shraim, 2014). Other research has concluded that employees who attain fulfillment utilizing provided work resources also achieve satisfaction of high engagement levels (Bal, et al., 2013).

A study examining County Extension Directors (Abbott, 2017) found minimal variances related to work engagement with reference to age, gender, or number of years in position. However, Abbott (2017) did find that increased work engagement positively correlated with increased age. Noting that workplace relationships provide for at least one immediate supervisor (Usadolo, 2016), the relationship among leaders and subordinates is naturally participatory and can predict engagement.

Kim (2002) found that participatory management is required for optimal performance. Saks (2006) found increased levels of engagement among employees when leaders exhibited relationship centered actions. Utilizing work-related resources including positive feedback, social support, and independence, superiors or leaders can help employees attain a high level of engagement (Breevaart et al., 2015).

Summary of Research on Employee Engagement and Demographics

Both work engagement and performance are influenced through worker characteristics. These characteristics are made up of age, years of service, gender, and Extension employee program area. Understanding the relationship of demographics to engagement is vital for success of an organization (Abbott, 2017). These characteristics impact how employees are either engaged or disengaged while working (Pitt-Catgouphes & Matz-Costa, 2008). Employees who

work closely with clientele exhibit stronger engagement (Abbott, 2017). Success of the institution is determined upon recognizing how these demographics are interrelated with employee engagement.

The following are shown to improve engagement: length of time in the present position, time with present employer, and personal age (BlessingWhite, 2013). Because of this, when employees garner more seniority within an institution, they become more invested and engagement is increased.

The BlessingWhite Employee Engagement Research Report (2013) offers minute differences between genders in regard to employee engagement. Programming disciplines in the University of Missouri Extension Service are comparable to departments of other organizations. Research performed by BlessingWhite (2013) reported workers located in different sectors display different levels of engagement within the same institution. Additionally, BlessingWhite (2013) reported employees located in departments closer to the clientele and those who are essential in delivering the institutions policy show more engagement when compared to other areas of the institution.

As stated above, through the innovations and ideals of the University of Missouri, Extension improves lives, businesses, and communities by focusing on solving Missouri's grand challenges around economic opportunity, educational access, and health and well-being. These branches consist of four primary areas: Agriculture and Environment, Business and Community, Youth and Family, and Health and Safety. These different job sectors carry with them different job descriptions, and, with this, each program area interacts with clientele differently. Also, each sector of Extension varies with leadership, engagement, interaction, trainings and expectations. Obtaining knowledge of how these sectors correlate with employee engagement is vital in

creating positive administrative programming to assist and sustain Extension professionals involved in each sector of Extension.

Summary

Understanding leadership style preference characteristics and employee engagement will allow Extension to improve as an organization. The literature related to leadership of an organization indicates that leadership is crucial for employee engagement (Biro, 2014). He found that leaders who actively participate in their work will garner followers who will, in turn, become engaged. Research performed by De Jong and Den Hartog (2007) noted employees who have been influenced by leaders often display behaviors related to innovation. The employee engagement literature advocates several methods to increase an organization's employee engagement. However, there is not a simple means to meet every organizational requirement (Lockwood, 2007). There was no literature specifically related to Extension employee levels of engagement. However, engagement is the core mission of University of Missouri Extension Service as specialists and administration form and preserve connections with communities and stakeholders.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Purpose and Objectives

This chapter describes the methodology, procedures and analyses used in this research study. Specifically, this chapter details the research design utilized, population used for this study, variables studied, instrumentation utilized for data collection, procedures for collecting data and, statistical analyses utilized in this study.

Design

The researcher employed a descriptive-correlational design to determine if there were relationships between Extension county personnel perceived leadership styles and engagement. The descriptive correlational design is the most appropriate for this analysis because the design defines the variables and relationships which transpire naturally between them (Sousa, et al., 2007). McBurney and White (2009) state that descriptive-correlational design is utilized to deliver an understanding of a relationship between different variables. This design was appropriate for use as the researcher collected data surrounding both the attitude and behavior of participants. Because the objective was to identify and evaluate dependent and independent variable relationships, nonexperimental quantitative method consisting of correlational design was correct for this study (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015).

Since the purpose of this study was to describe the relationship among variables without exploring a causal connection, it utilized questionnaire as a method for collecting data. Using

questionnaires allowed for easier findings of relationships. This design formatting was utilized to reduce the large sampling of data into an easily understood format. Condensing also allowed for a clearer understanding of the variables including age, gender, service length, leadership style and program area, but not for the connection among the variables (Vroom, 1964).

Population and Sample

The target population for this study was 448 University of Missouri Extension county engagement specialists, interim county engagement specialists, other specialists, and office staff, including office support assistants in all 114 counties. There are 112 County Engagement Specialists serving in a supervisory role in each county in Missouri. Additionally, each County host an Engagement Specialist grouped in one of four areas of programming: Agriculture and Environment, Business and Community, Health and Safety and Youth and Family for a total of 236 positions in the field. Specialists covering Agriculture and Environment consist of agriculture business and policy, agriculture systems and natural resources, animal health and production, and plant health and production. Specialists involved with Business and Community include business development, community development, and labor and workforce development. Health and Safety specialists are made up of continuing education and emergency management. Youth and Family specialists consists of 4-H youth development, college access and family and home education, nutrition and health education as well as youth program associates and nutrition program associates and secretarial staff with 4-H responsibilities.

Variables and Instrumentation

The independent variables for this study were age, gender/sex, program area, service length, and perceived leadership style. The dependent variable was level of employee engagement.

Different leadership instruments have been used over the years to measure leadership style preferences (Johnson, et al., 2004). House and Aditya (1997) reported that most research studies focused more on supervisory leadership. The MLQ is the premier instrument utilized to evaluate transformational leadership style (Avolio & Bass, 2004; Hunt, 1999; Lowe, et al., 1996). Developed by Bass and Avolio (2011), its reliability has been demonstrated across many disciplines. Additionally, the MLQ evaluates transactional leadership as well. Because of its validity, it is used in research determining the effectiveness of leadership in organizations including academia, military, corporate, government and many others (Bass & Avolio, 1999; Berson, et al., 2001). Abbott (2017) found the MLQ to be reliable measuring variables of scales and subscales of leadership. The MLQ originated over 35 years ago (Bass, 1985), with many revisions since then and has been the standard survey instrument regarding research in leadership. These versions have been utilized in more than 30 countries including the United States with translations into many languages (Avolio & Bass, 2004). The MLQ is based specifically in Full Range Leadership Theory (FRLT) (Avolio & Bass, 1991).

Developed in 2014, the Vannsimpco Leadership Survey the (VLS) is based upon the MLQ and has the unique ability to incorporate a more comprehensive examination related to different leadership traits from both supervisors and non-supervisors. The VLS was selected to be used for this research to understand the leadership style preferences of Extension personnel (Vann & Simpson, 2014). Similar to the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) developed

by Bass and Avolio (2004), the VLS is an instrument used to assess more than the three leadership styles of the MLQ. The MLQ considers efficiency, satisfaction, and extra effort as basic outcomes (Avolio & Bass, 2004), but it is written from the vantage point of an administrator (Vann & Simpson, 2014).

The Vannsimpco Leadership Survey was formulated to provide for better understanding of a wider variety and combination of leadership styles. The VLS assesses individuals on leadership styles, including transformational, transactional, autocratic transformational, laissez-faire, autocratic transactional, democratic transformational, and democratic transactional, and condenses them into realistic and applicable groupings. Because most leaders use a fusion of leadership styles, the VLS allows researchers to categorize leaders more definitively, leading to a decrease in institutional bias (Vann & Simpson, 2014). Developing leadership style instruments offers discussion, and further research in this field is needed. However, other than the VLS, there exist no other hybrid leadership instruments which incorporate a diversity of leadership factors lacking bias or placing importance of a specific leadership aspect or workplace setting (Vann, et al., 2014).

The Vannsimpco Leadership Survey (VLS) was utilized to determine the perceived leadership style of County Extension specialists and staff members with University of Missouri Extension. Each of the nine leadership styles was assessed by three questions using a five-point scale Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, or Strongly Agree.

Reliability was determined through a pilot test performed by a senior developer of the instrument while at the University of the Cumberland in 2014. The VLS was administered twice to the same participants at a leadership seminar. The reliability was then established by a

Pearson's Product Moment Correlation r . The test-retest for reliability coefficient was ($r [106] = .91, p < .001$) (Vann et al., 2014).

Utrecht Work Engagement Scale

The dependent variable, work engagement, was measured by the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES). The UWES consists of three constructs: vigor, absorption and dedication. Seventeen items were used to measure constructs. Vigor was measured by six items; dedication was measured by five items and absorption was measured by five items (see Table 3.1). Schaufeli (2002b) stated that vigor includes large amounts of energy and mental flexibility while performing work. Additionally, it is the eagerness to provide effort and dedication to accomplishment through hardships. Salanova (2001) stated absorption is the satisfaction of one's work to the point time passes by quickly thus lacking the ability to detach from labor. Further, Salanova (2001) stated that dedication is experiencing pride, motivation and eagerness with labor.

