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## The effect administrators have on employee morale within the University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service

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The effect administrators have on employee morale within the  
University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service

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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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Pages in Study 106

Candidate for Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

The purpose of this study was to describe the relationship between Arkansas County Extension County staff morale and their perceived relationship county staff had with their County Staff Chair. The University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service (UAEX) can utilize the results from this research to identify individuals who have the capacity to build high-quality relationships with staff members, thereby promoting higher levels of morale within the organization. Administrators can use this study to identify current or future leaders within the organization by identifying those who can promote high-quality relationships with county-level staff. Results from this study may also be used to identify individuals needing training in developing high-quality relationships.

It utilized surveys to collect data. Therefore, Qualtrics was used to distribute the Leader-Member Exchange-7 (LMX-7) and the Staff Morale Questionnaire (SMQ) electronically through the UAEX email distribution list of county employees. Participants were asked to provide a numeric response (1-5) for the seven statements relating to the Leader-member exchange (LMX) on the LMX-7. Each statement had a different 5-point scale, but 1 represented the lowest rated response, 3 represented the average or neutral response, and 5 represented the highest rated

response. In addition, participants were asked to provide a numeric response (1-4) where 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = agree, and 4 = strongly agree for the 27 statements relating to the three constructs (Leadership Synergy, Cohesive Pride, and Personal Challenge) of the SMQ. Overall, UAEX county employees reported moderate to high morale, which was directly related to their perceived quality of relationship with their County Staff Chair.

The implications of this study suggest that leader-member relationships can affect employee morale in all three constructs measured. The higher the quality of relationship employees perceive with their staff chair, the higher their morale will be. County staff had moderate to high level of morale in each of the three constructs as measured by the SMQ. County-level staff also felt united in striving to achieve the goals and mission of their county office and Extension as a whole.

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this to my husband, Scott Sullivan, and my parents, Ron and Judy Beaty. Without their support, I would have never completed this program. They reminded me that anything worth having is worth working hard to achieve. They reminded me how stubborn (I prefer determined) I am. Thank you for encouraging me and letting me have meltdowns. Here's to almost 10 years of blood, sweat, and tears (but mostly tears).

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my graduate committee: Dr. Kirk Swortzel, Dr. Jane Parish, Dr. Donna Peterson, and Dr. Susan Seal, for their time, commitment, and advice throughout this process. You have asked the hard questions and made me think outside my own understanding. You told me I write like a County Agent (which I took as a compliment, even though it was not intended as such). I appreciate each of them assisting me in this process and for the classes they taught. This has been a very humbling experience.

I would also like to acknowledge the friends I have made as a part of this journey, those who were in the classes, and those who have been just a phone call away that understood this process and could relate to the challenges and the phone therapy sessions. Thank you!!

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

In the Cooperative Extension Service, administrators must be effective leaders to maintain positive employee morale. Furthermore, Extension employees must respect, trust, and have open communication with their administrative leader. Extension employee morale can affect how employees feel about their career and job performance. If Extension employees have low morale, that may affect how they serve their clientele. In return, clientele may be unsatisfied with how Extension employees respond to their needs (Johnson & Bledsoe, 1974), leading clientele to seek out other sources of information that may not be impartial or research-based.

Having effective Extension agents is essential to meet the needs of their clientele. Extension agents play a significant role "...in using modern technology to disseminate knowledge and tools and rely on traditional human values and relationships to gain the attention and trust of the people they serve. As residents of the communities where they work, local extension agents bring credibility to their roles as educators" (NIFA, n.d., para 7).

Extension employees are not driven solely by monetary compensation. Personal and societal considerations influence and govern employees' attitudes toward every facet of their work. The importance of individual attitudes in establishing employee actions is undeniable. The significance of effective supervision in maintaining employee morale and productivity is indisputable (Buford et al., 1995).

For the Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service to remain relevant, competitive, and sustainable, the organization must adopt practices that foster high-quality functioning employees (Fernet et al., 2015). Ngambi (2011) found a relationship existed between an administrator's leadership style and employee morale, finding that the leadership characteristics that most affected employee morale were communication, trust, and team building.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Employees who work for the same administrator over a period of time will expect to see some highs and lows in their career. However, when the lows outweigh the highs, employees must think about themselves and decide whether to stay in or leave the profession.

Employee morale is vital to the Extension workforce because morale can influence employee productivity, the Extension program's success, and relationships between agents and their clientele. Researchers have suggested that low morale can be "contagious" among employees (Johnson & Bledsoe, 1974; Ngambi, 2011). "Poor morale, recognized or not, contributes to increased personnel turnover, lowered effectiveness, and most importantly, an intensified struggle to stay fully staffed" (Giegold & Skelton, 1976, p. 6). Johnson and Bledsoe's (1974) study found that leader behavior could be measured while leadership style was difficult to measure. Furthermore, leader behavior and Extension employee morale were "significantly and highly related" (p. 16).

Determining how Extension staff chairs perceive their leadership relationship versus how their employees perceive their relationship can give insight into employee morale and perhaps, how to correct it if needed. Rothfelder et al. (2013) reported that when employees felt they were considered valued members of an organization, customer satisfaction increased in the hospitality



industry. In a study on higher education employee morale, Ngambi (2011) concluded that as the organizational climate changed for the better, so did employee morale.

Research conducted by Giegold and Skelton (1976), Johnson and Bledsoe (1974), and Ngambi (2011) all identified key characteristics that effective administrative leaders possessed to help to ensure employee morale was high. Identified characteristics included vision, courage, integrity, humility, foresight, focus, cooperation, effective communication, trust, teamwork, motivation, recognition, constructive criticism, clear expectations, and shared organizational values and goals (Fernet et al., 2015; Gill, 2008; Hernandez, 2011; Ngambi, 2011; Rothfelder et al., 2013). Although research has shown that leadership style can affect morale positively and negatively in other organizations (Buch et al., 2016; Dhar & Mishra, 2001; Fernet et al., 2015; Gill, 2008; Hernandez, 2011; Jones, 2012; Loke, 2001; McKnight et al., 2001; Ngambi, 2011; Rooney et al., 2009; Rothfelder et al., 2013), no studies could be found that discussed the relationship between leadership style and morale in Extension.

### **Background of the Problem**

Although several studies have been conducted on Extension agent morale, these studies were conducted in the 1950s, 60s, and early 70s when administrators' leadership styles were more transactional in nature. By the end of the 1970s, Extension administrators were demonstrating more transformational leadership styles. Dansereau et al. (1973) looked at relationships among supervisors and subordinates to predict employee outcomes during the same period. They found a positive effect of high-quality leader-member exchange relationships on follower outcomes.

There is little research on Extension employees' morale and their relationship with their administrators. Previous research found critical characteristics that great leaders possess (Dhar &

Mishra, 2001; Loke, 2001) and certain flaws inadequate leaders possess, such as arrogance, distraction, and disconnection (Pater, 2013).

Ngambi (2011) found, “Poor morale tends to be contagious. Once poor morale has set in, it can be difficult to identify its sources” (p. 763). Furthermore, Ngambi (2011) found, “To overcome these challenges, leaders of higher education institutions need to seek creative strategies to improve and maintain the performance and high morale of employees. It has become apparent that improving and maintaining high employee morale is a key factor in the pursuit of institutional success” (p. 763).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to determine if there was a relationship between Arkansas Cooperative Extension County staff morale and the perceived relationship county staff had with their County Staff Chair. The specific research objectives of this study were to:

1. Assess the morale of Extension agents and support staff employed by the Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service.
2. Assess the morale of Extension Staff Chairs employed by the Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service.
3. Assess how Extension agents and support staff perceive their relationship with their Staff Chair.
4. Assess how Extension Staff Chairs perceive their relationship with their county staff compared to how their county staff perceive their relationship.
5. Determine the relationship between the County Staffs’ morale and the perceived relationship with their Staff Chair.

## **Significance of the Study**

Studies have shown that employee morale can significantly affect employee turnover (Tanchaisak, 2019; Wilson-Evered, et al., 2001). Many factors lead to low morale, such as personal life issues, work growth opportunities, supervisor, co-workers, pay, etc. (Scott, 1967). Some factors that lead to low morale can be attributed to leadership style. Within leadership, those factors may include micro-managing employees, lack of clear or concise communication, and lack of leadership or a laissez-faire leadership approach (Amend, 1970; Carpenter, 1966; Giegold & Skelton, 1976; Gill, 2008; Loke, 2001; Ngambi, 2011; Rausch, 1971; Skaggs, 2008). Work growth opportunities may mean a lack of opportunities to move up in the organization, implying there is no continued education or clear hierarchy for promotion. This may mean that co-workers are antagonistic or do not adhere to a team approach to their work.

Other elements affecting or influencing what comes from the outside can combine the abovementioned factors. Schafer (2016) stated, “The moment that your employees begin to feel you do not appreciate them and that they are only on board to row, you have amplified the root cause of low employee morale, and it is going to cost you big time” (p.1). Administrators can improve or maintain high morale by communicating openly and honestly, fostering employees’ trust, leading by example, and showing that they care about employees. The bottom line is secondary to the employees’ needs (Zenger & Folkman, 2002). Administrators should avoid being arrogant, distracted, and disconnected. Disconnection may be the most challenging obstacle to overcome for Cooperative Extension Staff Chairs because of their workload and administrative duties. However, staying connected through weekly office conferences and visiting with their personnel will help keep them abreast of agent activities.

In Skaggs's (2008) study on reasons contributing to Extension agent resignations, the most compelling reason was in the area of leadership. "Former agents expressed concern over a lack of leadership at the county level and, in particular, that they received inadequate support from their County Staff Chair" (Skaggs, 2008, p.2). Manson (2000) stated, "Cooperative Extension provides a very important service to the community they serve. It is important for staff to have a good attitude toward their workplace and the service they provide" (p. 107).

Findings from this study will add to previous research findings in identifying key characteristics desired in administrative leaders to raise or maintain high employee morale and reduce turnover within the Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service due to morale issues. Results from this study may also be used to select individuals with desirable characteristics to fill future administrative leadership roles at the county and state levels. In doing so, agent turnover could be reduced, productivity could be increased, and the morale within Extension as a whole will be higher. With overall higher morale and productivity in the organization, the Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service will no longer be one of Arkansas' best-kept secrets. The Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service will be seen as a vital organization to the state's economy; by keeping experienced agents, they can and are willing to help, educate, and assist agriculture producers, families, youth, and their local communities to are more productive, increase revenues and improve quality of life through the services Extension offers.

### **Definition of Terms**

1. Administrative leaders—Leaders who can establish systems that protect and sustain essential operational functions (Gardiner, 2016).

2. Administrative Manager- An individual who “is concerned primarily with the preservation and survival of the enterprise. One who tries to protect the enterprise and its members from external enemies and internal disruptions” (Evans, 1967, pg. 57).
3. County Staff Chair- is a unique term to Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service given to a County Agent who has administrative duties in addition to regular agent educational duties. Those administrative duties include but are not limited to evaluation of agents and support staff within their county, managing county budget and finances, disciplinary action for county staff if needed, making sure all reports are completed and turned in on time, and other duties as assigned (UAEX Policy Handbook, 2022).
4. Leader-Member Exchange (LMX)- also called the Vertical Dyad Linkage Theory; describes how leaders maintain their position in groups and develop relationships with other members that can contribute to growth or hinder development (Dansereau et al., 1973).
5. Employee Morale- “is the mental and emotional condition of staff in the work environment. It is the level of psychological well-being based on job” (Manson, 2000). The broad term morale, in a sense, is used in everyday speech. Namely, as a term that encompasses constructs like intrinsic motivation, job satisfaction, experienced work meaningfulness, organizational commitment, and pride in one’s work (McKnight et al., 2001).

### **Assumptions and Limitations**

Several assumptions underlined this study. First, the research assumed that the investigated participants represent the county extension agents, county support staff, and county staff chairs across Arkansas. Second, it was assumed that the self-reported demography (ethnicity, gender, and work experience) is free of error. Third, it was assumed that subjects will answer honestly, as the questionnaire will be completed anonymously.

As with most studies, this research study has its limitations. The first limitation of this study is that it may not be generalized to other states due to the University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service's unique administrative structure. A representative sample from across the U.S. would need to be employed to uncover additional areas of significance among the variables and increase the reliability and generalization of these results. The second limitation is that this study does not include agents and support staff with less than one year of experience. The author chose not to include agents and support staff with less than a year of experience because those agents may lack a complete understanding of the Extension hierarchy system. These limitations should not adversely affect the research outcome, but they would remain a potential constraint to the study's overall understanding.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### **Purpose**

This chapter aims to provide an overview of the University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture Cooperative Extension Service and discuss the theoretical framework, guiding this study. The study's theoretical framework is based on LMX Theory (Graen et al., 1982), formally known as Vertical Dyad Linkage (VDL), a term coined by Dansereau et al. (1973), to describe the dyadic relationship between a leader and each subordinate. The study also aims to see if there is a relationship between LMX and staff morale.

#### **Effective Leadership**

Being a staff chair is not just being boss “it is a science with its own set of rules, procedures and standards” (Amend, 1970, p. 17). Supervisors hold the fate of subordinates in their hands. “Bad” or ineffective staff chairs can affect worker morale, which can affect worker productivity and customer satisfaction (Borich, 1978; Bruce & Carter, 1967; Clegg, 1967; Giegold & Skelton, 1976; Hampton & Shull, 1973; Johnson & Bledsoe, 1974; Jones, 2012; Ngambi, 2011; Rothfelder et al., 2013; Sirota & Wolfson, 1972; Rausch, 1971). Being an administrator is more than directing people on what to do day to day; it is taking care of the people who work for them (Dhar & Mishra, 2001; Hampton & Shull, 1973; Johnson & Bledsoe, 1974; Jones, 2012; Rausch, 1971; Rothfelder et al., 2013). Administrators' relationships can affect employee morale through their action or inaction (Anand et al., 2018; Baker, 2019; Bruce

& Carter, 1967; Burns & Otte, 1999; Chaudhry et al., 2021; Clemens et al., 2009; Dansereau et al., 1973; Giegold & Skelton, 1976; Gill, 2008; Johnson & Bledsoe, 1974; Ngambi, 2011; Rausch, 1971; Skaggs, 2008).