The validity of the UWES has been compared with other work engagement constructs through testing (Hallberg & Schaufeli, 2006). Seppala et al., (2009) stated the UWES displays good construct validity and Nerstad, et al., (2010) noted the UWES factorial validity.

Table 3.1 Statements corresponding with constructs

Constructs	Statements
	UWES Question Numbers
Vigor	UWES 1, 4, 8, 12, 15, 17
Dedication	UWES 2, 5, 7, 10, 13
Absorption	UWES 3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 16

Internal consistencies of Cronbach’s alpha relating to various versions of the UWES

Research regarding validity of Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) by Sonnentag (2003) utilized UWES to successfully measure engagement. He quoted resulting scores citing the high reliability of the UWES. This reliability is important in engagement research as County Extension engagement specialists typically exhibit average to above normal engagement. This scoring also includes higher levels of dedication, more vigor, and a higher amount of absorption (Abbott, 2017). The UWES initially included 24 objects, but due to a psychometric assessment, 7 items were found to be flawed and were then removed, leaving only 17 items to produce a nine-item version to utilize measurement (Schaufeli, et al., 2002).

Data Collection

In an effort to sample all demographics of county staff in Missouri, participants were selected through surveys included in lists of emails through the University of Missouri and through email addresses. Utilizing Extension resources to obtain the most comprehensive results possible and to cover a large demographic of county staff, a mass email was sent to all county

Extension personnel requesting their help to complete surveys. To legally administer the survey, required authorization from the Mississippi State Institutional Review Board was garnered (see appendix D). All required documents were submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to gain approval for this study. The researcher also asked for permission to utilize the online platform, Qualtrics, for this study. The IRB approval was received, and permission was granted for the use of Qualtrics. The researcher generated an email containing a cover letter providing detailed information about the purpose, confidentiality, and the anonymity of the study, and this cover letter was sent to the participants via email. A link to the survey was also included in the email.

The first page of the survey included a consent form, which contained an overview of the study and potential risks to the participants. These risks were minimal due to the anonymous nature of the data received by the researcher. The participants had the option to agree or disagree with the terms of the consent form. County Extension staff who agreed to the terms of the consent form were utilized as participants, whereas those who disagreed with the terms of the consent form were not allowed to proceed with the survey. After agreeing to the terms of the consent form, participants were directed through the questions on the survey. The survey consisted of a demographics survey that asked for the participant's age, gender, program area, service length, and program area.

As the primary researcher, my email and contact information were provided on the email of the survey as well as the reminder email notices. However, there was no contact information on the survey itself as to avoid any misconceptions of non-anonymity. Only official University of Missouri logos and required wording were allowed.

Data Analysis

Data cleaning was performed by searching for missing data in the dataset (Field, 2013). If there was a value is missing, the entire set was dismissed from the analysis and not utilized for research; this is regarded as list wise deletion. Utilizing complete datasets without missing values, multiple regression analysis was used. Additionally, to measure category variables, descriptive statistics including frequencies, means, and standard deviations were utilized to measure categorical variables. Also, measures of central tendencies of means, standard deviations and minimum values were conducted.

Multiple regression was conducted to address research questions two, four, and five while descriptive statistics were conducted to address research questions one and three. Significance was established at the 5% level. This significance means that any predictor in the multiple regression model that had a p-value less than or equal to .05 ($p \leq .05$) was deemed a significant predictor. In order to perform multiple regression, several assumptions were tested. These included the assumptions of linearity, homoscedasticity, independence, absence of multicollinearity, absence of outliers, and normality of residuals.

Twelve regression models were tested and assumptions for each one of the regressions were checked. For each model, all assumptions were tested and met. A linearity assessed by plots of standardized residuals against predicted vales was performed. As assessed by visual inspection of plots of standardized residuals against the predicted values, homoscedasticity was found. There was an independence of residuals, as assessed by Durbin-Watson statistics of between 1.5 and 2.5. However, no indication of multicollinearity was found, as assessed by tolerance values greater than 0.1. Also, no standardized residuals greater than ± 3 standard

deviations, no leverage values greater than 0.2, or values for Cook's distance above 1. As evaluated through visual inspection of histograms, assumption of normality was met.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to describe the relationship between leadership preference of county level personnel within University of Missouri Extension and their level of employee engagement.

1. What was the leadership style preference of county level personnel (engagement specialists, support staff, field specialists) within University of Missouri Extension?
2. What was the relationship between the leadership style preference of county-level personnel within University of Missouri Extension and the following demographic characteristics: age, gender, number of years with Extension, and programmatic area?
3. What levels of engagement exists among county-level personnel within University of Missouri Extension?
4. What was the relationship between the levels of engagement of county-level personnel with University of Missouri Extension and the following demographic characteristics: age, gender, and years with Extension?
5. What was the relationship between leadership style preference and level of engagement of county-level personnel with University of Missouri Extension?

Data Collection

The target population for this study was the University of Missouri Extension county engagement specialists, interim county engagement specialists, and other specialists and office staff, including office support assistants, and program assistants in all 114 counties. In order to obtain comprehensive results to a cover a large demographic of county staff, this study utilized Extension resources with a mass email sent to all county employees asking them to complete the survey; this mass email was sent to a total of 448 participants through their University of Missouri email address.

Participants completed an online questionnaire that included demographics questions, the Vannsimpco Leadership Survey (VLS), and the Work Engagement Scale (UWES). There were 195 responses for a 44% response rate. However, 14 people did not complete the survey in its entirety. Additionally, some participants did not respond to the demographic variables. As a result, listwise deletion was used to remove those cases. In listwise deletion, if a value is missing, that piece of data is deleted from the analysis. Therefore, final analysis was performed on 164 complete cases out of 195 returned surveys for a 37% usable response rate.

Demographic Characteristics

County-level Extension personnel were asked to identify their gender, as reported in Table 4.1. Seventy-eight percent ($f= 128$) of the county-level personnel indicated they were female while 17.7% ($f= 29$) were male. Seven individuals (5.3%) preferred not to indicate their gender.

Regarding age, the largest group of county-level personnel was in the 51 - 60 age category ($f= 51$, 31.1%) and the smallest group was in the 21 - 30 age category ($f= 18$, 11.0%). Table 4.2 provides additional age categories participants could select.

Table 4.3 reports information regarding length of service to University of Missouri Extension. The largest response category was for those who had worked between 1 - 5 years for Extension ($f = 55, 33.5\%$) with the smallest response category being those who had been with Extension 21 - 25 years for ($f = 8, 4.9\%$).

Lastly, regarding the program area in which county-level personnel worked, the largest percentage worked in Youth and Family area ($f = 88, 53.7\%$). There were only four respondents (2.4%) who worked in the Health and Safety area. Additionally, Agriculture and Environment personnel made up 31.1% ($f = 51$) of Extension personnel and Business and Community staff constituted 11.6% ($f = 19$) of the Extension personnel (see Table 4.4).

Table 4.1 Gender of University of Missouri Extension Agents (n = 164)

	f	%
Male	29	17.7
Female	128	78.0
Prefer not to say	7	4.3

Table 4.2 Age of University of Missouri Extension Agents (n = 164)

	f	%
21-30	18	11.0
31-40	34	20.7
41-50	36	22.0
51-60	51	31.1
61 and over	25	15.2

Table 4.3 Agents' Length of Service to University of Missouri Extension (n = 164)

	f	%
Less Than One Year	18	11.0
1-5 Years	55	33.5
6-10 Years	30	18.3
11-15 Years	16	9.8
16-20 Years	10	6.1
21-25 Years	8	4.9
Over 25 Years	25	15.2
Not Reported	2	1.2

Table 4.4 Program Area Responsibilities of University of Missouri Extension Agents (n=164)

	f	%
Agriculture and Environment	51	31.1
Business and Community	19	11.6
Health and Safety	4	2.4
Youth and Family	88	53.7
Not Reported	2	1.2

Leadership Style Preference of County-Level Personnel

Participants' leadership style was assessed by the Vannsimpco Leadership Survey (VLS), which included 27 Likert items measured on a five-point scale ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree. Three statements were used to assess each of the nine different leadership styles: Transactional, Democratic, Autocratic, Autocratic-Transformational, Autocratic-Transactional, Democratic-Transformational, Democratic-Transactional, Transformational, and Laissez-faire. Means for each leadership style were calculated and served as an overall measure of that particular leadership style.

Democratic leadership was the highest rated perceived leadership style ($M = 4.42$, $SD = 0.51$) followed by democratic-transactional ($M = 4.36$, $SD = .58$) and then transactional ($M = 4.29$, $SD = .63$). Laissez-faire leadership was the lowest-rated perceived leadership style ($M = 2.91$, $SD = .79$). Table 4.5 provides the means of all leadership styles.

Table 4.5 Perceived Leadership Styles of University of Missouri Extension County Level Personnel (n=164)

	Minimum	Maximum	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Democratic	2.33	5.00	4.42	.51
Democratic-Transformational	2.00	5.00	4.36	.58
Transactional	2.33	5.00	4.29	.63
Transformational	3.00	5.00	4.21	.59
Democratic-Transactional	2.00	5.00	4.01	.66
Autocratic-Transactional	1.67	5.00	3.77	.73
Autocratic-Transformational	2.00	5.00	3.74	.64
Autocratic	2.00	5.00	3.60	.65
Laissez-Faire	1.00	5.00	2.91	.79

Relationship Between Perceived Leadership Style and Demographic Characteristics

Transactional Leadership Style

A multiple regression analysis was used to investigate whether any of the demographic characteristics could significantly predict participants' transactional leadership style. The results of the multiple regression analysis indicated that the model explained 13.7% of the variance and that the model was not a significant predictor of one's preferred transactional leadership style $F(14,141) = 1.604, p = .085$ (see Table 4.6).