Effective leaders who supervise employees should exhibit positive morale and possess key characteristics, which include vision, courage, integrity, humility, foresight, focus, cooperation, effective communication, trust, teamwork, motivation, earned recognition, constructive criticism, clear expectations, and shared organizational values and goals (Clegg, 1967; Gill, 2008; Hernandez, 2011; Rothfelder et al., 2013). Flaws or characteristics associated with ineffective administrators include arrogance, distraction, disconnection, inadequate supervision, and poor communication (*High Plains Journal*, 2015; Pater, 2013).

Research has identified essential characteristics associated with effective administrators, such as open communication, team building, and instilling trust (Borich, 1978; Carpenter, 1966; Dhar & Mishra, 2001; Gill, 2008; Hernandez, 2011). Specific flaws identified with ineffective administrators that can affect employee morale such as arrogance, being distant, and distracted (Borich, 1978; Carpenter, 1966; Dhar & Mishra, 2001; Gill, 2008; Hernandez, 2011; Pater, 2013). Hampton and Shull (1973) conducted baseline research on Extension's approach to administrative decision-making and indicated that at the time of their study Extension was transitioning from transactional to a more transformational leadership style among administrators. They found that administrators had to do more than keep employees happy and morale high, they also needed to increase productivity of their employees.

No further research has been conducted within the Extension realm to follow Hampton and Shull's (1973) research on Extension employees' morale, much less on leaders' relationship with employees. "Leading and influencing is the process of inducing individuals and groups to



assist willingly and harmoniously in the accomplishment of Extension objectives” (Buford et al., 1995, p. 191). “Poor leading and influencing can negate the work that has gone into planning, organizing, and staffing, making it difficult or impossible to attain objectives” (Buford et al., 1995, p. 191).

### **Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service Overview**

The University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service (CES) is unique compared to Extension services in other states. The headquarters for the Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service is centrally located in Little Rock, AR. However, the University of Arkansas land grant system's main campus is in Fayetteville, AR. While the Cooperative Extension Service is a part of the Division of Agriculture for the University of Arkansas System, it still maintains its own business office and administrative team in Little Rock. Where many CES specialists are also housed.

Unlike other states where district directors are located within the district, district directors with the University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service are located at Little Rock's headquarters. Each district has only one district director, whereas other states may have an associate district director or district program leaders.

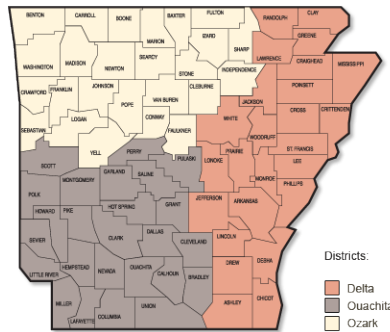
The Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service is divided into three districts. The Delta District comprises 25 counties on the Eastern side of Arkansas. The majority of farms within this district produce row crops and aquaculture along the Mississippi River and its tributaries. The Ouachita District consists of 25 counties of Southwest Arkansas. This district is the most agriculturally diverse with row crops, fruit and vegetable crops, a large timber industry, forage crops, livestock (cattle, equine, sheep, and goats), and poultry. The Ozark District comprises 25 counties in Northwest and Northcentral Arkansas, consisting primarily of forage crops, livestock,

poultry industry, some timber, and some commercial horticulture crops consisting of vineyards and fruit trees, and a few row crop counties along the Arkansas River Valley (see Figure 2.1).

New figure

Figure 1

*Districts of the Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service*



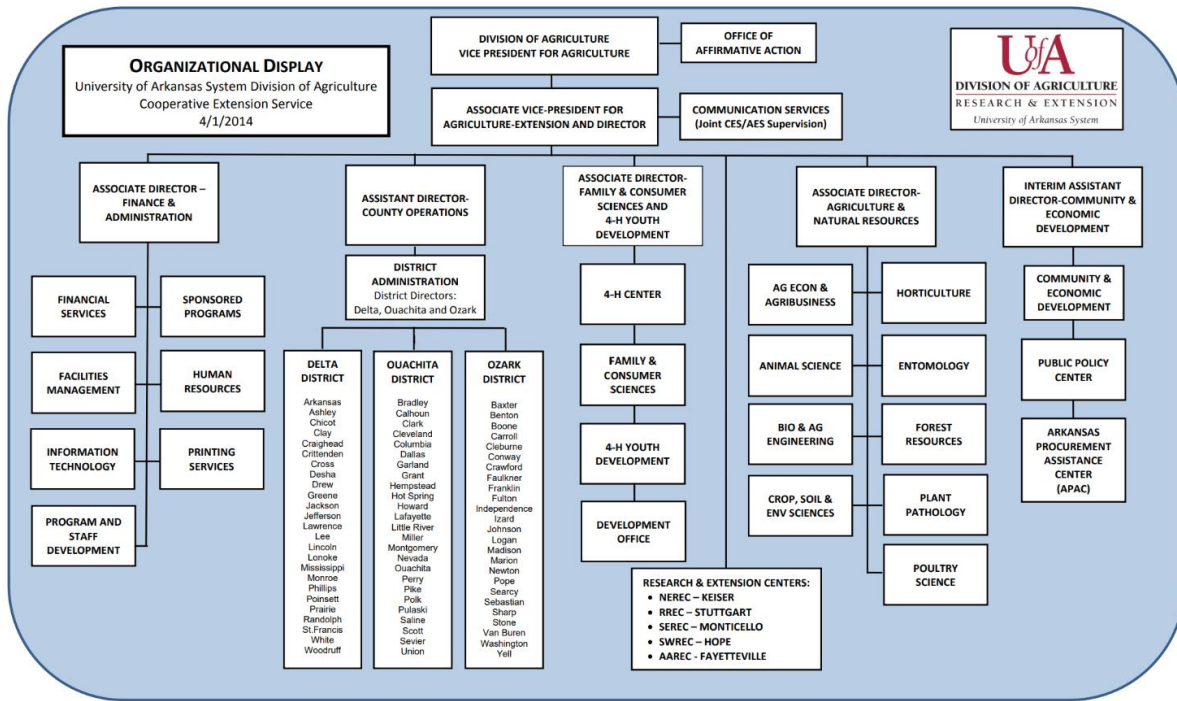
<https://www.uaex.edu/counties/default.aspx>

The Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service (UAEX) is a part of the University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture (UADA). The UAEX has a unique setup compared to other Cooperative Extension Service Systems in the United States, with a unique hierarchy within the University of Arkansas System (see Figure 2.2). The Extension Director reports directly to the Division of Agriculture Vice-President for Agriculture. Each of the district directors report to the Extension Director. Staff chairs report to their respective district director.

The University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture headquarters is in Little Rock. The Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service headquarters is located on a separate site in Little Rock. All administrators of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service are housed at the Extension headquarters, including district directors and most Extension specialists.

Figure 2

Organizational Chart for the University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture



## Theoretical Framework

### Introduction

Being a recognized leader is attractive to many employees (Bernerth & Hirschfeld, 2016). The pursuit of higher leadership roles is considered a traditional career motivator. Leadership roles are appealing for several reasons, “including personal impact, social status, and financial income” (Bernerth & Hirschfeld, 2016, p. 697). Leadership is one of the critical elements for enhancing organizational performance.

## **Leader-Member Exchange Theory**

This study's theoretical framework is based on Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) Theory (Graen et al., 1982), formally known as Vertical Dyad Linkage (VDL), a term coined by Dansereau et al. (1973) to describe the dyadic relationship between a leader and each subordinate. "The key role of the leader is maintaining equitable contingencies between the performance of his members and the outcomes that he mediates for them and in communicating these contingencies clearly to his members" (Dansereau et al., 1973, p. 190). According to Burns & Otte (1999), "dyadic theory, when applied to leadership, describes leadership in terms of the pair relationship existing between people in leadership roles and each of their subordinates, emphasizing the influence of individual variables flowing both ways" (p. 228). The leadership theory describes, in broad terms, "that the leader and each member of a workgroup have a unique relationship" (Burns & Otte, 1999, p. 225).

The LMX theory provides a context for researchers to assess the effect of superior-subordinate relationships (Gerstner & Day, 1997). The LMX theory is distinctive among all leadership theories, for it does not assume members to be passive recipients of leadership (Anand et al., 2018). A central assumption of the LMX theory is that leaders cultivate different exchange relationships with their followers, the quality of which affects the attitudes and actions of both leaders and members alike (Barbuto et al., 2011; Bernerth & Hirschfeld, 2016).

## **Leader-Member Roles**

Graen's (1976) framework postulates three areas that interact to define individual roles: the physical-technical, interpersonal, and personal domains. The role occurrence in Graen's (1976) extended model is a three-stage socialization progression concentrating on behaviors between the leader and the follower over an indefinite period. Stage one of the progression is

“role-taking,” where the leader communicates the desired role of the follower(s), but there is no involvement from the follower. Stage two is “role-making,” where the relationship continues to grow and both parties contribute to defining the role of the follower. Stage three is “role routinization,” where the nature of the exchange becomes routine and established. The theoretical base of Graen’s (1976) LMX Theory is the concept of a “developed” or “negotiated” role. A key concern is that the exchange grows over time in response to repeated experiences of social exchange between a leader and member (Bernerth & Hirschfeld, 2016).

Furthermore, Dansereau et al. (1975) and Graen and Cashman (1975) theorized and established the negotiating freedom paradigm to study the assimilation of administrators in an organization. Dansereau et al. (1975) and Graen and Cashman (1975) also described negotiating freedom as the extent to which a leader allows subordinates to identify their role development. Dansereau et al. (1975) and Graen and Cashman (1975) theorized that this negotiating freedom was central to developing the quality of the LMX. The paradigm was measured by the member’s perception of the leader’s flexibility in permitting them to make changes in their job and the leader’s inclination to use formal authority to assist in solving a problem on the member’s job. Dansereau et al. (1975) theorized negotiating freedom as a range at the low-negotiating end of the range, the leader is unwilling to allow the member any influence on the definition of their role, whereas, at the high negotiating end of the range, the leader assists the follower in defining their role.

Graen and Cashman (1975) examined members’ involvement in job activities in the initial construct definition process. They reported that the amount of negotiating freedom allowed to a member resulted in significant differences between what the leader said the member was doing and what the leader expected the member to be doing. Leaders indicated that they

treated high-negotiating and low-negotiating members in a different way. In agreement, members stated they received different treatment—the most significant difference was in the attitude between high and low negotiating concerning interpersonal relationships with their leader. According to Dansereau et al. (1975), the degree of negotiating freedom presented to members early in the dyadic relationship led to differential leader behavior throughout the relationship.

Having defined the construct of negotiating freedom, Graen and his associates (1978) developed the LMX model of leadership based on the concept that role development will result in distinguished role definitions and, therefore, in diverse leader-member exchanges. They presumed that interpersonal relationship was critical to modifying the member's role. They also proposed that the exchange level predicts subsequent organizational phenomena (Dansereau et al., 1975; Graen, 1976; Graen & Cashman, 1975).

### **Leader-Member Relationship Quality**

Clemens et al. (2009) stated that “LMX theory is grounded in the belief that there are differences in the quality of relationships between leaders and their subordinates, referred to as members” (p. 75). The assessment of the theory exists on the premise that relationship quality is predictive of outcomes at the individual, group, and organizational levels. The LMX theory has been used to evaluate the outcomes of superior-subordinate relationships in various professional and paraprofessional fields (Gerstner & Day, 1997; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995).

Although most LMX research has been done in the United States, research in other countries supports the LMX theory's generalizability. Outcome variables most frequently associated with LMX quality are “performance issues, job problems, job satisfaction, and turnover” (Burns & Otte, 1999, p. 233). A promising outcome Burns and Otte (1999) found was

“innovative behavior” where they stated, “employees most likely to be innovative were those who had a commitment to the organization and support from their leaders” (p. 234-235).

Dienesch and Liden (1986) formed a model of the LMX that proposed other variables for research. They criticized Graen’s (1976) LMX model as lacking a clear definition of whether a leader-member exchange was a unidimensional or a multidimensional relationship. Dienesch and Liden (1986) suggested that the LMX was a multidimensional development process and defined three leader-member exchange dimensions: perceived contribution to the exchange, loyalty, and affect based primarily on interpersonal attraction rather than work or professional values.

Dienesch and Liden (1986) proposed that leader-member exchanges can be classified using these three dimensions as continuous variables. Dienesch and Liden’s (1986) model of the leader-member exchange growth stressed the interaction of leader and individual member characteristics and acknowledgments that both leaders and members make about each other’s conduct. Dienesch and Liden (1986) tried to expand the LMX model to include attitude and personality similarities well. The revised LMX model suggested that the degrees or levels of supposed contribution, loyalty, and effect in exchange should clearly and differentially influence the behavior of dyadic members. LMX theorists Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995) defined the paradigm of relationship quality as the degree to which trust, respect, and mutual obligation exist within a dyad.

### **High-Quality Leader-Member Relationships**

Anand et al. (2018) stated, “the leader-follower relationship is asymmetric, such that the leader has more power, resources, and information” (p. 700). They also said that followers realized that the leader could choose with whom to create a high-quality relationship, and followers assume more risk during the development. Higher-quality relationships are connected

with more positive organizational and member outcomes and fewer work-related problems (Clemens et al., 2009). Liden et al. (2016) maintained that a high-quality dyadic relationship is created and sustained when both parties hold and express respect for one another. A high-quality relationship was shown to include understanding by the leader of the member's job, consideration, information, and support given to the member by the leader (Burns & Otte, 1999). Liden and Graen (1980) found variances in relationship quality in over 90 percent of their studied dyads. Members reporting high-quality relationships with their leaders assumed more responsibilities, contributed more to their work units, and were regarded as higher performers (Liden & Graen, 1980). The relationship was based on "social exchange, where each party must offer something, the other party sees as worthy, and each party must see the exchange as reasonably equitable or fair" (Baker, 2019, p. 2527). These relationships exceeded the legal responsibilities and developed personal power (the ability to influence people and/or events) rather than position power (power you have when you hold a specific rank or title in an organization) or authority (Yukl, 2005).