Table 4.6 Summary of Multiple Regression Model for Transactional Leadership Style by Demographic Characteristics

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean	F	p
			Square		
Regression	8.260	14	.590	1.604	.085
Residual	51.867	141	.403		
Total	60.127	155			

Democratic Leadership Style

A multiple regression analysis was used to investigate whether any of the demographic characteristics could significantly influence the participants' democratic leadership style. The results of the multiple regression analysis indicated that the model explained 12.9% of the variance and that the model was not a significant predictor of one's preferred democratic leadership style $F(14, 141) = 1.485, p = .124$. The results are presented in Table 4.7.

Table 4.7 Summary of Multiple Regression Model for Democratic Leadership Style by Demographic Characteristics

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean	F	p
			Square		
Regression	5.093	14	.364	1.485	.124
Residual	34.539	141	.245		
Total	39.632	155			

Autocratic Leadership Style

A multiple regression analysis was used to investigate whether any of the demographic characteristics could significantly predict the participants' autocratic leadership style. The results of the multiple regression analysis indicated that the model explained 15.9% of the variance and that the model was a significant predictor of one's preferred autocratic leadership style $F(14,141) = 1.903, p = .03$ (see Table 4.8).

Table 4.8 Summary of Multiple Regression Model for Autocratic Leadership Style by Demographic Characteristics

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Regression	10.737	14	.767	1.903	.031*
Residual	56.820	141	.403		
Total	67.558	155			

* $p < .05$

Table 4.9 illustrates the results of the multiple regression analysis, reporting the regression coefficients for each variable. Three demographic characteristics showed a significant impact on autocratic leadership style: Service1 ($\beta = .453, p < .05$), Service2 ($\beta = .572, p < .05$), and Service3 ($\beta = .446, p < .05$). The autocratic leadership style was found to be predicted the highest by Service2 ($\beta = .572, p < .05$) followed by Service1 ($\beta = .453, p < .05$) and then Service3 ($\beta = .446, p < .05$). As years of Service1 increased by one-unit, autocratic leadership scores increased by .453 units. As years of Service2 increased by one-unit, autocratic leadership

scores increased by .572 units. As years of Service3 increased by one-unit, autocratic leadership scores increased by .446 units.

The following represents the equation formula for autocratic leadership style.

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Autocratic Leadership Score} = & 3.264 - (-.139 * \text{Sex_recode}) - (.059 * \text{Age_21_30}) - \\ & (.133 * \text{Age_31_40}) + (.225 * \text{Age_41_50}) + (.190 * \text{Age_51_60}) - (.056 * \text{YouthandFamily}) + \\ & (.474 * \text{HealthandSafety}) + (.131 * \text{BusinessandCommunity}) + (.453 * \text{Service1}) + (.572 * \text{Service2}) \\ & + .446 * \text{Service3}) + (.268 * \text{Service4}) + (.368 * \text{Service5}) - (.116 * \text{Service6}) \end{aligned}$$

Table 4.9 Regression Coefficients of Demographic Characteristics on Autocratic Leadership Style

Variable	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients Beta	t
	β	Std. Error		
(constant)	3.264	.193		16.893*
Sex recode	-.139	.144	-.082	-.965
Age_21_30	-.059	.219	-.029	-.270
Age_31_40	-.133	.189	-.081	-.704
Age_41_50	.225	.183	.141	1.234
Age_51_60	.190	.163	.135	1.170
Youth and Family	-.056	.125	-.042	-.449
Health and Safety	.474	.346	.114	1.369
Business and Community	.131	.186	.062	.702
Service1	.453	.222	.220	2.035*
Service2	.572	.178	.412	3.219*
Service3	.446	.199	.260	2.241*
Service4	.268	.224	.124	1.199
Service5	.368	.246	.137	1.500
Service6	-.116	.278	-.037	.675

*p<.05

Autocratic Transformational Leadership Style

A multiple regression analysis was used to investigate whether any of the demographic characteristics could significantly predict participants' autocratic transformational leadership style. The results of the multiple regression analysis indicated that the model explained 10.3% of the variance and that the model was not a significant predictor of one's preferred autocratic transformational leadership $F(14, 141) = 1.151, p = .320$ (Table 4.10).

Table 4.10 Summary of Multiple Regression Model for Transformational Leadership Style by Demographic Characteristics

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Regression	6.550	14	.468	1.151	.320
Residual	57.305	141	.406		
Total	63.855	155			

Autocratic Transactional Leadership Style

A multiple regression analysis was used to investigate whether any of the demographic characteristics could significantly predict participants' autocratic transactional style. The results of the multiple regression analysis indicated that the model explained 7.0% of the variance and that the model was not a significant predictor of one's preferred autocratic transactional leadership $F(14, 141) = .755, p = .715$ (Table 4.11).

Table 4.11 Summary of Multiple Regression Model for Autocratic Transactional Leadership Style by Demographic Characteristics

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean	F	p
			Square		
Regression	5.640	14	.403	.755	.715
Residual	75.205	141	.533		
Total	80.845	155			

Democratic Transformational Leadership Style

A multiple regression analysis was used to investigate whether any of the demographic characteristics could significantly predict the participants' democratic transformational leadership style. The results of the multiple regression analysis indicated that the model explained 13.7% of the variance and that the model was not a significant predictor of one's preferred democratic transformational leadership style $F(14, 141) = 1.58, p = .087$ (Table 4.12).

Table 4.12 Summary of Multiple Regression Model for Democratic Transformational Leadership by Demographic Characteristics

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean	F	p
			Square		
Regression	7.033	14	.502	1.598	.087
Residual	44.325	141	.314		
Total	51.358	155			

Democratic Transactional Leadership Style

A multiple regression analysis was used to investigate whether any of the demographic characteristics could significantly predict the participants' democratic transformational leadership style. The results of the multiple regression analysis indicated that the model explained 13.7% of the variance and that the model was not a significant predictor of one's preferred democratic transformational $F(14, 141) = 1.58, p = .087$ (Table 4.13).

Table 4.13 Summary of Multiple Regression Model for Democratic Transactional Leadership by Demographic Characteristics

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Regression	6.406	14	.458	1.096	.367
Residual	58.878	141	.418		
Total	65.284	155			

Transformational Leadership Style

A multiple regression analysis was used to investigate whether any of the demographic characteristics could significantly predict the participants' transformational leadership style. The results of the multiple regression analysis indicated that the model explained 19.9% of the variance and that the model was not a significant predictor of one's preferred transformational leadership $F(14, 141) = 1.492, p = .121$ (Table 4.14).

Table 4.14 Summary of Multiple Regression Model for Transformational Leadership by Demographic Characteristics

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean	F	p
			Square		
Regression	6.691	14	.478	1.492	.121
Residual	45.161	141	.320		
Total	51.852	155			

Laissez-Faire Leadership Style

A multiple regression analysis was used to investigate whether any of the demographic characteristics could significantly predict participants' laissez-faire leadership style. The results of the multiple regression analysis indicated that the model explained 12.4% of the variance and that the model was not a significant predictor of one's preferred laissez-faire leadership style $F(14, 141) = 1.423, p = .150$ (Table 4.15).

Table 4.15 Summary of Multiple Regression Model for Laissez-Faire Leadership Style by Demographic Characteristics

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean	F	p
			Square		
Regression	11.492	14	.821	1.423	.150
Residual	81.362	141	.577		
Total	92.855	155			

Levels of Work Engagement by County-Level Personnel

Descriptive statistics were used to summarize and describe the levels of work engagement of University of Missouri Extension county level personnel. Work engagement was measured by the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) with subscales of absorption and dedication measured by five items and vigor measured by six items.

Regarding work engagement, dedication had the largest mean ($M = 4.54$, $SD = 1.00$) among participants. Vigor was the next highest-rated construct of work engagement ($M = 4.17$, $SD = 0.98$), followed by absorption ($M = 4.11$, $SD = 1.02$). Overall work engagement had a mean of $M = 4.26$ ($SD = 0.92$). Table 4.16 provides this information.

Table 4.16 Level of Work Engagement by University of Missouri Extension Personnel (n = 164)

	Minimum	Maximum	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Work Engagement Overall	1.24	6.00	4.26	.92
Vigor	.67	6.00	4.17	.98
Dedication	1.60	6.00	4.54	1.00
Absorption	1.33	6.00	4.11	1.02

The scale was measured on a Likert Scale of 0 = never to 6 = always.

Relationship Between Level of Work Engagement and Demographic Characteristics

Work Engagement Overall

A multiple regression analysis was used to investigate whether any of the demographic characteristics could significantly predict participants' overall level of work engagement. The results of the multiple regression analysis indicated that the model explained 8.9% of the variance and that the model was not a significant predictor of one's preferred work engagement overall $F(11, 144) = 1.423, p = .240$ (Table 4.17).