Garg and Dhar (2014) brought to the forefront that high-quality LMX led to higher levels of organizational commitment. According to Jones and George (1998), effective behavioral exchanges go along with optimistic moods and sentiments, which pave the way for the long-lasting exchange and establishment of greater trust. Negative moods and sentiments come with negative assessments of the other party, signaling a lack of trust (Jones & George, 1998).

Grossman (2000) surmised that leaders who understood emotion seemed to encourage followers more successfully. Kuvaas and Buch (2018) found that high-quality LMX relationships were negatively associated with perceiving goals, a variable positively related to role overload and turnover intention. Martin et al. (2016) discovered a positive relationship between LMX and



task performance, and trust in the leader and job satisfaction mediated this positive relationship where trust in the leader has the most significant effect. Matta et al. (2015) revealed that employee work engagement and organizational behavior citizenship behavior were maximized when leaders and subordinates agreed on the quality of their LMX relationship. “Optimism is a positive emotion that goes hand in hand with high-quality leader-member exchange relationship” (Baker, 2019, p. 2544).

### **Low-Quality Leader-Member Relationships**

Low-quality LMX relationships are more economic or transactional, and binary actions hardly advance beyond what is designated in the employment contract (Baker, 2019). Low-quality LMX relationships are identified by the absence of reciprocal appreciation, official downward communications, limited standard view, little assistance and responsibility for each other, and no mutual commitment, as in a “stranger” relationship (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1991). Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995) found that employees who reported low-quality exchanges with their manager, namely those who belonged to the out-group (out-group defined as employees with low-quality relationships with their supervisor (Graen & Uhl-Bien, (1991), fulfilled job description requirements, but did not contribute extra effort in completing job assignments. Their relationship with their manager was based only on their employment contract, unlike high-quality exchanges where relationships are based on mutual trust.

Buch et al. (2016) studied the relationship between more Transactional Leader-Member exchange (LMX) relationships and follower work performance. Their research showed “a negative relationship between more Transactional LMX relationships and follower work performance was weaker for employees with a highly political skilled leader” (Buch et al., 2016, p. 461). Buch et al. (2016) also found that leaders did not treat followers alike, and the difference

in treatment also affected follower work performance. Their research suggested that more Transactional LMX relationships were related to lower work performance. Their study was conducted predominately with male leaders and followers. Buch et al. (2016) concluded, "...if it is difficult to learn the abilities necessary to develop more social, as opposed to more Transactional LMX relationships as perceived by followers' organizations should select and promote candidates to leadership positions who already have these abilities" (p. 463).

### **Role Designation**

According to Clemens et al. (2009), role designation can be theorized as the identity of subordinates within an organization, how they spend their time and the programs they implement. Role designation is an important area of investigation. Supervisors have considerable influence on shaping the roles of subordinates with whom they work. LMX theory suggests that regardless of the initial conceptualization a leader may hold for a member's role, the quality of the relationship is linked with the freedom the member has to impact and negotiate their role within the organization.

An exchange associated with LMX theory is the supervisor's inclination to share vital information and decisions with subordinates. "Leaders might engage in behaviors that include informing, consulting, and delegating regarding decisions that are relevant to and impact members and their programs" (Clemens et al., 2009, p. 76). They suggested that leaders' decision involvement may affect role designation because members are provided with data about essential decisions (informing) and asked to participate in the decision-making process (consulting and delegating). The leader-member exchange and role designation may affect job satisfaction and turnover intentions for members (Clemens et al., 2009). Researchers who have applied LMX theory to other professions consistently have found significant relationships

between leader-member relationship quality and member job satisfaction and turnover intentions (Gerstner & Day, 1997).

Waldron (1991) studied how member communication contributed to LMX quality. He reported that maintaining the relationship is the most important of the communication objectives pursued by members. This work supports earlier work by Dansereau et al. (1975), where researchers found that members participating in leadership exchanges used more personal and informal maintenance tactics and had the freedom to communicate with their leaders outside of formally prescribed channels about issues not directly related to their work. These upward maintenance tactics provided the capacity for role negotiation and change.

### **Leader Relationship Hierarchy**

In leadership exchanges, leaders provide influence and support beyond what is called for in employment contracts (Graen & Cashman, 1976; Liden & Graen, 1980). Leadership exchanges are characterized by positive characteristics such as more mutual support, mutual trust, respect and liking, more significant interaction, and greater responsibility for the member (Dansereau et al., 1975; Dienesch & Liden, 1986; Graen & Cashman, 1975).

Graen et al. (1978) furthered the research of the leader-member dyad to the dyad immediately above the relationship between the leader and their supervisor. Graen et al. (1978) found that the quality of the upper dyad in the organizational hierarchy was related to the resources available to members a level below. Graen et al. (1978) further reported that those leaders who established higher-quality connections with their bosses produced more resources for their members than those who developed lower-quality connections.

## **Strengths and Weaknesses of the LMX**

Leader-member exchange theory and research have strengths and weaknesses. According to Burns and Otte (1999), in preliminary exchanges, judgments are made and the leader and member form opinions of each other. If the leader forms a positive opinion, the leader will assign greater responsibilities to the member, and the member will experience more support. Notgrass (2014) found a negative, significant relationship was determined between followers' perceived relationship quality with their leader and passive leadership.

### **Strengths of the LMX**

This LMX results in an informal role negotiated between each group member and leader (Graen, 1976). LMX theory holds that the supervisor's efficiency and success are affected by the association's quality with each subordinate. Furthermore, the leader does not have time to give all members the same attention and creates a close relationship with only a few strategic members who become the "in-group" (Burns & Otte, 1999). The initial LMX theory has been chiefly supported and diverse leader-member exchanges have been documented. The impact of LMX quality on organizational outcomes has also been established to some extent, especially regarding leader trust, job satisfaction, and organizational citizenship behavior.

### **Weaknesses of the LMX**

Burns and Otte (1999) discussed some of the weaknesses of LMX in their study, such as difficulty in attributing early conceptualizations, identifying clear concepts and research, and instrumentation. They also identified numerous terms to describe relationships and relationship development have been used by many authors, making clear discussion problematic. Burns and Otte (1999) listed other weaknesses of the LMX, such as the LMX theory was not yet helpful as

a guide to practice mainly because there is not a standard model of the LMX, and how LMX quality develops has not yet been well researched. This research gap has limited theory building. Anand et al. (2018) also criticized LMX research for not concentrating enough on the exchange of resources occurring in the dyad. The LMX and its expansion may change be contingent on the level in an organization and the kind of organization in which the leader and member are operating (Burns and Otte, 1999).

### **LMX Theory Overview**

The LMX is a fertile field for theory development for three reasons. First, leader-member relationships are probably more complex and multidimensional than depicted in existing theoretical work. Second, the theory regarding how leader-member relationships develop is non-existent. Finally, the current theory is insufficient to guide organizational development, succession planning, managerial coaching, or performance improvement. The LMX and its development may vary depending on the level in an organization and the type of organization in which the leader and its members are functioning. According to Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995), “LMX is both transactional and transformational; it begins as transactional social exchange and evolves into transformational social exchange” (p. 238).

While the LMX theory is one of the most extensively researched leadership theories, many formal studies have examined the effect of the LMX on different follower job outcomes (Baker, 2019). The LMX depicts the quality of the relationship between employee and supervisor (Baker, 2019). Leaders substantially affect how an organization functions and how their members function within the organization (Yukl, 2005).

The fundamental premise of the LMX theory is that leaders distinguish among employees so that they form tighter relationships with certain employees, who are called the employees of

the in-group, and bestow them more bargaining tolerance than other employees, who are called the employees of the out-group (Cashman et al., 1976; Dansereau et al., 1975). Baker (2019) found that “high LMX leaders will arouse greater levels of affective organizational commitment, trust in leader and job satisfaction by their followers as compared to low LMX leaders” (p. 2543). Their findings were consistent with current research (Anand et al., 2018; Kuvaas & Buch, 2018; Martin et al., 2016; Newman et al., 2017; Matta et al., 2015) that presented the positive effect of high-quality leader-member exchange relationships on follower outcomes of trust in the leader; job satisfaction, work performance, work engagement, and organizational citizenship behavior; and their negative effect on role overload and turnover intention and the negative effect of poor-quality LMX relationships on organizational commitment and job satisfaction.

The LMX theory suggests that leadership is a personalized exchange in which leaders act differently toward each follower. It further implies that followers form different groups based on the quality of their interpersonal relationships. In-group (higher-quality) and out-group (lower-quality). Leader exchanges with insiders are based on support and trust. Leader exchanges with outsiders are mechanical and authoritative. The theory holds that in-group members perform better and are more satisfied than out-group members (Buford et al., 1995).

### **Employee Morale vs. Job Satisfaction**

While employee morale and job satisfaction have been used interchangeably in previous research studies, these terms have become more defined and separated into two separate definitions. According to Martin and Kaufman (2013), job satisfaction measures workers’ contentedness with their job, whether they like the job or individual aspects or facets of jobs, such as the nature of work or supervision. McKnight et al. (2001) summarized morale as a term

encompassing intrinsic motivation, job satisfaction, experienced work meaningfulness, organization commitment, and pride in one's work.

### **Job Satisfaction**

Job satisfaction can be measured in cognitive, affective, and behavioral components. CambridgeDictionary.com (2020) defined job satisfaction as “the happiness a worker feels when they are satisfied with their job and work condition, used as one way to measure a company's success.” In short, job satisfaction is a feeling of fulfillment or enjoyment that a person derives from their job that can be measured in cognitive, affective, and behavioral components (Elizer, 2011; Farmer, 2011; Harder et al., 2014; Kemp, 1967; Loke, 2001; Martin & Kaufman, 2013; Metwally & Nawar, 2014; Rothfelder et al., 2013). When an employee says they are satisfied with their job, they are in effect, saying their needs are satisfied as a result of having their job (Lawler & Porter, 1967).

### **Employee Morale**

Williams and Lane (1975) said, “Morale is a chameleon-like concept. Many researchers claim to have grasped it has defined it so that it is readily recognizable. Still, it proves itself ever-elusive, persistently merging into and refusing to be seen as separate from the environment to which it lives” (p. 90). Morale was more clearly defined by Wilson-Evered et al. (2001), “Morale has been given relatively little attention as a mediating factor in group performance, although it is a term frequently recited in the industrial relations and human resource literature” (p. 318). According to Wilson-Evered et al. (2001), most definitions of morale reference satisfaction, motivation, high energy, and enthusiasm at the individual or group level.

Mason (2000) defined employee morale as a staff's mental and emotional condition in the work environment. Morale is the level of psychological well-being based on the job. In short, morale is the employee's state of mind related to their job. Morale can be measured by questionnaires where individuals can express their opinions regarding specific operations about their job, such as job satisfaction, commitment to the organization, motivation, etc. These questionnaires capture a short period to give a glimpse of the employees' morale within the period that the questionnaire was administered (Mason, 2000).

For this study, employee morale was studied over job satisfaction and the administrator's effect on morale to gauge Arkansas Extension agents' state of mind over job satisfaction. Another rationale for studying employee morale over job satisfaction was the lack of recent studies within Extension that addressed employee morale. The results of this study will be presented to the Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service Director with the hope that middle and higher management and human resources may use this information to hire county staff chairs with the desired leadership style to promote high employee morale.

### **Employee Morale Studies within Cooperative Extension Service**

Johnson and Bledsoe (1974) studied the relationship between county Extension agents' morale and how the county administrators' behavior affected employee morale. Johnson and Bledsoe (1974) used the Hoppock self-evaluation technique and had individuals make qualitative judgments and express their feelings about the people and things in their environment that may be related to morale. They found that leader behavior and an agent's morale were significantly and highly correlated. Johnson and Bledsoe (1974) suggested that staff chairs paid more attention to considering behavior or interpersonal relations (Transformation Leadership style) rather than task-oriented (Transactional Leadership style). Their findings "strongly suggest a need for



training the Chair in executive or management development” (Johnson & Bledsoe, 1974, p. 17). Johnson and Bledsoe (1974) further stated, “Chairs must be concerned with fellow workers’ personal needs because their job satisfaction (morale) influences productivity and ultimately the total Extension program” (p. 18).

Giegold and Skelton (1976) followed up Johnson and Bledsoe’s (1974) study in Extension by further pinpointing morale problems. Giegold and Skelton’s (1976) study was considered a baseline study to determine changes in morale or job satisfaction in Extension. They found three factors that “ranked in both important factors and lacking factors” (p. 8) that played a part in morale or job satisfaction; these factors were “sound management policies, good supervision, and pleasant co-workers” (p. 8). According to Elizer (2011), exceptional agents were promoted to county staff chair positions. However, success as an agent did not mean success as a county staff chair; preparation for the new role was often inadequate.

According to Buford et al. (1995), managers are one of the most valuable assets of the Extension service. Extension managers establish goals in planning development and through organizing, staffing, leading, guiding, and controlling affect the goals to be achieved. Extension managers are also one of the most expensive assets; their salaries are typically higher than non-managers, as a direct cost related to management positions. Successful management pays its way by guaranteeing net positive results. In other words, there must be a return on investment in management resources. The quality of management is one of the most important defining factors in organizational performance. The selection of managers at all levels is a mission that must be done well. Once selected for the role, managers make decisions. Because decision-making is a logical process, it is correct to say that managers are paid to think. Logical thinking is a skill that must be developed and utilized, and a scientific attitude is essential. The most successful

management will be accomplished by those who develop their natural and learned management skills. Such progress requires the right kind of education, and it also involves the cultivation of self-knowledge.

Although several studies have been related to supervisors' effect on employee morale in various industries, very few have been conducted within Extension. Baseline research was conducted in the mid-1970s when administrative styles were transitioning from a transactional leadership to more of a transformational leadership style, but little research has been done since in Extension (Bledsoe & Johnson, 1974). Not only have the administrative styles transitioned, but so has the workforce. In Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service alone, there are three male Family Consumer Science Agents, more than 25 female Agriculture Agents, and 20 females in county staff chair roles (UAEX personnel directory, 2020). While it is yet unclear if gender affects morale within the scope of the LMX, it is worth noting that the workforce within Extension has changed since the last morale study was conducted and warranted being mentioned for potential research in the future.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODS AND PROCEDURES

#### **Introduction**

Research has shown that administrators can affect people's feelings about their job and job performance (Dhar & Mishra, 2001; Ngambi, 2011). Ngambi's (2011) research found that ineffective administrators can lower employee morale, higher turnover rates, lower productivity, distrust of administrators, and negative feelings toward the organization.

#### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to determine if there was a relationship between Arkansas Cooperative Extension County staff morale and the perceived relationship county staff had with their County Staff Chair. The specific research objectives of this study were to:

1. Assess the morale of Extension agents and support staff employed by the Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service.
2. Assess the morale of Extension Staff Chairs employed by the Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service.
3. Assess how Extension agents and support staff perceive their relationship with their Staff Chair.
4. Assess how Extension Staff Chairs perceive their relationship with their county staff compared to how their county staff perceive their relationship.

5. Determine the relationship between the County Staffs' morale and the perceived relationship with their Staff Chair.

### **Research Design**

A descriptive correlational design was utilized in this study. This design was selected to describe the perceived relationships between Staff chairs and their staff and the morale of Extension agents who work under those Staff chairs. This research did not seek to establish a causal connection (Field, 2015; Fraenkel et al., 2015). Correlational research aims to identify variables that have some relationship to the extent that a change in one creates some change in the other (Field, 2015). This type of research was descriptive, unlike experimental research, which relies entirely on scientific methodology and hypothesis (Fraenkel et al., 2015).

The advantage of descriptive-correlational research is that it helps us understand the complex relationships between different variables. Because this study measured variables in a realistic setting, we can learn more about how Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service works. The disadvantage of descriptive-correlational research is that it will determine if there is a relationship, not why the relationship occurs. This study cannot be able to account for extraneous variables. This design was chosen to determine the perceived relationship between county staff chairs and employees and employee morale.

### **Population**

Two populations were utilized for this study. The first population consisted of the 75 County Extension Agents of the Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service who have administrative responsibilities as the Staff Chair. The second population consisted of 294 Extension agents (without Staff Chair responsibilities), employees, and support staff (i.e.,

program assistants and administrative support staff) who worked full-time with the Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service. The following criteria had to be met in order to be included in the study:

- A. Staff Chairs must have completed at least one year of experience as an administrator in their respective position and
- B. Extension agents and support staff must have completed at least one year of experience in their respective positions who work under those administrators and are full-time employees (FTE).

The rationale for the first criterion was that it would be challenging to evaluate an administrator with less than a year of experience who has not completed an entire Extension calendar cycle in that position. The second criterion was necessary because was essential to see if there was a correlation between the administrator's leadership style and employee morale of full-time employees.

### **Instrumentation**

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 being collected. 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 demographic questions that asked for the participant's gender, program area in which they worked, length of service in their current role, race, and ethnicity.

### **LMX-7 Survey**

Leader-member exchange (LMX) was measured using the LMX-7 survey, initially developed by Graen et al. (1982). The LMX-7 had seven statements; respondents used a 1-5 scale to respond to each statement. Each statement had a different response, but 1= lowest level, 3 = neutral/average, 5 = highest level. The LMX-7 is used widely to measure “trust, respect, and mutual obligation that generates influence between parties” (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995, p. 224). The LMX-7 is seen as highly consonant with the Leader-Member Exchange theory (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Graen & Scandura, 1987).

The LMX-7 scale is the most commonly used measure of LMX in organizational research (Gerstner & Day, 1997; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Schriesheim et al., 1999). “LMX measures respondent perceived leader-member exchange—things that cannot be measured directly” (Schriesheim & Cogliser, 2009, p. 725). The LMX-7 has been extensively used and is valid and reliable (Graen et al., 1982; Duluga, 1994; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Erdogan et al., 2002; Schriesheim & Cogliser, 2009) with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.898 (Dhar, 2016) consistent with the Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.85 established by Graen and Schliemann (1978).

### **Staff Morale Questionnaire (SMQ)**

Employee morale was evaluated using a modified version of the Staff Morale Questionnaire (SMQ), initially developed by Smith (1971). According to Smith (1971), responses to the questionnaire are scored numerically, where 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = agree, and 4 = strongly agree. The highest score goes to the response on each item previously

judged by the researcher, on the morale definition basis and questionnaire construction to be most indicative of high morale.

For his study, Smith (1971) defined morale as a “forward-looking and confident state of mind relevant to a shared and vital purpose” (p.33). Construct validity of the SMQ was determined by subjecting the data to factor analysis (Smith, 1971; Williams & Lane, 1975). In its original form, the SMQ was used and found reliable among K-12 educators. “Reliability of the instrument was tested earlier by Smith, who reported a corrected split-half correlation of .77. With 65 subjects, this coefficient gave reasonable evidence of internal consistency. No test-retest figures are produced as Smith argued that measures such as the SMQ are inherently unstable over time but sensitive to changes in attitudes” (Williams & Lane, 1975, p.91).

The survey was modified to use Extension vernacular and split double-barreled questions. Before the modified version was used in this study, it was pilot tested for validity and reliability with a sample of 10 Mississippi State University Extension agents. The SMQ measures three constructs of morale. The leadership synergy construct subscale consisted of 15 items ( $\alpha = .92$ ), the cohesive pride construct subscale consisted of 6 items ( $\alpha = .86$ ), and the personal challenge construct subscale consisted of 7 items ( $\alpha = .81$ ).

## **Data Collection**

### **Demographics**

To sample all demographics of county staff in Arkansas, participants were selected through the UAEX email server utilizing already established distribution lists (DL). 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 UAEX county personnel requesting their help to complete surveys. Following Mississippi State University Institutional Review

Board (IRB) guidelines, all required documents were submitted to the IRB to gain approval (IRB-21-419) for this study. The researcher also asked permission to utilize the online platform, Qualtrics (Provo, UT), for this study. The IRB approval was received, and permission was granted for using Qualtrics. Before the electronic survey was sent out the research also received permission from the UAEX Director to conduct this study with UAEX employees and to utilize the UAEX email listserv. An email containing a cover letter providing detailed information about the purpose, confidentiality, and anonymity of the study was sent to the participants via email. A link to the survey was also included in the email.

Working with the Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service administration and getting permission and access to the database, the LMX-7 questionnaire, the Staff Morale Questionnaire (SMQ), and demographic questions were distributed to all Staff Chairs, County Extension agents, and support staff that met the set criteria in Arkansas through their work email that included a Qualtrics link. An introductory letter explaining the research and its purpose were sent to those employees asking them to participate in this study. The message explained that participation was entirely voluntary and that their involvement would be appreciated.

Staff Chairs filled out the LMX-7 survey via Qualtrics as well as the Staff Morale Questionnaire (SMQ) to assess their level of morale. County Agents and Support Staff were asked to complete the LMX-7 and the SMQ. A two-week deadline was given, with a follow-up email sent at days 7, 10, and 14 days respectively after the initial email request to encourage Arkansas Extension Employees' involvement. There was an 83% response rate to the survey.



## Data Analysis

The study questionnaires were completed online; the data were exported from Qualtrics into the statistical analysis software IBM SPSS Statistics (SPSS 28.0). All personally identifiable data (name, email, etc.) were deleted to ensure the anonymity of results once imported.

Early respondents were compared to late respondents on scale scores via an independent samples t-test (Miller & Smith, 1983) to ensure there was no significant difference in the time of the responses. There was no significant difference in the timing of the responses.

Descriptive statistics was used to summarize data. Descriptive statistics appropriate for each variable (i.e., frequencies for all categorical variables; mean and standard deviation for all non-categorical variables) were used to summarize the study data. Pearson's  $r$  was used to describe the relationship between variables perceived leader-member relationship and employee morale. The correlational statistics measured the relationship between employee morale and the perceived leader-member relationship. Advantages of correlation research allow for collecting much more data, which can be applied to day-to-day life (Field, 2015). Limitations to correlation research are that it only uncovers a relationship; it cannot provide a conclusive reason for a relationship. A correlative does not expose which variable impacts the other. The Chi-square test was used to determine if a disparity between observed data and expected data is due to chance, or if it is due to a relationship between the variables being studied (Field, 2015).

Chi-square, like any analysis has its limitations. One of the limitations is that all participants measured must be independent, meaning that an individual cannot fit in more than one category. Another limitation with using chi-square is that the data must be frequency data (Field, 2015). While chi-square does have limitations, it also has its strengths. One of the strengths of chi-square is that it is easier to compute than some statistics. It can also be used with

data that has been measured on a nominal (categorical) scale. It can also be used to see if there is a “difference” between two or more groups of participants (Field, 2015).

Inferential statistics helps to foster a better understanding of the population data by evaluating the samples acquired from it (Field, 2015). It helps in generalizing the population by utilizing different analytical tests and tools. Inferential statistics were used to describe the differences between age groups, race, ethnicity, gender, program area, and length of service. County level Extension staff were asked to identify their gender, ethnicity, race, program area, length of service in their current role, district, and county in which they worked.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

#### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to determine if there was a relationship between Arkansas Cooperative Extension County staff morale and the perceived relationship county staff had with their County Staff Chair. The specific research objectives of this study were:

1. Assess the morale of Extension agents and support staff employed by the Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service.
2. Assess the morale of Extension Staff Chairs employed by the Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service.
3. Assess how Extension agents and support staff perceive their relationship with their Staff Chair.
4. Assess how Extension Staff Chairs perceive their relationship with their county staff compared to how their county staff perceive their relationship.
5. Determine the relationship between the County Staffs' morale and the perceived relationship with their Staff Chair.

#### **Data Collection**

The Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) and the Staff Morale Questionnaire (SMQ) were distributed through Qualtrics to all County Staff in the Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service. Approximately 294 employees were eligible to respond to the survey, with 204 County

Extension Staff responding (69.4%). In addition to the data from the LMX and the SMQ, the county staff's demographic information was also collected.

Pearson's  $r$  was used to describe the relationship between variables perceived leader-member relationship and employee morale.

The correlational statistics measured the relationship between employee morale and the perceived leader-member relationship. Advantages of correlation research allow for collecting much more data, which can be applied to day-to-day life. Limitations to correlation research are that it only uncovers a relationship; it cannot provide a conclusive reason for a relationship. A correlative does not expose which variable impacts others.

Inferential statistics helps to foster better understanding of the population data by evaluating the samples acquired from it. It helps in generalizing about the population by utilizing different analytical tests and tools. Inferential statistics were used to describe the differences between age groups, race, ethnicity, gender, program area, and length of service. County level Extension staff were asked to identify their gender, ethnicity, race, program area, length of service in their current role, district, and county in which they worked.

### **Demographics**

This section describes the demographic data on County Staff participating in this study. Data were collected on gender, race, and ethnicity. The role county staff had within their office and the number of years of service they had was also collected, as well as the district in which they worked.

## Gender, Ethnicity, and Race

County staff was asked to indicate their gender. Of the 204 respondents, 64.7% ( $f = 132$ ) were female, 26.5% ( $f = 54$ ) were male, and 1.5% ( $f = 3$ ) preferred not to identify their gender (Table 4.1). Fifteen (7.3%) of the staff members did not respond to the question.

Table 1

*Gender of Arkansas Extension Agents and Support Staff ( $n = 204$ )*

| Gender            | <i>f</i> | %    |
|-------------------|----------|------|
| Female            | 132      | 64.7 |
| Male              | 54       | 26.5 |
| Prefer Not to Say | 3        | 1.5  |
| Not Reported      | 15       | 7.3  |

Staff members were also asked to indicate their ethnicity and race. More than 90% ( $f = 184$ ) of the respondents identified themselves as non-Hispanic and 2.5% ( $f = 5$ ) indicated they were Hispanic. Fifteen staff members (7.4%) did not identify their ethnicity (Table 4.2).

Regarding their race, 87.7% ( $f = 179$ ) of the respondents indicated they were White, 3.9% ( $f = 8$ ) were African American/Black, 5.9% ( $f = 12$ ) were American Indian/Alaskan Native, and 0.5% ( $f = 1$ ) were Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander. Four staff members (2.0%) did not indicate their race.

Table 2

*Ethnicity and Race of Arkansas Extension Agents and Support Staff (n = 204)*

| Characteristics                  | <i>f</i> | %    |
|----------------------------------|----------|------|
| Ethnicity                        |          |      |
| Hispanic                         | 5        | 2.5  |
| Non-Hispanic                     | 184      | 90.2 |
| Not Reported                     | 15       | 7.3  |
| Race                             |          |      |
| White                            | 179      | 87.7 |
| African American/Black           | 8        | 3.9  |
| American Indian/Alaskan Native   | 12       | 5.9  |
| Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander | 1        | 0.5  |
| Not Reported                     | 4        | 2    |

**Current Role and Number of Years in Current Role**

County staff members were asked to indicate their current position in the county office (Table 4.3). Of the 204 valid responses, 29.9% of the respondents ( $f = 61$ ) were the County Extension Agent-Staff Chair, 14.2% ( $f = 29$ ) were the County Extension Agent-Agriculture, 21.6% ( $f = 44$ ) were the County Extension Agents-Family & Consumer Science, and 25.5% ( $f = 52$ ) were Support Staff.

Table 3

*Role of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Staff (n =204)*

| Role  | <i>f</i> | %    |
|---|----------|------|
| County Extension Agent-Staff Chair  | 61       | 29.9 |
| County Extension Agent-Agriculture (no Staff Chair responsibility)              | 29       | 14.2 |
| County Extension Agent-Family& Consumer Science (no Staff Chair responsibility) | 44       | 21.6 |
| County Extension Agent-4H (no Staff Chair responsibility)                       | 18       | 8.8  |
| Support Staff (i.e., program assistant, administrative office support, etc.)    | 52       | 25.5 |

County staff were also asked to indicate the number of years they had served in their current role, as reported in Table 4.4. Of the valid 204 survey responses, 40.7% of the respondents ( $f = 83$ ) had been in their current role 1-5 years, 22.5% ( $f = 46$ ) had been in their current role 6-10 years, 9.3% ( $f = 19$ ) had been in their current role 11-15 years, 12.7% ( $f = 26$ ) had been in their current role 16-20 years, 5.9% ( $f = 12$ ) had been in their current role 21-25 years and 8.8% ( $f = 18$ ) had been in their current role 26+ years.