Table 4.17 Multiple Regression Summary for Overall Work Engagement by Demographic Characteristics

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Regression	11.820	11	1.075	1.283	.240
Residual	120.615	144	.838		
Total	132.435	155			

Vigor Subscale for Work Engagement

A multiple regression analysis was used to investigate whether any of the demographic characteristics could significantly predict participants' level of vigor as part of their level of work engagement. The results of the regression analysis indicated that the model explained 2.3% of the variance and that the model was not a significant predictor of one's preferred vigor work engagement $F(11, 144) = 1.325, p = .216$ (Table 4.18).

Table 4.18 Multiple Regression Summary for Vigor Work Engagement by Demographic Characteristics

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean	F	p
			Square		
Regression	13.700	11	1.245	1.325	.216
Residual	135.357	144	.940		
Total	149.057	155			

Dedication Subscale of Work Engagement

A multiple regression analysis was used to investigate whether any of the demographic characteristics could significantly predict participants' level of dedication toward their overall level of work engagement. The results of the multiple regression analysis indicated that the model explained 9.2% of the variance and that the model was not a significant predictor of one's preferred dedication work engagement $F(11, 144) = 1.321, p = .219$ (Table 4.19).

Table 4.19 Multiple Regression Summary for Absorption Work Engagement by Demographic Characteristics

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean	F	p
			Square		
Regression	13.999	11	1.273	1.321	.219
Residual	138.752	144	.964		
Total	152.751	155			

Absorption Subscale of Work Engagement

A multiple regression analysis was used to investigate whether any of the demographic characteristics could significantly predict participants' level of absorption toward their overall level of work engagement. The results of the multiple regression analysis indicated that the model explained 7.7% of the variance and that the model was not a significant predictor of one's preferred absorption work engagement, $F(11, 144) = 1.099, p = .366$ (Table 4.20).

Table 4.20 Multiple Regression Summary for Absorption Work Engagement by Demographic Characteristics

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Regression	12.386	11	1.126	1.099	.366
Residual	147.489	144	1.024		
Total	159.875	155			

Relationship Between Leadership Style Preference and Level of Engagement

Transactional Leadership Style

A multiple regression analysis was used to investigate whether any of the work engagement variables could significantly predict participants' leadership style. The results of the multiple regression analysis indicated that the model explained 8% of the variance and that the model was not a significant predictor of one's preferred transactional leadership $F(30, 60) = 1.234, p = .238$ (Table 4.21).

Table 4.21 Multiple Regression Summary for Transactional Leadership Style by Engagement

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean		
			Square	F	p
Regression	1.716	30	.572	1.234	.238
Residual	64.338	160	.402		
Total	66.054	163			

Democratic Leadership Style

A multiple regression analysis was used to investigate whether any of the work engagement variables could significantly predict the participants' democratic leadership style. The results of the multiple regression analysis indicated that the model explained 7% of the variance and that the model was not a significant predictor of one's preferred democratic leadership $F(30, 60) = 1.370, p = .254$ (Table 4.22).

Table 4.22 Multiple Regression Summary for Democratic Leadership Style by Engagement

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean		
			Square	F	p
Regression	1.059	30	.353	1.370	.254
Residual	41.235	160	.258		
Total	42.295	163			

Autocratic Leadership Style

A multiple regression analysis was used to investigate whether any of the work engagement variables could significantly predict the participants' autocratic leadership style. The results of the multiple regression analysis indicated that the model explained 2.7% of the variance and that the model was not a significant predictor of one's preferred autocratic leadership $F(30, 60) = 1.42, p = .219$ (Table 4.23).

Table 4.23 Multiple Regression Summary for Autocratic Leadership Style by Engagement

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Regression	1.931	30	.644	1.42	.219
Residual	69.030	160	.431		
Total	70.961	163			

Autocratic Transformational Leadership Style

A multiple regression analysis was used to investigate whether any of the work engagement variables could significantly predict the participants' autocratic transformational leadership. The results of the multiple regression analysis indicated that the model explained 1.8% of the variance and that the model was not a significant predictor of one's preferred autocratic transformational leadership $F(30, 60) = .977, p = .405$ (Table 4.24).

Table 4.24 Multiple Regression Summary for Autocratic Transformational Leadership Style by Engagement

	Sum of Squares		Mean		
		df	Square	F	p
Regression	1.210	30	.403	.977	.405
Residual	66.034	160	.413		
Total	67.244	163			

Autocratic Transactional Leadership Style

A multiple regression analysis was used to investigate whether any of the work engagement variables could significantly predict participants' autocratic transactional leadership. The results of the multiple regression analysis indicated that the model explained 4% of the variance and that the model was not a significant predictor of one's preferred autocratic transactional leadership $F(30, 60) = .2.237, p = .086$ (Table 4.25).

Table 4.25 Multiple Regression Summary for Transactional Leadership Style by Engagement

	Sum of Squares		Mean		
		df	Square	F	p
Regression	3.528	30	1.176	2.237	.086
Residual	84.111	160	.526		
Total	87.640	163			

Democratic Transformational Leadership Style

A multiple regression analysis was used to investigate whether any of the work engagement variables could significantly predict the participants' democratic transformational leadership. The results of the multiple regression analysis indicated that the model explained 2.2% of the variance and that the model was not a significant predictor of one's preferred democratic transformational leadership $F(30, 60) = .1.185, p = .317$ (Table 4.26).

Table 4.26 Multiple Regression Summary for Democratic Transformational Leadership Style by Engagement

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Regression	1.172	30	.391	1.185	.317
Residual	52.760	160	.330		
Total	53.932	163			

Democratic Transactional Leadership Style

A multiple regression analysis was used to investigate whether any of the work engagement variables could significantly predict the participants' democratic transactional leadership. The results of the multiple regression analysis indicated that the model explained 4.4% of the variance and that the model was not a significant predictor of one's preferred democratic transactional leadership $F(30, 60) = 3.265, p = .055$ (Table 4.27).

Table 4.27 Multiple Regression Summary for Democratic Transactional Leadership Style by Engagement

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean	F	p
			Square		
Regression	3.265	30	1.088	2.588	.055
Residual	67.274	160	.420		
Total	70.539	163			

Transformational Leadership Style

A multiple regression analysis was used to investigate whether any of the work engagement variables could significantly predict the participants' transformational leadership. The results of the multiple regression analysis indicated that the model explained 3.7% of the variance and that the model was not a significant predictor of one's preferred democratic transformational leadership $F(30, 60) = 3.265, p = .055$ (Table 4.28).

Table 4.28 Multiple Regression Summary for Transformational Leadership Style by Engagement

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean	F	p
			Square		
Regression	2.101	30	.700	2.077	.105
Residual	53.961	160	.337		
Total	56.062	163			

Laissez-Faire Leadership Style

A multiple regression analysis was used to investigate whether any of the work engagement variables could significantly predict the participants' laissez-faire leadership. The results of the multiple regression analysis indicated that the model explained 3.6% of the variance and that the model was not a significant predictor of one's preferred laissez-faire leadership, $F(30, 160) = 1.999, p = .116$ (Table 4.29).

Table 4.29 Summary of Multiple Regression Model for Laissez-Faire Leadership Style by Engagement

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Regression	3.661	30	1.220	1.999	.116
Residual	97.694	160	.611		
Total	101.355	163			

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSION, LIMITATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter is organized into four segments. These segments include the conclusions, discussion, limitations, and recommendations for further research and practices.

Review of Methods

The purpose of this study was to assess the leadership style preferences of county-level staff within University of Missouri Extension and their level of employee engagement. Prior research by Abbott (2017) and Moore (2003) found that levels of engagement did not change regardless of age, gender, and years of employment within Extension; however, those studies did find that county extension directors preferred transformational leadership styles. However, as the Vannsimpco Leadership Survey (VLS) has only been in existence for a short period of time, there has been no research within Extension focusing on the nine areas of leadership measured by the VLS. Based on the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ), the VLS is a hybrid-based survey employing questions to combine leadership qualities into relevant categories. The VLS's unique categorization of nine concrete and measurable leadership traits utilized in this survey for this research promises to provide Extension with a better understanding of leadership practices.

A descriptive-correlational research design was utilized to determine relationships among perceived leadership styles and engagement. Data were collected on participants levels of work engagement, leadership style preferences, and selected demographic characteristics. This

research utilized the Vannsimpco Leadership Survey (VLS) to recognize nine leadership styles and to understand leadership style preference. The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) was utilized to assess the level of employee engagement. The UWES measures three dimensions: vigor, dedication, and absorption. From the 448 initial surveys that were distributed, 164 or 37% of those surveys were utilized in this study.

Demographic Characteristics

University of Missouri Extension county-level staff were female working in the Youth and Family discipline. These individuals were between 51 and 60 years of age and had worked for University of Missouri Extension for less than five years.

Conclusion and Discussion

This quantitative research study with University of Missouri Extension personnel focused on the preferred leadership styles and levels of work engagement of all county-level staff. This study may not accurately represent the total population of county Extension staff, which is addressed further in the limitations. Key findings related to these limitations are addressed below.