Table 4

*Years in Current Role of Arkansas Cooperative Extension County Staff (n = 204)*

| Years | <i>f</i> | %    |
|-------|----------|------|
| 1-5   | 83       | 40.7 |
| 6-10  | 46       | 22.6 |
| 11-15 | 19       | 9.3  |
| 16-20 | 26       | 12.7 |
| 21-25 | 12       | 5.9  |
| 26+   | 18       | 8.8  |

Note: County staff who had worked less than one year in their current position are not included in this study.

### **Districts Where Arkansas Cooperative Extension County Employees Worked**

Respondents were asked to indicate which Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service District they worked. Table 4.5 indicates 32.8% of the respondents (*f* = 67) worked in the Delta District, 28.4% (*f* = 58) worked in the Ouachita District, and 31.4% (*f* = 64) worked in the Ozark District. Fifteen (7.4%) did not respond to this question.



Table 5

*District in which Arkansas Cooperative Extension County Employees Worked*

| District    | <i>f</i> | %    |
|-------------|----------|------|
| Delta       | 67       | 32.8 |
| Ouachita    | 58       | 28.4 |
| Ozark       | 64       | 31.4 |
| No Response | 15       | 7.4  |

**Objective 1- Assess the morale of Extension agents and support staff employed by the Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service**

The morale of Extension agents and support staff was measured by the Staff Morale Questionnaire (SMQ). The results of the SMQ are presented by the three constructs of the survey: Leadership Synergy, Cohesive Pride, and Personal Challenge.

**Leadership Synergy Construct**

Leadership synergy is how followers perceive that their immediate supervisor communicates, instills trust, and builds a team atmosphere so that workers feel confident in exploring new ideas and feel energized in the workplace. Fifteen statements on the SMQ were related to Leadership Synergy. As seen in Table 4.6, the three highest rated statements pertaining to leadership synergy were “In this county, the County Staff feels accepted in the county” ( $M = 3.46, SD = .61$ ), “Members of this staff can be relied upon to work with steady persistence” ( $M = 3.40, SD = .60$ ), and “I have tried to be innovative in my programming techniques” ( $M = 3.32, SD = .52$ ). The three lowest rated statements regarding leadership synergy were “Arkansas Extension is run efficiently” ( $M = 2.58, SD = .69$ ), “My immediate supervisor seems to want

everything to depend solely on his/her judgement” ( $M = 2.02$ ,  $SD = .81$ ), and “When I believe that suggestions made by my immediate supervisor are of little value, I ignore them” ( $M = 1.86$ ,  $SD = .61$ ). Of the 190 (93.1%) valid responses regarding the Leadership Synergy Construct, out of a possible total score of 60, the mean score for leadership synergy was 49.2 ( $SD = 5.92$ ) (Table 4.6).

Table 6

*Means and Standard Deviations of Individual Statements of SMQ Leadership Synergy Construct for County Extension Staff Members*

| Statement   | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
|---|----------|-----------|
| I would rather work with my present colleagues than with any other group of colleagues in another county. | 3.30     | .76       |
| In this county, the County Staff feels accepted in the county.  | 3.46     | .61       |
| When I believe that suggestions made by my immediate supervisor are of little value, I ignore them.       | 1.86     | .61       |
| Members of this staff can be relied upon to work with steady persistence.                                 | 3.40     | .60       |
| I have the opportunity to show what I can really do in this county.                                       | 3.12     | .72       |
| I know what is going on in Extension.   | 2.98     | .61       |
| My immediate supervisor offers constructive criticism in a manner that makes me want to do a better job.  | 3.03     | .71       |
| I understand Extension policies and why they are in place.  | 3.01     | .68       |
| Arkansas Extension is run efficiently.  | 2.58     | .69       |
| Arkansas Extension is run effectively   | 2.62     | .73       |
| My immediate supervisor seems to want everything to depend solely on his/her judgment.                    | 2.02     | .81       |
| In general, the County Staff shows a great deal of originality in their programming.                      | 3.08     | .61       |
| I have tried to be innovative in my programming techniques.   | 3.32     | .52       |
| I am an essential part of my local community  | 3.12     | .60       |
| There is no complaining, arguing, or taking sides among my colleagues.                                    | 2.90     | .88       |

Note: Overall Mean=49.21, SD=5.91

### **Cohesive Pride Construct**

Six statements in the SMQ were related to cohesive pride. Cohesive pride relates to how individuals perceive their work relationship with their co-workers and leader, reflecting a sense

of cooperativeness. The two highest-rated statements pertaining to cohesive pride were “The County Staff contributes toward the achievement of the Extension mission ( $M = 3.57, SD = 0.60$ ) and “The County Staff in this county cooperates to achieve common professional objectives” ( $M = 3.48, SD = 0.57$ ). The lowest-rated statement regarding cohesive pride was “I would perform my duties equally well under less pleasant conditions than I have at present” ( $M = 2.77, SD = 0.76$ ). Of the 195 (95.6%) valid responses regarding the Cohesive Pride Construct with a total possible point of 24, the mean score was 19.28 ( $SD = 2.36$ ) (Table 4.7).

Table 7

*Means and Standard Deviation of Individual Statements of SMQ Cohesive Pride Construct for County Extension Staff Members*

| Statement   | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
|---|----------|-----------|
| The County Staff contributes toward the achievement of the Extension mission.                         | 3.57     | 0.60      |
| The County Staff in this county cooperates to achieve common professional objectives.                 | 3.48     | 0.57      |
| I would perform my duties equally well under less pleasant conditions than I have at present.         | 2.77     | 0.76      |
| I work beyond my normal working hours   | 3.20     | 0.80      |
| My immediate supervisor encourages the County Staff to participate to formulate significant projects. | 3.07     | 0.67      |
| County Staff are encouraged to pursue educational opportunities.                                      | 3.19     | 0.71      |

Note: Overall Mean=19.28, SD=2.36

### **Personal Challenge Construct**

There were seven statements on the SMQ related to personal challenge. Personal challenge in this study relates to how individuals perceived their work to be challenging,

representing the incentive derived from satisfaction in the county office. The two highest-rated statements about cohesive pride were “The County Staff displays confidence when called upon for a special effort” ( $M = 3.26, SD = 0.56$ ) and “The County Staff displays enthusiasm when called upon for a special effort” ( $M = 3.18, SD = 0.63$ ). The lowest-rated statement pertaining to cohesive pride was “Keeping up professionally is too much of a burden” ( $M = 1.97, SD = 0.55$ ). Table 4.8 shows the means and standard deviation of the seven statements related to personal challenge. Of the 189 (97.1%) valid responses regarding Personal Challenge Construct out of a possible score of 28, the mean score was 20.96 ( $SD = 2.73$ ).

Table 8

*Means and Standard Deviation of Individual Statements of SMQ Personal Challenge Construct*

*for County Extension Staff Members*

| Statement   | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
|---|----------|-----------|
| Keeping up professionally is too much of a burden.  | 1.97     | 0.55      |
| The County Staff displays enthusiasm when called upon for a special effort.               | 3.18     | 0.63      |
| My colleagues act as a unified staff rather than a collection of independent individuals. | 3.03     | 0.79      |
| My current programming gives me a feeling of success.                                     | 3.00     | 0.62      |
| The County Staff displays confidence when called upon for a special effort.               | 3.26     | 0.56      |
| To me, there is not a more challenging profession than being an Extension employee.       | 2.61     | 0.83      |
| Duties delegated to the County Staff are clearly and explicitly defined.                  | 2.84     | 0.66      |

*Note: Overall Mean=20.96, SD=2.73*

The responses for the Leadership Synergy construct were compiled to get an overall average of each answer. The limits used were 15-22.49 = Strongly Disagree; 22.50-37.49 = Disagree; 37.50-52.49 = Agree; and 52.50-60 = Strongly Agree. The same was done for Cohesive Pride and Personal Challenge.

Table 4.9 show the frequency of responses for the level of agreement to each of the three constructs of the SMQ by Arkansas County Extension Staff. For Leadership Synergy construct had 5.8% ( $f = 11$ ) disagreed at a high level on this construct, 77.9% ( $f = 148$ ) agreed at a high level on this construct, and 16.3% ( $f = 31$ ) strongly agreed at a very high level on this construct.

The limits for cohesive pride should be strongly disagree = 6 – 8.99, disagree = 9 – 14.99, agree = 15 – 20.99, and strongly agree = 21 - 24. The Cohesive Pride construct had 2.1% ( $f = 4$ )

disagreed at a high level on the cohesive pride construct, 65.6% ( $f = 128$ ) agreed on a high level with indicated this construct, and 32.3% ( $f = 63$ ) strongly agreed on a high level with this construct.

The limits for personal challenge should be strongly disagree = 7 – 10.49, disagree = 10.5 – 17.49, agree = 17.5 – 24.49, and strongly agree = 24.5 - 28. The Personal Challenge construct had 10.1% ( $f = 19$ ) disagreed at a high level on the personal challenge construct, 81.5% ( $f = 154$ ) agreed at a high level on the personal challenge construct, and 8.5% ( $f = 16$ ) strongly agreed at a very high level on this construct.

Table 9

*Arkansas County Extension Staff Responses to each of the SMQ Constructs*

| Construct Reponses                     | <i>f</i> | %    |
|--|----------|------|
| <i>Leadership Synergy</i>              |          |      |
| Strongly Disagree                      | 0        | 0    |
| Disagree                               | 11       | 5.8  |
| Agree                                  | 148      | 77.9 |
| Strongly Agree                         | 31       | 16.3 |
| <i>Response Cohesive Pride</i>         |          |      |
| Strongly Disagree                      | 0        | 0    |
| Disagree                               | 4        | 2.1  |
| Agree                                  | 128      | 65.6 |
| Strongly Agree                         | 63       | 32.3 |
| <i>Responses to Personal Challenge</i> |          |      |
| Strongly Disagree                      | 0        | 0    |
| Disagree                               | 19       | 10.1 |
| Agree                                  | 154      | 81.5 |
| Strongly Agree                         | 16       | 8.5  |

## **Objective 2-Assess the Morale of Extension Service County Staff Chairs Employed by the Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service**

The morale of Extension agents and support staff was measured by the Staff Morale Questionnaire (SMQ). The results of the SMQ are presented by the three constructs of the survey: Leadership Synergy, Cohesive Pride, and Personal Challenge.

### **Leadership Synergy Construct**

In this study, Staff Chairs were given the opportunity to complete the SMQ regarding their morale. Questions regarding supervisors, in this case would be their District Director. To recap, leadership synergy is how employees perceive that their immediate supervisor communicates, instills trust, and builds a team atmosphere so that workers feel confident in exploring new ideas and feel energized in the workplace. The same 15 statements on the SMQ that related to Leadership Synergy were present to Staff Chairs.

As seen in Table 4.10, the three highest-rated statements were “In this county, the County Staff feels accepted in the county” ( $M = 3.57, SD = 0.54$ ), “I have tried to be innovative in my programming techniques” ( $M = 3.43, SD = 0.50$ ), “Members of this staff can be relied upon to work with steady persistence” ( $M = 3.39, SD = 0.59$ ). The three lowest rated statements were “Arkansas Extension is run efficiently” ( $M = 2.62, SD = 0.68$ ), “Arkansas Extension is run effectively” ( $M = 2.67, SD = 0.72$ ), “There is no complaining, arguing, or taking sides among my colleagues” ( $M = 2.91, SD = 0.85$ ). Of the 54 Staff Chair respondents (2.6%) regarding the Leadership Construct, out of a possible score of 60, the mean score was 50.1 ( $SD = 5.71$ ).



Table 10

*Means and Standard Deviations of Individual Statements of SMQ Leadership Synergy Construct  
for County Extension Staff Chairs*

| Statement   | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
|---|----------|-----------|
| I would rather work with my present colleagues than with any other group of colleagues in another county. | 3.30     | 0.69      |
| In this county, the County Staff feels accepted in the county.  | 3.57     | 0.65      |
| When I believe that suggestions made by my immediate supervisor are of little value, I ignore them.       | 3.16     | 0.63      |
| Members of this staff can be relied upon to work with steady persistence.                                 | 3.39     | 0.59      |
| I have the opportunity to show what I can really do in this county.                                       | 3.25     | 0.70      |
| I know what is going on in Extension.   | 3.02     | 0.71      |
| My immediate supervisor offers constructive criticism in a manner that makes me want to do a better job.  | 3.15     | 0.68      |
| I understand Extension policies and why they are in place.  | 2.95     | 0.68      |
| Arkansas Extension is run efficiently.  | 2.62     | 0.68      |
| Arkansas Extension is run effectively   | 2.67     | 0.72      |
| My immediate supervisor seems to want everything to depend solely on his/her judgment.                    | 2.98     | 0.62      |
| In general, the County Staff shows a great deal of originality in their programming.                      | 3.24     | 0.64      |
| I have tried to be innovative in my programming techniques.   | 3.43     | 0.50      |
| I am an essential part of my local community  | 3.20     | 0.56      |
| There is no complaining, arguing, or taking sides among my colleagues.                                    | 2.91     | 0.85      |

Note: Overall Mean = 50.1, SD = 5.71

### Cohesive Pride Construct

Six statements in the SMQ were related to cohesive pride. Cohesive pride relates to how individuals perceive their work relationships with their co-workers and leaders, reflecting a sense of cooperativeness. The two highest-rated statements were “I work beyond my normal work hours” ( $M = 3.64, SD = 0.52$ ) and “The County Staff contributes toward the achievement of the Extension mission” ( $M = 3.59, SD = 0.57$ ). The lowest-rated statement was “I would perform my duties equally well under less pleasant conditions than I have at present” ( $M = 2.82, SD = 0.66$ ). Of the 55 (2.7%) valid responses regarding Cohesive Pride with a total possible point of 24, the mean score was 20.2 ( $SD = 2.09$ ) (Table 4.11).