Research Question 1: Perceived Leadership Styles

Among the nine possible leadership styles measured by the VLS, the democratic leadership style was the most preferred leadership style by University of Missouri Extension county-level staff. Local Extension personnel viewed an equal balance between decision-making and responsibility among County Engagement Specialists and county staff to be the most desired style of leadership. The laissez-faire leadership style was the least desired form of leadership among county-level staff.

Different leadership styles and different levels of engagement in each county are needed for Extension to be successful. Northouse (2013) stated that laissez-faire leaders do not motivate, nor do they empower those they supervise. Because of this, Extension personnel under this type of leadership placed in unfamiliar environments may feel as though their job performance is inadequate. Therefore, laissez-faire leadership is not beneficial to the success of Extension. While democratic leadership allows for input from followers, laissez-faire entails total decision making to be delegated to supporters. Through this, leaders only interject after the fact and only when a problem arises and often deliver negativity related to the outcome. With minimal knowledge related to job duties, this can have a detrimental impact on successful implementation of programming by staff. Avolio (1999) gave credence to laissez-faire actually being non leadership. Without strong leadership, Extension would not be successful in improving Missouri citizens through needed programming.

University of Missouri Extension serves all 114 counties in Missouri bracketed into eight regions with each region headed by a regional director (UMES, 2021). However, University of Missouri Extension houses approximately 448 off campus staff in county offices located within each county. As both the organizational climate and job involvement play key roles in perceived leadership styles, Srivasta (1994) found that organizational climate related to success is positively correlated to job involvement. With Extension serving as a community-based organization tasked to serve the public (McGahee & Davies, 2005), Extension personnel who implement program policies feel a special connection to their work and thus, exhibit more pride in what they do.

With the democratic leadership style being the most preferred by county-level staff, the ability to make decisions related to localized programming is important. Furthermore, Omolayo

and Ajila (2012) found that workers display positive attitudes attributed to democratic leadership in their work when they are included in policy and decision making. As this research found autocratic leadership styles less preferred, Williams (2002) found that workers presented differing leadership styles in a positive climate, displayed a preference for a democratic leader versus an authoritarian leader. De Witte (2005) also found that subordinates act according to organizational climates and leader directions.

This study also adds to previous research in the field of autocratic leadership through Extension's constant evolution of programming. Lussier and Achua (2010) stated that autocratic leadership is primarily needed when workers are focused on complex tasks, thus requiring strong authority. Because the needs of communities within the counties of Missouri are constantly changing, programming in Extension evolves to meet those demands. Therefore, as this study shows, autocratic leadership does fit a demand due to dissemination of new programming. Corresponding with previous studies Bass and Stogdill (1990), autocratic leadership is incorporated in Extension as programming often includes several employees working together to disseminate educational content. Understanding this can provide a positive impact on the lives of all Missourians as county Extension staff can participate in in-service trainings relating to autocratic leadership.

Research Question 2: Relationship Between Leadership Style Preference and Demographic Characteristics

Out of the nine leadership style preferences measured in this study, only one, the autocratic leadership style, was found to have demographic characteristics that predicted that leadership preference of individuals who had worked ten years or less (years of service) with University of Missouri Extension. These individuals displayed a stronger preference toward the

autocratic leadership style. This study also found that perceived autocratic leadership style preferences decrease as Extension personnel are at the highest stage of employment. Northouse (2013) stated an autocratic leadership style is the concentration of power to the manager and thus, all group exchanges go through the leader. As experience increases, self-sufficiency also increases, which means that knowledge related to tasks increases as well. This study coincides with other research as Aldoory and Toth (2004), who found that as employees' length of service increased, so did their own perception as leaders.

Length of service with University of Missouri Extension also had an impact on leadership style preference. Preference for the transformational leadership style increased for the 21-to-30 and 41-to-50 age groups, but diminished for the 51-to-60 age range. Additionally, those in Health and Safety preferred transformational leadership. Moreover, this study concluded that employees with 21-to-25 years of experience did not prefer autocratic-transformational leadership and those with the same length of service preferred the autocratic leadership style even less. Comparatively, this research study concluded that those with the least amount of time employed with Extension preferred autocratic-transformational leadership.

The lack of long-term experience from less knowledgeable employees creates a deficiency in self-awareness and confidence, leading to a desire for autocratic leadership within county Extension staff. Aldoory and Tooth (2004) stated that individuals with larger levels of experience felt that effective leaders do not necessitate a strong relationship with followers. As the most tenured Extension county staff understand what is needed and expected, an autocratic leadership style, including an autocratic transactional leadership style, is not as much of a requirement.

Additionally, bureaucratic workplace environments retract employee's feelings of empowerment when making decisions (Prabhu, 2005). As county Extension offices are relatively small with just a few people housed in each office, the organizational structure on the county level is less bureaucratic. With less bureaucracy and more experience, longer-tenured employees tend to display more confidence in their abilities thus perceiving less oversight and not needing autocratic leadership. County staff with less experience desire direct leadership and more oversight to successfully complete tasks.

The study concluded that age was a factor in leadership preference as employees in the 41-to-50 age bracket perceived democratic-transformational leadership more important while that same age demographic viewed transformational leadership as the second most desired leadership style. This result correlated age with experience and confidence, meaning that, as Extension county staff learn more pertaining to their own duties, there existed less need for supervision. However, employees in the 41-to-50 age range do felt that there is a need for leadership related to positive change and motivation. Additionally, those in the 31-to-40 age range desired to have goals set for them as they had a preference for transactional leadership. Due to having less experience as the older age group, this age range had yet to fully advance to becoming leaders themselves.

Importance of Non-Significant Results

This study found no statistical significance between the demographic characteristics and the remaining leadership style preferences. This study concluded that one leadership style (autocratic leadership) was significantly predicted by selected demographic characteristics while the remaining eight leadership styles were not statistically significant. Comparable, Abbott (2017) found there were no significant differences in leadership styles by leadership groups.

Also, Abbott (2017) found only one leadership style, transformational leadership, to be significant. Though University of Missouri Extension county staff were unsure about the ninth leadership style (*laissez-faire*), this study found that all participants agreed that eight of the nine leadership styles were preferred within the organization.

Similar to this research, Supaman et al., (2019) found that work environments can positively impact leadership, but still display non-significance while reinforcing positive commitment. While the results of this study showed length of service to be substantial in most leadership style preferences, Kelarijani et al., (2014) found that length of service had a direct correlation to commitment. Additionally, Supaman et al., (2019) stated that leadership processes in some institutions provided little influence and individuals developed their own leadership. Corresponding with Kelarijani et al., (2014) and Supaman et al., (2019), this study found as County Extension personnel were employed longer, employees developed self-leadership, thus reducing the need for outside leadership styles.

Extension in Missouri is complex, provides for a large number of services, and serves the needs of a vast array of stakeholders. To remain successful, University of Missouri Extension must maintain diverse leadership styles to meet the needs of clientele. Xenikou and Simosi (2006) concluded organizational culture and leadership combine to impact organizational thought processes and expectations. Also, Idris et al., (2022) found leadership style and organizational culture impact performance, but organizational culture by itself was not significant. Due to varied clientele needs, the findings of only one leadership style to be predictive represents the need for diverse leadership to advance organizational goals of Extension in Missouri. Thus, depending upon the demographic characteristics, all researched leadership styles were not deemed significant for all demographics. This created a varied demand

of multiple leadership styles due to specific needs of each county office. Furthermore, Bhagyashree (2019) stated due to strengths and weaknesses of each leadership style, a mixture of multiple leadership styles may be needed to address weaknesses of an organization.

Democratic Leadership Style

University of Missouri Extension personnel prefer to be included in the decision-making processes rather than be engaged in by a laissez-faire leadership style. This preference for democratic and democratic transformational leadership is reinforced by previous research as Northouse (2004) claims that laissez-faire leadership is passive and leaders often delay action until mistakes are noted. Because laissez-faire leaders do not become involved in the decision-making process, this type of leadership is coined as inactive leadership (Hayat et al., 2011). With the important endeavor of improving lives, county level Extension personnel have firsthand knowledge of societal impacts needed for their specific county. Therefore, they possess the ability to interject this knowledge during decision-making processes. With laissez-faire leadership, leaders are often absent (Gardner & Stough, 2002) and provide little to no guidance. This leadership style can be problematic as decisions made by Extension personnel often impact public populations.

Extension personnel typically make decisions in real-time. Also, Extension personnel may feel as though they are their own leader in the decision-making process. Moreover, staff may have unique decision-making needs related to their duties, including clerical staff being required to answer questions related to specialists programming. Additionally, county Extension specialist may be pressed for knowledge outside of their field. Because of this, county-level staff may have a necessitated preferred leadership style. Northouse (2013) stated leaders utilizing laissez-faire leadership style will not assume responsibility as a manager. Conversely, other

leadership styles can be of benefit to office staff. Mesick and Kramer (2004) state that leadership is based upon both situation and environment. Therefore, as this research shows, laissez-faire leadership is not typically useful in the scope of Extension at the county level. Administrative assistants need to be aware of specialists programming coverage. Additionally, they need to have some understanding of what the program consists of. Thus, through democratic or democratic-transformational leadership, secretaries can be of assistance with programming.