Table 11

*Means and Standard Deviation of Individual Statements of SMQ Cohesive Pride Construct for County Extension Staff Chairs*

| Statement   | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
|---|----------|-----------|
| The County Staff contributes toward the achievement of the Extension mission.                         | 3.59     | 0.57      |
| The County Staff in this county cooperates to achieve common professional objectives.                 | 3.55     | 0.53      |
| I would perform my duties equally well under less pleasant conditions than I have at present.         | 2.82     | 0.66      |
| I work beyond my normal working hours   | 3.64     | 0.52      |
| My immediate supervisor encourages the County Staff to participate to formulate significant projects. | 3.22     | 0.53      |
| County Staff are encouraged to pursue educational opportunities.                                      | 3.35     | 0.62      |

Note: Overall Mean=20.2, SD=2.09

## Personal Challenge Construct

There were seven statements on the SMQ that related to personal challenge. Personal challenge in this study relates to how the individuals perceived their work to be challenging, representing the incentive derived from satisfaction in the county office (Table 4.12). The two highest-rated statements were “The County Staff displays confidence when called upon for a special effort” ( $M = 3.35$ ,  $SD = 0.56$ ) and “The County Staff displays enthusiasm when called upon for a special effort” ( $M = 3.31$ ,  $SD = 0.58$ ). The lowest-rated statement was “To me, there is not a more challenging profession than being an Extension employee” ( $M = 2.70$ ,  $SD = 0.83$ ). Table 4.35 shows the means and standard deviation of the seven statements related to personal challenge. Of the 54 (2.6%) valid responses regarding Personal Challenge Construct with a possible score of 28, the mean score was 21.54 ( $SD = 2.73$ ).

Table 12

*Means and Standard Deviation of Individual Statements of SMQ Personal Challenge Construct**for County Extension Staff Chairs*

| Statement   | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
|---|----------|-----------|
| Keeping up professionally is too much of a burden.  | 2.98     | 0.46      |
| The County Staff displays enthusiasm when called upon for a special effort.               | 3.31     | 0.58      |
| My colleagues act as a unified staff rather than a collection of independent individuals. | 3.19     | 0.65      |
| My current programming gives me a feeling of success.                                     | 3.07     | 0.54      |
| The County Staff displays confidence when called upon for a special effort.               | 3.35     | 0.56      |
| To me, there is not a more challenging profession than being an Extension employee.       | 2.70     | 0.84      |
| Duties delegated to the County Staff are clearly and explicitly defined.                  | 2.93     | 0.54      |

Note: Overall Mean=21.54, SD=2.73

The responses for the Leadership Synergy construct were compiled to get an overall average of each answer. The limits used were 1-7 = Strongly Disagree; 8-14 = Disagree; 15- 21 = Agree; and 22-28 = Strongly Agree. The same was done for Cohesive Pride and Personal Challenge. Table 4.13 show the frequency of responses to each of the three constructs of the SMQ by Arkansas County Extension Staff Chairs. The Leadership Synergy construct had 3.3% disagree ( $f = 2$ ) indicating low morale in this construct, 67.2% agree ( $f = 41$ ) indicating high morale in this construct and 18.0% strongly agree ( $f = 11$ ) indicating very high morale in this construct. The Cohesive Pride construct had 47.5% agree ( $f = 29$ ) indicating high morale in this construct, and 42.6% strongly agree ( $f = 26$ ) indicating very high morale in this construct. The Personal Challenge construct had 8.2% disagree ( $f = 5$ ) indicating low morale in this construct,

70.5% agree ( $f = 43$ ) indicating high morale in this construct, and 9.8% strongly agree ( $f = 6$ ) indicating very high morale in this construct.

Table 13

*Arkansas County Extension Staff Chairs Responses to each of the SMQ Constructs*

| Construct Responses                    | <i>f</i> | %    |
|--|----------|------|
| <i>Leadership Synergy</i>              |          |      |
| Strongly Disagree                      | 0        | 0    |
| Disagree                               | 2        | 3.3  |
| Agree                                  | 41       | 67.2 |
| Strongly Agree                         | 11       | 18.0 |
| <i>Response Cohesive Pride</i>         |          |      |
| Strongly Disagree                      | 0        | 0    |
| Disagree                               | 0        | 0    |
| Agree                                  | 29       | 47.5 |
| Strongly Agree                         | 26       | 42.6 |
| <i>Responses to Personal Challenge</i> |          |      |
| Strongly Disagree                      | 0        | 0    |
| Disagree                               | 5        | 8.2  |
| Agree                                  | 43       | 70.5 |
| Strongly Agree                         | 6        | 9.8  |

**Objective 3- Assess how Extension Agents and Support Staff Perceive Their Relationship with Their Staff Chair**

The LMX was used to determine the dyadic relationship between a leader and each subordinate. The score attained from the questionnaire indicated the quality of the leader-member relationships, which in this case was the relationship between the staff chair and the county staff members. The score from the LMX also determined the degree to which the relationships are characteristic of partnerships between the County Staff Chair and their county

staff as described by the LMX model. Scoring interpretation of the LMX was as follows: very high = 30-35, high = 25-29, moderate = 20-24, low = 15-19, very low = 7-14.

Table 4.14 shows the perceived relationship quality of County Staff (Followers) with their Staff Chair (Leader). Of the 141 follower respondents, 43.1 % ( $f = 61$ ) indicated they had a very-high quality relationship with their Staff Chair, 32.0% ( $f = 45$ ) indicated they had a high-quality relationship, 14.2% ( $f = 20$ ) indicated a moderate quality relationship, 5.7% ( $f = 8$ ) indicated a low-quality relationship, and 2.8% ( $f = 4$ ) indicated a very low-quality relationship with their Staff Chair. The highest possible score for the LMX is 35, with the mean in this study for followers (county staff) being 27.37 (SD = 5.7).

Table 14

*Perceived Relationship of Extension Agents and Support Staff to Staff Chair According to LMX*

*Scores (n = 141)*

| LMX Score         | <i>f</i> | %    |
|-------------------|----------|------|
| Very High (30-35) | 61       | 43.1 |
| High (25-29)      | 45       | 32.0 |
| Moderate (20-24)  | 20       | 14.2 |
| Low (15-19)       | 8        | 5.7  |
| Very Low (7-14)   | 7        | 5.0  |

Mean = 27.37, Standard Deviation = 5.7

**County Staffs' LMX Follower Scores by Role, Years in Role, and Gender**

County staff LMX scores were separated by the role county staff members held with the Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service. Mean score and standard deviation were as follows: County Extension Agent-Agriculture ( $M = 26.71$ ,  $SD = 4.66$ ), County Extension Agent-Family Consumer Science ( $M = 25.91$ ,  $SD = 6.23$ ), County Extension Agent-4H ( $M = 28.72$ ,  $SD = 5.38$ ), Support Staff ( $M = 28.51$ ,  $SD = 5.88$ ) Table 4.15 shows followers' LMX mean scores and standard deviation by role.

Table 15

*County Staff's LMX Mean Scores and Standard Deviation by Role (n = 141)*

| Role   | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
|--|----------|-----------|
| County Extension Agent-Agriculture                                     | 26.71    | 4.66      |
| County Extension Agent-Family Consumer Science                         | 25.91    | 6.23      |
| County Extension Agent-4H  | 28.72    | 5.38      |
| Support Staff (program assistants, administrative support staff, etc.) | 28.51    | 5.88      |

### **Differences in LMX Score by Role**

A one-way ANOVA was performed to determine if there was a significant difference between Arkansas County Staff (followers) and LMX score (Table 4.16). A one-way ANOVA revealed no statistically significant difference in LMX scores between the four roles of County Staff ( $F(3, 137) = 2.09, p = .104, \eta^2 = .044$ ). The effect size for LMX score, and role of county staff was small (Cohen, 1988).

Table 16

*Arkansas County Staffs' LMX Scores Compared to Role*

|               | SS      | df  | Mean Square | <i>F</i> | <i>p</i> | $\eta^2$ |
|---------------|---------|-----|-------------|----------|----------|----------|
| Between Group | 205.12  | 3   | 68.32       | 2.09     | .104     | .044     |
| Within Group  | 4473.71 | 137 | 32.66       |          |          |          |
| Total         | 4678.82 | 140 |             |          |          |          |



### Difference in LMX Scores by Years of Service

County staff LMX scores were separated by the number of years of service with the Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service. Mean score and standard deviation were as follows: 1-5 years ( $M = 26.39$ ,  $SD = 6.18$ ), 6-10 years ( $M = 28.17$ ,  $SD = 7.73$ ), 11-15 years ( $M = 27.92$ ,  $SD = 2.39$ ), 16-20 years ( $M = 28.00$ ,  $SD = 6.72$ ), 21-25 years ( $M = 31.75$ ,  $SD = .50$ ), 26+ years ( $M = 28.67$ ,  $SD = 3.57$ ). Table 4.17 shows the mean LMX scores of county staff categorized by the number of years they have been in their current role within UAEX.

Table 17

*LMX Scores Based on County Staffs' Years of Service in Current Role (n = 141)*

| Years of Service | <i>f</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
|------------------|----------|----------|-----------|
| 1-5              | 71       | 26.39    | 6.18      |
| 6-10             | 29       | 28.17    | 7.73      |
| 11-15            | 12       | 27.92    | 3.29      |
| 16-20            | 16       | 28.00    | 6.72      |
| 21-25            | 4        | 31.75    | 0.50      |
| 26+              | 9        | 28.67    | 3.57      |

A one-way ANOVA was performed to compare LMX follower scores to the number of years Extension employees have worked in their current role. A one-way ANOVA revealed no statistically significant difference in LMX scores between the six groups ( $F(5, 135) = 1.31$ ,  $p = 0.35$ ,  $\eta^2 = .040$ ) shown in Table 4.18. The effect size for LMX score and the number of years in current role was small (Cohen, 1988).

Table 18

*LMX Scores Based on County Staffs' Number of Years in Current Role*

|               | SS      | df  | Mean Square | <i>F</i> | <i>p</i> | $\eta^2$ |
|---------------|---------|-----|-------------|----------|----------|----------|
| Between Group | 188.06  | 6   | 37.61       | 1.31     | 0.35     | 0.040    |
| Within Group  | 4490.76 | 135 | 33.27       |          |          |          |
| Total         | 4678.82 | 140 |             |          |          |          |

**Difference in LMX Scores by Districts**

Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service is divided into three geographical districts. Delta, Ouachita, and Ozark districts. The mean and standard deviation on the LMX for each district are as follows: Delta ( $M = 25.43$ ,  $SD = 6.39$ ), Ouachita ( $M = 28.16$ ,  $SD = 5.69$ ), Ozark ( $M = 27.37$ ,  $SD = 5.86$ ). Table 4.19 reports the mean and standard deviation for County Staff (followers) in each of the three districts.

Table 19

*Means and Standard Deviation for LMX Scores of County Staff (Followers) by District*

| District | <i>f</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
|----------|----------|----------|-----------|
| Delta    | 49       | 25.43    | 6.39      |
| Ouachita | 38       | 28.16    | 5.69      |
| Ozark    | 48       | 27.37    | 5.86      |

A one-way ANOVA was performed to compare LMX follower scores among the three districts. The one-way ANOVA revealed a statistically significant difference in LMX scores of

followers between the three districts ( $F(2, 132) = 4.55, p = .01, n^2 = .07$ ) (Table 4.20). The effect size for LMX score and district in which county staff work was a moderate effect (Cohen, 1988).

A post hoc comparison using the Tukey’s HSD test indicated that the mean score for the Delta District ( $M = 25.43, SD = 6.39$ ) was significantly different than the Ozark District ( $M = 27.37, SD = 5.86$ ). However, the Ouachita District ( $M = 28.16, SD = 5.69$ ) did not significantly differ from the Delta and Ozark districts (Table 4.20).

Table 20

*County Staffs’ LMX Score by District*

|                | SS      | df  | Mean Square | <i>F</i> | <i>p</i> | <i>n</i> <sup>2</sup> |
|----------------|---------|-----|-------------|----------|----------|-----------------------|
| Between Groups | 296.95  | 2   | 148.48      | 4.55     | .01      | .07                   |
| Within Groups  | 4306.53 | 132 | 32.63       |          |          |                       |
| Total          | 4603.48 | 134 |             |          |          |                       |

### **Differences in LMX Score by Gender**

The 115 participants who identified as female ( $M = 27.39, SD = 6.01$ ) compared to the 18 participants who identified as male ( $M = 27.833, SD = 5.00$ ). Table 4.21 shows the mean and standard deviation of LMX scores between female and male followers in the Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service.

An independent-samples t-test was used to determine if there was a significant difference between gender and LMX score. The independent samples t-test indicated no significant difference in LMX scores,  $t(131) = -.30, p = .57$  (Table 4.17). The effect size for LMX score and county staff gender was very small ( $d = 0.075$ ) (Cohen, 1988).

Table 21

*Independent Samples t-test on LMX Score and County Staff's Gender*

|           | Gender | <i>n</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>t</i> | <i>df</i> | <i>p</i> | <i>Cohen's d</i> |
|-----------|--------|----------|----------|-----------|----------|-----------|----------|------------------|
| LMX Score | Female | 115      | 27.39    | 6.01      | -.30     | 131       | .57      | 0.075            |
|           | Male   | 18       | 27.83    | 5.00      |          |           |          |                  |

**Objective 4- Assess how Extension Staff Chairs Perceive Their Relationship with Their County Staff Compared to How Their County Staff Perceive Their Relationship**

The LMX was used to determine the dyadic relationship between a leader and each subordinate. The scores attained from the questionnaire indicated the quality of the leader-member relationship. Table 4.22 shows the perceived relationship quality between Staff Chairs (Leaders) and County Staff (Followers) from the Staff Chairs' perspective. Of the 57 Leader respondents, 15.8% ( $f = 9$ ) indicated they had a very high-quality relationship with their County Staff, 52.6% ( $f = 30$ ) indicated they have a high-quality relationship, 28.1% ( $f = 16$ ) indicated a moderate quality relationship, 3.5% ( $f = 2$ ) indicated a low-quality relationship. None of the staff chairs indicated a very low-quality relationship with their county staff. The highest possible score for the LMX is 35, with a mean LMX score for leaders (Extension Staff Chairs) being 26.23 ( $SD = 3.59$ ), indicating a high relationship with their followers.