Autocratic Leadership Styles

Hersey (2010) stated transformational leaders motivate followers where autocratic leaders do not offer participation to staff in the decision-making process (Shahzad, et al., 2010). In addition to laissez-faire leadership, this research showed autocratic leadership, autocratic-transactional and autocratic transactional leadership styles to be the least preferred among county Extension staff. Alluding to previous research, this study demonstrates the autocratic aspect of the autocratic-transformational leadership style could override the positiveness of the transformational side. Vann (2014) stated autocratic transformational leadership is when a the leader adopts complete control of the decision-making process while allowing for feedback from followers. This research did show that an autocratic leadership style was significantly predictive. The results revealed that county-level staff in the lowest three years of service preferred an autocratic leadership style in their work setting. This could be due to short-term or relatively new staff not possessing clear job expectations and thus, having lower job satisfaction when compared to more experienced staff (Hill, 2009). This research shows those who had been employed with University of Missouri Extension one to five years had the largest preference for an autocratic leadership style. This could be due to the need for oversight until knowledge and skills are acquired by new Extension staff. Additionally, though autocratic transactional

leadership was not significant, this research also showed the least tenured demographic as having the highest desire for this leadership style.

This research found a strong relationship between autocratic-transformational leadership and being employed for less than one year with University of Missouri Extension. As a hybrid leadership style, autocratic transformational leadership utilized both styles to serve as a more specific reference point of leadership than each individually. One possible reason for this relationship is that increased levels of length of service causes employees to decrease the need for oversight. Extension personnel located in county offices may possess more knowledge pertaining to local needs than supervisors placed in region or state offices. Graybill (2014) stated that in autocratic leadership, follower's opinions are not valued which creates low morale and a lack of satisfaction in these followers. Therefore, longer tenured office staff may perceive themselves as having more pertinent knowledge than those in supervisory roles located outside of the local office.

Transactional Leadership

The demographic characteristics were not a significant predictor of the transactional leadership style. However, three variables were shown to be significant. County-level staff between the ages of 31-to-50 and those who were employed 6-10 years displayed increased transactional leadership. However, transactional leadership was not statistically different among those between 31 to 50 age ranges and 6 to 10 years of employment. This lack of continuity exhibits the potential need for future development for skillsets related to transactional leadership within the other groups. Abbott (2017) posited that as Extension employment length increases, transformational leadership skills of specific age groups and employee engagement would also increase.

The reduction of transactional leadership among the 51-to-60 age range could be due to lack of desire for change. Those who prefer transformational leadership tend to be younger in age. As this research found, the majority of respondents were younger and more inexperienced. In-service training for this demographic utilizing transformational leadership could enhance their delivery of programming. Furthering this research, Moore and Rudd (2006) found that long-term organizational managers desired to maintain the status quo while younger leaders were more likely to be risk takers. Those who engaged in transactional leadership styles worked within the organizational culture. Therefore, as each Extension county office is different, there are diverse expectations of work to be performed. Transactional leadership allows for county staff to fully understand these expectations. Additionally, Bass (1985) stated that leaders offer rewards for compliance. This rewarding allows for transactional leaders to understand roles of followers and their responsibilities (Moore & Rudd, 2006). Therefore, leaders exhibiting traits of transactional leadership will effectively communicate what is expected from followers. This perceived leadership style allows Extension personnel to be fully aware of expectations and rewards.

Transformational Leadership

As previously stated, transformational leadership holds that interactions between leader and follower can create a positive environment. Though this research found transformational leadership was not significant, it was found to be in the median of preferred leadership styles. Additionally, this study found that as length of service increased, so did the preference of transformational leadership. Compared to other research, it can be concluded that more motivation is needed to inspire workers as their tenure in Extension increases. This preference for transformational leadership could potentially be due to worker burnout. Gill (2006) posited that leaders could alleviate burnout and job stress through transformational leadership. This

alleviation can be performed through clarification of the mission and vision of Extension. Liu (2019) stated that developing specific approaches and strategies can simplify growth of employees. However, transformational leadership may not be strong enough for those who already possess a vast amount of knowledge related to occupational requirements, such as long-term or extremely knowledgeable Extension staff.

Research Question 3: Work Engagement

Coinciding with Abbott (2017), this research displayed average work engagement within the University of Missouri Extension County Engagement Specialists, other specialists, and county staff and that University of Missouri Extension county staff were engaged at least weekly on the three subscales of engagement. Those who invested effort into their work, even through difficulties, maintained strong levels of engagement with their work.

Research conducted by Shuck and Reio (2011) found leadership behaviors and working conditions were directly linked to levels of engagement, while Brown (2014) stated increased levels of engagement arise from organizational understanding of workplace experiences. Furthermore, Saks (2006) stated that increased levels of engagement occur with relationship-oriented behaviors. Similarly, potentially due to leadership turnover within the organization, this study concluded that county-level personnel are in need of developmental contact to increase engagement. Smulders (2006) found entrepreneurs to be more engaged than salaried workers. As Extension personnel primarily occupy salaried positions, this research showed a diminished strength in relationships to coincide with research conducted by Gorgievski et al., (2020).

This study also concluded that absorption was a key component of engagement with county Extension staff. Research by Salanova (2001) concluded workers who have absorption felt satisfied in their efforts and that workers often lost themselves in their work. This study

showed county Extension personnel possessed high work levels, thus detailing absorption work engagement. As University of Missouri Extension county staff are dedicated to their work, this research found that they often felt their work absorbed them.

Research Question 4: Relationship Between Levels of Work Engagement and Demographics

This research looked at the relationship between the demographic characteristics of age, gender, and length of service on level of work engagement. This study did find that University of Missouri Extension county-level personnel were dedicated to their jobs, displayed mental resilience of vigor, and had a highly concentrated state of absorption with each measure of the UWES. This study also found that there were no significant predictors relating to employee engagement. Though not significant, this study did find increased dedication work engagement among those with less than one year of service. Also, those with between 16 and 20 years of service showed the highest levels of dedication work engagement but those with 6 to 10 years displayed a negative dedication toward work engagement. Additionally, the data showed the highest amount of work engagement for the age demographic to be those between 51 and 60 years of age and the least for those between 31 and 40 years of age.

This research further showed more absorption work engagement from those Extension employees with less than one year of service. This could be due to hiring processes involving older employees. Khan (1990) noted that absorption is motivation within the role of work. As older employees have gained experience to understand their likes and dislikes, they will have increased engagement when compared to inexperienced workers. Avolio and Bass (2004) found that personal philosophies contribute to interaction among employees as they arise from personal beliefs and impact engagement. As this study presented those with less than one year of service

as rating the highest in engagement, it also showed those in the youngest age category as having the least amount of engagement.

Vigor work engagement was low among all variables with the 21 to 30 age range. As most college graduates are searching for any occupation and not a career, this could reflect the lack of energy and resilience. Smola and Sutton (2002) found that pride relating to craftsmanship was not important for workers between the ages of 17 and 26. Additionally, Rhodes (1983) found that attitudes related to work evolve as workers enter different stages of their careers. This would explain the low values of engagement from the young demographic.

Research Question 5: Relationship Between Perceived Leadership Style and Level of Engagement

This research found that the relationship between perceived leadership style and level of engagement of county-level personnel was not significant. However, Fleming and Asplund (2007) stated that engaged employees are highly productive and remained employed for longer periods of time. Also, Buckingham and Coffman (1999) stated that only 30% of the entire workplace was engaged with their work. While Northouse (2004) noted leadership as the influence one has over another, Bass (1985) stated that leaders provide energy and talents to others. Furthermore, Alagaraja and Shuck (2015) stated that engagement aligned with organizational goals promotes a positive culture within the organization.

As this research did not find increased work engagement, that does not correspond to no work engagement. Shuck (2015) stated that cognitively engaged employees often hold a shared purpose. To engage employees, leaders need to possess effective communication skills. In Extension, these skills help support employee achievement. Managers who entertain employee input and offer constructive feedback improve workforce confidence and efficiency (Lightle, et

al., 2015). Extension in Missouri may be no different than other Extension services that have researched engagement. As previous research alludes to proper employee fitment to ensure engagement, hiring the correct people in the proper positions is paramount (Alagaraja & Shuck, 2015).

Dedication Work Engagement

This study showed that county Extension staff had average dedication work engagement, and there was no significant predictor among the nine leadership styles tested. However, dedication had the largest mean among the three engagement constructs. Conversely, a study by Abbott (2017) showed dedication work engagement among county directors in Purdue Extension to be high. However, that same study showed overall employee engagement to be average. Employees displaying high dedication believe that their work is important (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004b). As Extension personnel in county offices are public servants, they often display pride in their work of helping others. Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) also stated that dedication provides for a means of pride while Sadovaya and Korchagina (2016) stated that dedication is the positive attitude of work with the goal of personally achieving success.

A study by Jaya and Ariyanto (2021) found that dedication work engagement can produce a significant positive effect related to employee performance. Conversely, research conducted by Mills and Konya (2019) showed low dedication work engagement will also lower work production. Though dedication work engagement showed no significant predictors, this research found it to have the largest predictor in transactional leadership. Bass and Riggio (2006) state that transactional leaders focus on expectations and rewards. Thus, Extension personnel located in county offices may provide more dedication related toward their duties to receive recognition of accomplished work. Furthermore, this research found dedication as the least

significant work engagement in the laissez-faire leadership style followed closely by democratic leadership.