Table 22

*Perceived Relationship of Leaders (Extension Staff Chairs) to Followers according to LMX*

*Scores*

| LMX Score         | <i>f</i> | %    |
|-------------------|----------|------|
| Very High (30-35) | 9        | 15.8 |
| High (25-29)      | 30       | 52.6 |
| Moderate (20-24)  | 16       | 28.1 |
| Low (15-19)       | 2        | 3.5  |
| Very Low (7-14)   | 0        | 0.0  |

Mean=26.23, Standard Deviation=3.59

**Differences in Extension Staff Chairs LMX Scores by District**

As stated previously, the Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service is divided into three geographical districts Delta, Ouachita, and Ozark the LMX was used to determine the staff chair’s perceived relationship quality with their county staff. The mean scores and standard deviation are reported for the 18 participants from the Delta District ( $M = 27.22, SD = 2.73$ ) for the 20 from the Ouachita District ( $M = 26.30, SD = 4.11$ ), and the 16 Ozark District ( $M = 25.50, SD = 3.50$ ).

A one-way ANOVA was performed to compare LMX scores of staff chairs among the three districts. The one-way ANOVA revealed no significant statistical difference in LMX scores of leaders between the three districts ( $F(2, 51) = 1.02, p = .37, n^2 = .04$ ), as shown in Table 4.23. The effect size for the LMX score of Staff Chairs by district was small (Cohen, 1988).

Table 23

*ANOVA Results for Staff Chairs' LMX Score by District*

| Measure   | Delta    |           | Ouachita |           | Ozark    |           | <i>F</i> | <i>p</i> | $\eta^2$ |
|-----------|----------|-----------|----------|-----------|----------|-----------|----------|----------|----------|
|           | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |          |          |          |
| LMX Score | 27.22    | 2.73      | 26.30    | 4.11      | 25.50    | 3.50      | 1.02     | .37      | .04      |

**Differences in LMX Scores by Number of Years as Staff Chair**

To determine if there was a significant difference between Staff Chair LMX scores and the number of years that they served in a Staff Chair role, a one-way ANOVA was used. The one-way ANOVA revealed there was no significant difference between the LMX score and the number of years participants had served as Staff Chair ( $F(5, 51) = 2.34, p = .06, \eta^2 = .19$ ) (Table 4.24). The effect size for LMX score of Staff Chairs and the number of years in current role was large (Cohen, 1988).

Table 24

*LMX Scores Based on Staff Chairs' Number of Years in Current Role*

|               | SS     | df | Mean Square | <i>F</i> | <i>p</i> | $\eta^2$ |
|---------------|--------|----|-------------|----------|----------|----------|
| Between Group | 134.82 | 5  | 26.97       | 2.34     | .06      | .19      |
| Within Group  | 587.21 | 51 | 11.51       |          |          |          |
| Total         | 722.04 | 56 |             |          |          |          |

### Differences in LMX Score by Gender of Staff Chair

An independent-samples t-test was used to determine if there was a significant difference between gender and LMX score. Seventeen participants identified as female ( $M = 26.00$ ,  $SD = 4.18$ ) compared to 36 participants who identified as male ( $M = 26.78$ ,  $SD = 2.92$ ). The independent samples t-test demonstrated no significant difference in LMX scores,  $t(51) = -.79$ ,  $p = .12$  (Table 4.25). The LMX score of Staff Chairs' gender indicated a small effect size (Cohen, 1988).

Table 25

*Independent Samples t-test on LMX Score and Staff Chairs' Gender*

|           | Gender | <i>f</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>t</i> | <i>df</i> | <i>p</i> | <i>Cohen's d</i> |
|-----------|--------|----------|----------|-----------|----------|-----------|----------|------------------|
| LMX Score | Female | 17       | 26.00    | 4.18      | -.79     | 51        | .12      | .231             |
|           | Male   | 36       | 26.78    | 2.92      |          |           |          |                  |

### Objective 5- Determine the Relationship Between the County Staffs' Morale and the Perceived Relationship with Their Staff Chair

#### Correlation Between Follower LMX Scores and SMQ Constructs

Pearson-product moment correlation coefficients were calculated to determine the relationship between Extension staff LMX scores and the Leadership Synergy portion of the SMQ. There was a positive, moderate relationship between SMQ Follower scores and the scores on the Leadership Synergy construct ( $r(136) = .65$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

#### Relationship Between LMX and Morale- Leadership Synergy

A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the relationship between Leadership Synergy and County Staffs' perceived relationship with Staff Chair as measured by

the LMX. There was a significant relationship between the Leadership Synergy construct and the LMX scores ( $X^2(8, N = 136) = 45.18, p < .001$ ). A Kendall's tau-b correlation was calculated to determine the strength and magnitude of the relationship between the Leadership Synergy portion of the SMQ and the perceived relationship followers have with their Staff Chair among the 136 followers. There was a moderate, positive correlation between leadership synergy and the perceived relationship with the staff chair, which was statistically significant ( $\tau_b = .376, p < .001$ ) (Table 4.26).

Table 26

*Relationship Between Leadership Synergy and County Staffs' Perceived Relationship with Staff Chair*

| <i>Leadership Synergy</i> | <i>f</i> | <i>df</i> | <i>X<sup>2</sup></i> | <i>p</i> |
|---------------------------|----------|-----------|----------------------|----------|
|                           | 136      | 8         | 45.18                | <.001    |

| <i>Leadership Synergy x Perceived Relationship with Staff Chair</i> | <i>Very Low</i> | <i>Low</i> | <i>Moderate</i> | <i>High</i> | <i>Very High</i> |
|---|-----------------|------------|-----------------|-------------|------------------|
| Disagree  | 2               | 4          | 1               | 1           | 1                |
| Agree   | 5               | 4          | 17              | 38          | 43               |
| Strongly Agree  | 0               | 0          | 0               | 4           | 16               |
| Total   | 7               | 8          | 18              | 43          | 60               |

$\tau_b = .376, p < .001$

### **Relationship Between LMX and Morale-Cohesive Pride**

A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the relation between Cohesive Pride and County Staffs' perceived relationship with Staff Chair as measured by the LMX. There was a significant relationship between the Cohesive Pride construct and LMX scores ( $X^2(8, N = 140) = 43.66, p < .001$ ). A Kendall's tau-b correlation was calculated to determine the strength and magnitude of the relationship between the Cohesive Pride construct of the SMQ and the perceived relationship followers have with their Staff Chair amongst the 140



followers. There was a strong, positive correlation between cohesive pride and the perceived relationship with the staff chair, which was statistically significant ( $\tau_b = .232, p = 0.002$ ) (Table 4.27).

Table 27

*Relationship Between Cohesive Pride and County Staffs' Perceived Relationship with Staff Chair*

| <i>Cohesive Pride</i> | <i>f</i> | <i>df</i> | <i>X<sup>2</sup></i> | <i>p</i> |
|-----------------------|----------|-----------|----------------------|----------|
|                       | 140      | 8         | 43.66                | <.001    |

| <i>Cohesive Pride x Perceived Relationship with Staff Chair</i> | <i>Very Low</i> | <i>Low</i> | <i>Moderate</i> | <i>High</i> | <i>Very High</i> |
|---|-----------------|------------|-----------------|-------------|------------------|
| Disagree  | 2               | 2          | 0               | 0           | 0                |
| Agree   | 5               | 5          | 19              | 28          | 42               |
| Strongly Agree  | 0               | 1          | 1               | 16          | 19               |
| Total   | 7               | 8          | 20              | 44          | 61               |

$\tau_b = .232, p = .002$

### **Relationship Between LMX Morale-Personal Challenge**

A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the relation between Personal Challenge and County Staffs' perceived relationship with Staff Chair as measured by the LMX. There was not a significant relationship between the Personal Challenge construct and the LMX score ( $X^2 (8, N = 135) = 13.59, p = .09$ ) (Table 4.28). A Kendall's tau-b correlation was calculated to determine the strength and magnitude of the relationship between the Personal Challenge portion of the SMQ and the perceived relationship followers have with their Staff Chair amongst the 135 followers. There was a significant strong, positive correlation between personal challenge and the perceived relationship with the staff chair ( $\tau_b = .199, p = 0.01$ ).

Table 28

*Relationship Between Personal Challenge and County Staffs' Perceived Relationship with Staff**Chair*

| <i>Personal Challenge</i> | <i>f</i> | <i>df</i> | <i>X<sup>2</sup></i> | <i>p</i> |
|---------------------------|----------|-----------|----------------------|----------|
|                           | 135      | 8         | 13.59                | 0.01     |

| <i>Personal Challenge x Perceived Relationship with Staff Chair</i> | <i>Very Low</i> | <i>Low</i> | <i>Moderate</i> | <i>High</i> | <i>Very High</i> |
|---|-----------------|------------|-----------------|-------------|------------------|
| Disagree  | 3               | 1          | 1               | 6           | 3                |
| Agree   | 4               | 7          | 16              | 34          | 50               |
| Strongly Agree  | 0               | 0          | 1               | 2           | 7                |
| Total   | 7               | 8          | 18              | 42          | 60               |

$\tau_b = .199, p = 0.01$

### **Correlation Between Leader LMX Scores and SMQ Constructs**

#### **Relationship Between LMX and Morale-Leadership Synergy**

A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the relationship between leadership synergy and Staff Chairs' perceived relationship with their county staff as measured by the LMX. There was not a significant relationship between Leadership Synergy Construct and the LMX scores ( $X^2(3, N = 54) = 5.07, p < .17$ ). A Kendall's tau-b correlation was calculated to determine the strength and magnitude of the relationship between the Leadership Synergy portion of the SMQ and the perceived relationship Staff Chairs have with their followers among the 54 Staff Chairs. There was a moderate, positive correlation between leadership synergy and perceived relationship with followers, which was not statistically significant ( $\tau_b = .113, p = 0.38$ ) (Table 4.29).

Table 29

*Relationship Between Leadership Synergy and Staff Chairs' Perceived Relationship with Extension Staff*

| <i>Leadership Synergy</i> | <i>f</i> | <i>df</i> | <i>X<sup>2</sup></i> | <i>p</i> |
|---------------------------|----------|-----------|----------------------|----------|
|                           | 54       | 6         | 6.60                 | 0.38     |

| <i>Leadership Synergy x Perceived Relationship with Staff</i> | <i>Very Low</i> | <i>Low</i> | <i>Moderate</i> | <i>High</i> | <i>Very High</i> |
|---|-----------------|------------|-----------------|-------------|------------------|
| Disagree  | 0               | 0          | 2               | 0           | 0                |
| Agree   | 0               | 2          | 9               | 23          | 7                |
| Strongly Agree  | 0               | 0          | 3               | 6           | 2                |
| Total   | 0               | 2          | 14              | 29          | 0                |

$\tau_b = .113, p = 0.38$

### **Relationship Between Staff Chairs' LMX and Morale-Cohesive Pride**

A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the relationship between Cohesive Pride and Staff Chairs' perceived relationship with County Staff as measured by the LMX. There was not a significant relationship between the Cohesive Pride construct and LMX scores ( $X^2 (3, N = 55) = 5.07, p < .17$ ). A Kendall's tau-b correlation was calculated to determine the strength and magnitude of the relationship between the Cohesive Pride portion of the SMQ and the perceived relationship Staff Chairs have with their staff among the 55 Staff Chairs. There was a strong, positive correlation between cohesive pride and perceived relationship with followers, which was statistically significant ( $\tau_b = .241, p = .046$ ) (Table 4.30).

Table 30

*Relationship Between Cohesive Pride and Staff Chairs' Perceived Relationship with County Staff*

| <i>Cohesive Pride</i> | <i>f</i> | <i>df</i> | <i>X<sup>2</sup></i> | <i>p</i> |
|-----------------------|----------|-----------|----------------------|----------|
|                       | 54       | 6         | 5.07                 | .167     |

| <i>Cohesive Pride x Perceived Relationship with Staff</i> | Very Low | Low | Moderate | High | Very High |
|---|----------|-----|----------|------|-----------|
| Disagree  | 0        | 0   | 0        | 0    | 0         |
| Agree   | 0        | 2   | 10       | 13   | 4         |
| Strongly Agree  | 0        | 0   | 4        | 17   | 5         |
| Total   | 0        | 2   | 14       | 30   | 9         |

$\tau_b = .241, p = .046$

### **Relationship Between Staff Chairs' LMX and Morale-Personal Challenge**

A chi-square of independence was performed to examine the relationship between Personal Challenge and Staff Chairs' perceived relationship with County Staff as measured by the LMX. There was a significant relationship between the Personal Challenge construct and LMX scores ( $X^2 (6, N = 54) = 25.52, p < .001$ ). A Kendall's tau-b correlation was calculated to determine the strength and magnitude of the relationship between the Personal Challenge portion of the SMQ and the perceived relationship Staff Chairs have with their staff among the 54 Staff Chairs. There was a strong, positive correlation between personal challenge and perceived relationship with followers, which was statistically significant ( $\tau_b = .219, p = .094$ ) (Table 4.31).