Employees under laissez-faire leadership often reduce commitment to organizations through diminished contributions including goals from subordinates (Robert & Vandenberghe, 2021). As laissez-faire is a hands-off approach to leadership, Extension county staff could feel reduced or no dedication as there is no leadership to direct them. Additionally, dedication work engagement was positive for transformational and democratic transformational leadership styles with both displaying almost identical coefficients. To coincide with changing needs of stakeholders, this could suggest that University of Missouri Extension county staff are implementing methods involving democratic leadership with goals and practices related to transformational leadership styles (Wilson, 2020). Dedication work engagement with autocratic and autocratic transactional leadership was also found to be negative while autocratic transformational was not.

Vigor Work Engagement

Abbott (2017) stated that vigor is the energy that one invests into their work. Furthermore, Schaufeli (2006) stated that vigor work engagement consists of workers with high energy who are willing and persistent and invest mental effort into their work. Hanaysha (2016) found that when related to performance, vigor has a weak significant positive effect. Furthermore, Abbott (2017) found vigor to be average among county directors employed with the Purdue Extension Service.

This study found vigor work engagement to be not significant among the nine leadership styles. Additionally, none of the two remaining autocratic leadership styles —autocratic transformational and autocratic transactional — had any significant predictors related to vigor

engagement. The democratic leadership style also expressed non-significant predictors, but showed vigor as the second most desired type of work engagement. Democratic transformational, transactional, and transformational leadership styles all showed negative vigor engagement with laissez-faire leadership, the remaining leadership style. Furthermore, this study found that county Extension staff displayed an average investment of energy related to their occupation.

Absorption Work Engagement

Schaufeli (2002) defined absorption work engagement as an employee so fully integrated into work that time constraints are not realized. Schaufeli (2012) stated that absorption reflects a person's mental state and is both pervasive and persistent. Previous research by Hanaysha (2016) showed absorption to have weak positive engagement relating to performance where research by Phan and Ngu (2014a) studied high school students and found that absorption had a positive influence related to success. Additionally, research relating to engagement of Extension county directors at Purdue University by Abbott (2017) found high absorption engagement relating to Extension county directors with absorption as the second highest engagement construct.

This research found that absorption work engagement did not have any significant predictor variables related to the nine leadership styles and ranked the lowest of the three constructs. Cohen and Levinthal (1990) stated that transformational leadership encourages absorptive capacity. This leadership style inspires organizational structure in a manner that promotes an organizations characteristic (Van den Bosch, et al., 1999). As Extension is an organization based on disseminating educational content to stakeholders, absorption of knowledge by county staff is important in delivering information and programs. Additionally,

absorption engagement within Extension allows for acquisition, implementation and transformation of education and programs.

Zahra and George (2002) related leaders who allowed absorption of knowledge to develop value through absorptive capacity. As laissez-faire leadership contains little to no involvement in the decision-making process, county Extension staff are required to absorb more knowledge and information compared to the other leadership styles. Often, this conscription occurs from outside the normal channels of information received by county staff from Extension leaders. Further, Abbott (2017) stated that laissez-faire leaders are not prone to engage in their own duties or likely to engage with other Extension employees. Through absorption, Missouri county Extension staff are able to transcend that leadership style by acquiring needed content and leadership elsewhere.

Limitations

As with all research, limitations exist, which reduces the ability to generalize this study to outside populations. Due to the fact that the University of Missouri Extension is structured uniquely, these findings may not be conducive with other work forces. This study was limited to only Extension staff operating in county offices in Missouri Extension. As such, staff housed in regional offices and on campus were not included.

A potential limitation was the release day of the survey instrument. As the survey was originally released on a Friday afternoon, a large proportion of specialists and non-clerical staff may not have been in the office. Thus, the majority of most offices tend to be staffed by administrative assistants. Additionally, the survey was released the week following an extended holiday break. Office staff may not have been fully integrated back into their work environment

or office space. To remedy this limitation, future assessment release days could be centered around the middle of the week and at least two weeks past any major holiday or break.

A third possible limitation includes the demographic variables. Though the researcher was able to garner a 48 percent response rate, there exists the possibility other variables related to demographics were not included within the survey. These variables could have had an impact on leadership styles and engagement.

Moore and Rudd (2005) define leaders as those who are responsible for daily operations such as a County Engagement Specialist. As the data is self-reported, the accuracy of answers related to leaders and leadership may not be as precise. The validity of the answers was dependent upon an honest response of the participants. If participants had preconceived ideas related to leadership, they may not have answered truthfully.

Finally, the Vannsimpco Leadership Survey (VLS) is a relatively new instrument. As such, there is not a large amount of literature or research regarding the survey or choices within the questionnaire. Therefore, there exist a lack of data to use when comparing the survey in its entirety or its questions to other forms of assessment.

Recommendations

The most preferred leadership styles of democratic, democratic-transformational, and transactional leadership were selected by participants with the laissez-faire leadership style being the least preferred. This research showed that University of Missouri Extension county staff prefer to be included in the decision-making process. Furthermore, the research showed that University of Missouri Extension county staff feel that dictatorial leadership will not allow them to be successful.

Based to the results of this research, the following recommendations are presented:

Recommendations for future research

- Due to the VLS and the UWES serving as self-reporting instruments, more research should be conducted utilizing both instruments among supervisors at different levels and county staff.
- Further research separating office supervisors such as CES/CED and office staff into groups and researching their current leadership preference could potentially enhance perceived leadership styles.
- Future research focusing on regional director leadership styles compared to county office supervisors' leadership style preference may allow for knowledge of favored leadership preferences of county CESs. Additionally, this could lead to enhancements for Extension in-service trainings related to leadership and engagement.
- As the face of Extension's outreach in the state, future research should be conducted in leadership preference of administrative assistants and county CESs.
- As this research noted a disproportionate number of employees having worked for Missouri Extension less than five years, future leadership research should be performed to gain insight of employee turnover.

As each work environment is different, so are the needs relating to each county. In order to have successful programming at the county level to fit those needs, different leadership styles and appropriate levels of work engagement are needed for Extension to function successfully. For example, where St. Louis and Clay counties in Missouri serve more urban areas, Extension in Linn and Wayne counties are designed more towards agriculture. Though all counties in

Missouri have active 4-H programs, the needs of youth in urban counties reflect an environment not necessarily conducive with agriculture. However, 4-H programming in rural counties is predominantly related to farming. Conversely, education involving agronomy in all counties can include garden clubs.

Based to the results of this research, the following recommendations are presented:

Recommendations for Future Practices

- Extension administrators should utilize this research with on-campus faculty and specialists to improve leadership and engagement through in-service trainings.
- More interactions between education directors and region directors with county specialists and staff could improve both leadership and engagement.
- Professional development specifically related to leadership implemented during Extension conferences can enhance county employee relationships and engagement.
- Monthly meetings between supervisors and county staff should be held to identify and discuss ways to increase levels of engagement when delivering Extension programs.

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APPENDIX A
QUESTIONS FOR DEMOGRAPHICS

Place a check in the corresponding box that best represents you

1. Gender: Male Female Prefer not to answer

2. Age: 21-30, 31-40, 41-50, 51- 60, 61 and over

3. Length of service to University of Missouri Extension: Less than 1 year, 1-5 years, 6-10 years, 11-15 years, 16-20 years, 21-25 years, Over 25 years

4. Program Area: Agriculture and Environment Business and Community Health and Safety Youth and Family Support Staff

APPENDIX B

UTRECHT WORK ENGAGEMENT SCALE

Please read each of the following statements and place a corresponding number displaying your work sentiment in the space to the left of each statement.

	Almost never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often	Always
0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Never	A few times a year or less	Once a month or less	A few times a month	Once a week	A few times a week	Every day

Rate each statement on a scale of 0 to 6 with the 0 equaling never and 6 equaling every day.

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 resilient, 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

VANNSIMPCO LEADERSHIP SURVEY KEY

Transactional Questions

_____ 1 Supervisors should make it a point to reward staff for achieving organizational goals.

Strongly Disagree 1 Disagree 2 Neutral 3 Agree 4 Strongly Agree 5

_____ 2 Supervisors should let staff members know what to expect as rewards for achieving goals.

Strongly Disagree 1 Disagree 2 Neutral 3 Agree 4 Strongly Agree 5

_____ 3 Supervisors should set deadlines and clearly state the positive or negative consequences of staff members' not meeting defined goals.

Strongly Disagree 1 Disagree 2 Neutral 3 Agree 4 Strongly Agree 5

Democratic Questions

_____ 4 Supervisors should give staff authority to make important decisions.

Strongly Disagree 1 Disagree 2 Neutral 3 Agree 4 Strongly Agree 5

_____ 5 Supervisors should seek input from staff when formulating policies and procedures for implementing them.

Strongly Disagree 1 Disagree 2 Neutral 3 Agree 4 Strongly Agree 5

_____ 6 To solve problems, supervisors should have meetings with staff members before correcting issues.

Strongly Disagree 1 Disagree 2 Neutral 3 Agree 4 Strongly Agree 5

Autocratic Questions

_____ 7 It is the supervisor's ultimate responsibility for whether the organization achieves its goals.

Strongly Disagree 1 Disagree 2 Neutral 3 Agree 4 Strongly Agree 5

____ 8 Supervisors should make quick decisions in times of urgency and be more deliberate in making decisions during times of less urgency.

Strongly Disagree 1 Disagree 2 Neutral 3 Agree 4 Strongly Agree 5

____ 9 Supervisors should assign specific tasks to key staff members in order to achieve specific goals.

Strongly Disagree 1 Disagree 2 Neutral 3 Agree 4 Strongly Agree 5

Autocratic-Transformational

____ 10 Supervisors should provide the goal for the organization and allow staff to work towards achieving the goal, making sure to offer them feedback concerning their efforts.

Strongly Disagree 1 Disagree 2 Neutral 3 Agree 4 Strongly Agree 5

____ 11 Supervisors should retain control of decision making, but they should encourage high morale so followers can more effectively implement change.

Strongly Disagree 1 Disagree 2 Neutral 3 Agree 4 Strongly Agree 5

____ 12 Supervisors are responsible for the operation of the organization or department, which includes the development of the competencies and commitment of personnel.

Strongly Disagree 1 Disagree 2 Neutral 3 Agree 4 Strongly Agree 5

Autocratic-Transactional

____ 13 In addition to having responsibility for decision-making, it is essential for a supervisor to provide incentives and disincentives for staff with respect to work they have done on assigned projects.

Strongly Disagree 1 Disagree 2 Neutral 3 Agree 4 Strongly Agree 5

____ 14 Supervisors should state clearly the incentives and disincentives to followers while maximizing oversight on the most critical decisions.

Strongly Disagree 1 Disagree 2 Neutral 3 Agree 4 Strongly Agree 5

____ 15 Supervisors make the key decisions for the organization and get most of the credit or blame, but they should make sure that their promises for rewards and disincentives made to workers are kept.

Strongly Disagree 1 Disagree 2 Neutral 3 Agree 4 Strongly Agree 5

Democratic-Transformational

____ 16 Supervisors should provide opportunities for staff members to be involved in decision making while serving as mentors during times of change.

Strongly Disagree 1 Disagree 2 Neutral 3 Agree 4 Strongly Agree 5

____ 17 Supervisors should be open to others' ideas, yet he or she should guide employees to become stronger workers.

Strongly Disagree 1 Disagree 2 Neutral 3 Agree 4 Strongly Agree 5

____ 18 Supervisors should be highly concerned about developing staff's ability to contribute to making important organizational decisions.

Strongly Disagree 1 Disagree 2 Neutral 3 Agree 4 Strongly Agree 5

Democratic-Transactional

____ 19 Supervisors should be comfortable working with groups to seek their input in making decisions while providing incentives and disincentives for the quality of their work.

Strongly Disagree 1 Disagree 2 Neutral 3 Agree 4 Strongly Agree 5

____ 20 In order to make decisions, supervisors should discuss issues with all of the staff members while considering which incentives and disincentives should be used in response to the quality of their work.

Strongly Disagree 1 Disagree 2 Neutral 3 Agree 4 Strongly Agree 5

_____ 21 Supervisors should be concerned about building consensus among staff members while making sure they understand the timelines, as well as their benefits and penalties in relation to achieving goals.

Strongly Disagree 1 Disagree 2 Neutral 3 Agree 4 Strongly Agree 5

Transformational

_____ 22 Supervisors should rely on personal influence and relationship building rather than on position or title to get staff to do work tasks.

Strongly Disagree 1 Disagree 2 Neutral 3 Agree 4 Strongly Agree 5

_____ 23 Supervisors should develop strategies to develop the staff's competence and commitment.

Strongly Disagree 1 Disagree 2 Neutral 3 Agree 4 Strongly Agree 5

_____ 24 Supervisors should look for ways to develop the strengths of staff members.

Strongly Disagree 1 Disagree 2 Neutral 3 Agree 4 Strongly Agree 5

Laissez-faire

_____ 25 Supervisors' jobs are to read reports and "see the big picture;" nearly all of their work should involve little or no direction of the staff members who make point of contact decisions.

Strongly Disagree 1 Disagree 2 Neutral 3 Agree 4 Strongly Agree 5

_____ 26 Staff members should be hired with skills necessary to make decisions in the workplace. If staff members need direct supervision, they should not be working in the organization.

Strongly Disagree 1 Disagree 2 Neutral 3 Agree 4 Strongly Agree 5

_____27 Supervisors should hire competent and committed staff members, which relieves the
“manager” from making most of the day-to-day decisions.

Strongly Disagree 1 Disagree 2 Neutral 3 Agree 4 Strongly Agree 5

APPENDIX D
IRB APPROVAL

From: tss132@msstate.edu
Sent Date: Thursday, January 06, 2022 13:43:52 PM
To: kas103@msstate.edu, jcm995@msstate.edu, jrb9@msstate.edu, men1@msstate.edu, pt8@msstate.edu
Cc:
Bcc:
Subject: Do Not Reply: Approval Notice for Study # IRB-21-333, Leadership preference of county level personnel within University of Missouri Extension and their employee engagement.

Message:

Protocol ID: IRB-21-333
Principal Investigator: Kirk Swortzel
Protocol Title: Leadership preference of county level personnel within University of Missouri Extension and their employee engagement.
Review Type: EXEMPT
Approval Date: January 06, 2022
Expiration Date: January 05, 2027

****This is a system-generated email. Please DO NOT REPLY to this email. If you have questions, please contact your HRPP administrator directly.****

The above referenced study has been approved. *For Expedited and Full Board approved studies, you are REQUIRED to use the current, stamped versions of your approved consent, assent, parental permission and recruitment documents.*

To access your approval documents, log into myProtocol and click on the protocol number to open the approved study. Your official approval letter can be found under the Event History section. All stamped documents (e.g., consent, recruitment) can be found in the Attachment section and are labeled accordingly.

If you have any questions that the HRPP can assist you in answering, please do not hesitate to contact us at irb@research.msstate.edu or 662.325.3994.

Please take a minute to tell us about your experience in the survey below. When logging in, please use your MSU email (ex: abc123@msstate.edu) and login credentials:
<https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=sNtR7YavokWcl3P7OTXff9uShqNaQAdClfXwiCnibYZURUfWVDRRN1pRMEhHUzBCT1RGUFRZRkdLSy4u>

APPENDIX E
SURVEY CONSENT EMAIL

Reply Reply All Forward IM

Fri 1/7/2022 9:27 AM



Morris, Jason

Leadership and Engagement PhD Survey

To MU EXT Urban East Staff; MU EXT Urban East CES; MU EXT SW Staff; MU EXT SW Secretaries; MU EXT NW Staff; MU EXT NE SEC; MU EXT Urban West Staff; MU EXT WC Staff; MU EXT SE Staff; MU EXT EC Staff; MU EXT NE Staff

Cc Swortzel, Kirk; Traub, Sarah

You replied to this message on 1/12/2022 3:20 PM.

Extension Colleagues,

While working with MU Extension, I am pursuing my Doctorate through Mississippi State University and am at the research stage. My research is related to Leadership and Engagement of Extension county faculty and staff. The survey link included will only take approximately 10-15 minutes and is formatted for you to choose an answer. This survey is being performed through Qualtrics and all participants will remain completely anonymous. As it is being provided through Mississippi State University, no one from UM Extension will have access to data except me.

This survey will be posted for two weeks with follow up emails to be provided. I want to thank each of you for your participation in this research.

https://msstate.co1.qualtrics.com/fe/form/SV_4ITmHOFVu1A0syW

Jason C. Morris

County Engagement Specialist Agriculture Business

University of Missouri Extension

109 N. High Street

Linneus, MO 64653

Phone: 660-895-5123 Fax: 660-895-5124

Email: jcmorris@missouri.edu

APPENDIX F

APPROVAL LETTER FROM EXTENSION VICE CHANCELLOR



Dr. Marshall Stewart, Vice Chancellor for Extension and Engagement
University of Missouri Extension
108 Whitten Hall
Columbia, MO 65211-6300

11/19/21

Dear Dr. Stewart,

I am requesting approval for research to be conducted pertaining to my dissertation titled *Leadership preference of county level personnel within University of Missouri Extension and their employee engagement*. The purpose of this study will be to ascertain the connection between County Engagement Specialists engagement and their leadership style. Understanding this will allow for enhancement of Extension professionals' leadership through individual engagement and those which they supervise.

There will be a link emailed to all sitting and interim County Engagement Specialists, field specialists housed in county offices and office support staff requesting each to complete an attached survey. This will be performed utilizing Qualtrics and will take approximately 15 minutes to complete.

This study will provide useful knowledge of both leadership traits and styles which enhance employee engagement from County Engagement Specialists. If I am permitted to conduct this research, any and all data received will be utilized under the supervision of my major professor and committee chair, Dr. Kirk Swortzel at Mississippi State University.

I want to thank you in advance for your allowance in conducting this study and to utilize the data for my research. Please return signed copy to:

Jason C. Morris
109. N. High Street
Linneus, MO 64653

Jason C. Morris

Approved
Marshall Stewart, Ed.D., Vice Chancellor, MU Extension & Engagement