Table 31

*Relationship Between Personal Challenge and Staff Chairs' Perceived Relationship with County Staff*

| <i>Personal Challenge</i> | <i>f</i> | <i>df</i> | <i>X<sup>2</sup></i> | <i>p</i> |
|---------------------------|----------|-----------|----------------------|----------|
|                           | 54       | 6         | 25.52                | <.001    |

| <i>Personal Challenge x Perceived Relationship with Chair</i> | Very Low | Low | Moderate | High | Very High |
|---|----------|-----|----------|------|-----------|
| Disagree  | 0        | 2   | 2        | 1    | 0         |
| Agree   | 0        | 0   | 11       | 23   | 9         |
| Strongly Agree  | 0        | 0   | 1        | 5    | 0         |
| Total   | 0        | 2   | 14       | 29   | 0         |

$\tau_b = .219, p = .094$

## Morale by Gender, Role, Years of Service, and District

### SMQ Constructs of Morale by Gender

An independent samples t-test was utilized to determine if there was a significant difference in morale using the three constructs of the SMQ based on the gender of County Extension Staff. The results of the t-test showed no significant difference in the scores for Leadership Synergy among female ( $M = 49.14, SD = 6.30, f = 132$ ), male staff ( $M = 49.80, SD = 4.85, f = 54$ ); ( $t(184) = -.690, p = .49, d = .11$ ). The effect size for Leadership Synergy and gender is very small (Cohen, 1988).

There was also no significant difference in scores for Cohesive Pride among female ( $M = 19.14, SD = 2.51, f = 132$ ), male staff ( $M = 19.80, SD = 2.00, f = 54$ ); ( $t(184) = -1.70, p = .09, d = .28$ ). The effect size for Cohesive Pride and gender was small (Cohen, 1988).

There was no significant difference in the scores Personal Challenge among female ( $M = 20.89, SD = 2.83, f = 132$ ) male ( $M = 21.29, SD = 2.43, f = 54$ ); ( $t(184) = -.91, p = .36, d = .15$ ). The effect size for Personal Challenge and gender was small (Cohen, 1988) (Table 4.32).

Table 32

*Independent t-test for the Three Constructs of the SMQ Based on Gender of County Extension Staff*

|                    | <i>Gender</i> | <i>f</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>t</i> | <i>df</i> | <i>p</i> | <i>Cohen's d</i> |
|--------------------|---------------|----------|----------|-----------|----------|-----------|----------|------------------|
| Leadership Synergy | Female        | 132      | 49.14    | 6.30      | -.690    | 184       | .49      | .11              |
|                    | Male          | 54       | 49.80    | 4.85      |          |           |          |                  |
| Cohesive Pride     | Female        | 132      | 19.14    | 2.51      | -1.70    | 184       | .09      | .28              |
|                    | Male          | 54       | 19.80    | 2.00      |          |           |          |                  |

|                    |        |     |       |      |      |     |     |     |
|--------------------|--------|-----|-------|------|------|-----|-----|-----|
| Personal Challenge | Female | 132 | 20.89 | 2.83 | -.91 | 184 | .36 | .15 |
|                    | Male   | 54  | 21.29 | 2.43 |      |     |     |     |

### SMQ Constructs of Morale by Role

To determine if there was a significant difference between Extension personnel role and morale using the three constructs of the SMQ a one-way was used ANOVA (Table 4.33). Scores on the Leadership Synergy Construct by role in Extension were as follows: Staff Chairs ( $M = 50.11$ ,  $SD = 5.71$ ,  $f = 54$ ), Agriculture Agents ( $M = 46.58$ ,  $SD = 5.03$ ,  $f = 26$ ), Family Consumer Science Agents ( $M = 48.65$ ,  $SD = 7.04$ ,  $f = 43$ ), 4-H Agents ( $M = 49.29$ ,  $SD = 4.50$ ,  $f = 17$ ) and Support Staff ( $M = 50.06$ ,  $SD = 6.68$ ,  $f = 50$ ). There was not a significant difference between Extension personnel role and Leadership Synergy ( $F(4, 185) = 2.00$ ,  $p = .097$ ,  $\eta^2 = .041$ ). The effect size of Leadership Synergy and Extension personnel role was small (Cohen, 1988).

Scores on the Cohesive Pride Construct by role in Extension were as follows: Staff Chairs ( $M = 20.20$ ,  $SD = 2.09$ ,  $f = 55$ ), Agriculture Agents ( $M = 18.18$ ,  $SD = 1.98$ ,  $f = 28$ ), Family Consumer Science Agents ( $M = 19.18$ ,  $SD = 2.76$ ,  $f = 44$ ), 4-H Agents ( $M = 19.56$ ,  $SD = 2.25$ ,  $f = 18$ ), and Support Staff ( $M = 18.88$ ,  $SD = 2.16$ ,  $f = 50$ ). There was a significant difference between Extension personnel role and Cohesive Pride ( $F(4, 190) = 4.35$ ,  $p = .002$ ,  $\eta^2 = .084$ ). The effect size of Cohesive Pride and Extension personnel role was medium (Cohen, 1988).

Scores on the Personal Challenge Construct by role in Extension were as follows: Staff Chairs ( $M = 21.54$ ,  $SD = 2.73$ ,  $f = 54$ ), Agriculture Agents ( $M = 19.76$ ,  $SD = 2.44$ ,  $f = 25$ ), Family Consumer Science Agents ( $M = 20.98$ ,  $SD = 3.15$ ,  $f = 43$ ), 4-H Agents ( $M = 20.53$ ,  $SD = 1.84$ ,  $f = 17$ ), and Support Staff ( $M = 21.08$ ,  $SD = 2.61$ ,  $f = 50$ ). There was not a significant

difference between Extension personnel role and Personal Challenge ( $F(4, 184) = 1.98, p = .099, \eta^2 = .041$ ). The effect size of Personal Challenge and Extension personnel role was small (Cohen, 1988).

Table 33

*ANOVA Results for Morale Using the Three Constructs of the SMQ by Role of Extension*

*Personnel*

| Morale Construct   | Staff Chair |           | Agriculture Agent |           | Family Consumer Science Agent |           | 4H Agent |           | Support Staff |           | <i>F</i> | $\eta^2$ |
|--------------------|-------------|-----------|-------------------|-----------|-------------------------------|-----------|----------|-----------|---------------|-----------|----------|----------|
|                    | <i>M</i>    | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i>          | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i>                      | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i>      | <i>SD</i> |          |          |
| Leadership Synergy | 50.11       | 5.71      | 46.58             | 5.03      | 48.65                         | 7.04      | 49.29    | 4.50      | 50.06         | 6.68      | 2.00     | .041     |
| Cohesive Pride     | 20.20       | 2.09      | 18.18             | 1.98      | 19.18                         | 2.76      | 19.56    | 2.25      | 18.88         | 2.16      | 4.35*    | .084     |
| Personal Challenge | 21.54       | 2.73      | 19.76             | 2.44      | 20.98                         | 3.15      | 20.53    | 1.84      | 21.08         | 2.61      | 1.98     | .041     |

(\*) Notes significance

**SMQ Constructs of Morale by Years of Service**

To determine if there was a significant difference between Extension personnel’s years of service and morale using the three constructs of the SMQ a one-way was used ANOVA (Table 4.34). The scores for the Leadership Synergy Construct and years of service were as follows: 1-5 years ( $M = 48.06, SD = 6.22, f = 77$ ), 6-10 years ( $M = 49.26, SD = 6.45, f = 42$ ), 11- 15 years ( $M = 49.83, SD = 6.37, f = 18$ ), 16-20 years ( $M = 50.04, SD = 5.46, f = 24$ ), 21-25 years ( $M = 50.09, SD = 3.48, f = 11$ ), 26 + years ( $M = 51.72, SD = 3.75, f = 18$ ). There was not a significant difference between Extension personnel years of service and Leadership Synergy ( $F(5, 184) = 1.43, p = .22, \eta^2 = .037$ ). The effect size of Leadership Synergy and Extension personnel years of service in role was small (Cohen, 1988).

The score for the Cohesive Pride Construct and years of service were as follows: 1-5 years ( $M = 18.58, SD = 2.51, f = 81$ ), 6-10 years ( $M = 19.47, SD = 2.32, f = 43$ ), 11- 15 years ( $M =$



= 20.11,  $SD = 2.14, f=18$ ), 16-20 years ( $M = 20.00, SD = 1.96, f = 24$ ), 21-25 years ( $M = 20.00, SD = 1.90, f = 11$ ), 26 + years ( $M = 19.78, SD = 1.99, f = 18$ ). There was not a significant difference between Extension personnel years of service and Cohesive Pride ( $F (5, 184) = 2.88, p = .02, \eta^2 = .071$ ). The effect size of Cohesive Pride and Extension personnel years of service was moderate (Cohen, 1988).

The scores for the Personal Challenge Construct and years of service were as follows: 1-5 years ( $M = 20.64, SD = 2.80, f = 76$ ), 6-10 years ( $M = 20.57, SD = 2.86, f = 42$ ), 11- 15 years ( $M = 21.00, SD = 2.83, f=18$ ), 16-20 years ( $M = 21.42, SD = 2.28, f = 24$ ), 21-25 years ( $M = 21.73, SD = 2.72, f = 11$ ), 26 + years ( $M = 20.96, SD = 2.40, f = 18$ ). There was not a significant difference between Extension personnel years of service and Personal Challenge ( $F (5, 189) = 1.33, p = .25, \eta^2 = .035$ ). The effect size of Personal Challenge and Extension personnel years of service was small (Cohen, 1988).

Table 34

*ANOVA Results for Morale Using the Three Constructs of the SMQ by Years of Service of Extension Personnel*

| Morale Construct   | 1-5                   | 6-10                  | 11-15                 | 16-20                 | 21-25                 | 26+                   | <i>F</i> | $\eta^2$ |
|--------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------|----------|
|                    | <i>M</i><br><i>SD</i> | <i>M</i><br><i>SD</i> | <i>M</i><br><i>SD</i> | <i>M</i><br><i>SD</i> | <i>M</i><br><i>SD</i> | <i>M</i><br><i>SD</i> |          |          |
| Leadership Synergy | 48.06<br>6.22         | 49.26<br>6.45         | 49.83<br>6.34         | 50.04<br>5.46         | 50.09<br>3.48         | 51.72<br>3.75         | 1.43     | .037     |
| Cohesive Pride     | 18.58<br>2.51         | 19.47<br>2.32         | 20.11<br>2.14         | 20.00<br>1.96         | 20.00<br>1.90         | 19.78<br>1.99         | 2.88*    | .071     |
| Personal Challenge | 20.64<br>2.80         | 20.57<br>2.86         | 21.00<br>2.83         | 21.42<br>2.28         | 21.73<br>2.72         | 22.11<br>2.40         | 1.33     | .035     |

(\*) Notes significance

### SMQ Constructs of Morale by District

To determine if there was a significant difference between Arkansas Cooperative Extension districts and morale using the three constructs of the SMQ a one-way ANOVA was used (Table 4.35). A one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare Leadership Synergy among the three districts Delta ( $M = 48.70, SD = 5.82, f = 67$ ), Ouachita ( $M = 49.03, SD = 5.81, f = 58$ ), and Ozark ( $M = 50.02, SD = 6.10, f = 64$ ). There was not a significant difference between districts and Leadership Synergy ( $F(2, 186) = .863, p = .42, \eta^2 = .009$ ). The effect size of Leadership Synergy and District was small (Cohen, 1988).

The scores for the Cohesive Pride Construct among the three districts were as follows: Delta ( $M = 19.19, SD = 2.73, f = 67$ ), Ouachita ( $M = 19.51, SD = 2.27, f = 58$ ), and Ozark ( $M = 19.23, SD = 2.09, f = 64$ ). There was not a significant difference between districts and Cohesive Pride ( $F(2, 186) = .329, p = .72, \eta^2 = .004$ ). The effect size of Cohesive Pride and District was very small (Cohen, 1988).

The scores for the Personal Challenge Construct among the three districts were as follows: Delta ( $M = 21.10, SD = 2.81, f = 67$ ), Ouachita ( $M = 20.86, SD = 2.51, f = 58$ ), and Ozark ( $M = 20.91, SD = 2.87, f = 64$ ). There was not a significant difference between districts and Personal Challenge ( $F(2, 186) = .142, p = .87, \eta^2 = .002$ ). The effect size of Personal Challenge and District was very small (Cohen, 1988).

Table 35

*ANOVA Results for Morale Using the Three Constructs of the SMQ by Arkansas Cooperative*

*Extension Service Districts*

| Morale Construct   | Delta    |           | Ouachita |           | Ozark    |           | <i>F</i> | $\eta^2$ |
|--------------------|----------|-----------|----------|-----------|----------|-----------|----------|----------|
|                    | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |          |          |
| Leadership Synergy | 48.70    | 5.82      | 49.03    | 5.81      | 50.02    | 6.10      | .863     | .009     |
| Cohesive Pride     | 19.19    | 2.73      | 19.52    | 2.27      | 19.23    | 2.09      | .329     | .004     |
| Personal Challenge | 21.10    | 2.81      | 20.86    | 2.51      | 20.91    | 2.87      | .142     | .002     |

CHAPTER V  
CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

**Introduction**

This chapter presents the conclusion of the study and the discussion of significant findings related to the literature on supervisors' effect on employee morale, leader-member exchange (LMX), cohesive pride, personal challenge, and leadership synergy. Also included is a discussion on the connection between this study, LMX theory, and employee morale. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the limitations of this study, areas of future research possibilities, and a summary.

The purpose of this study was to determine if there was a relationship between Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service County staff morale and the perceived relationship county staff had with their County Staff Chair. This chapter contains discussion and future research possibilities to help answer the research objectives of this study which were to:

This chapter contains discussion and future research possibilities to help answer the research questions:

1. Assess the morale of Extension agents and support staff employed by the Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service.
2. Assess the morale of Extension Staff Chairs employed by the Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service.

3. Assess how Extension agents and support staff perceive their relationship with their Staff Chair.
4. Assess how Extension Staff Chairs perceive their relationship compared to how their employees perceive their relationship.
5. Determine the relationship between the County Staffs' morale and the perceived relationship with their Staff Chair.

### **Methods and Procedures**

A descriptive correlational design was utilized in this study. This design was primarily interested in describing perceived relationships between Staff Chairs and their staff and the morale of Extension agents and support staff who work under those Staff Chairs. There were two populations for this study. The first population consisted of the 75 County Extension Agents of UAEX who have administrative responsibilities as the Staff Chair. The second population consisted of the 294 Extension agents without administrative responsibility and support staff (i.e., program assistants, and administrative support staff) who work full-time with the University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service (UAEX).

The LMX-7 questionnaire and the Staff Morale Questionnaire (SMQ) were distributed to all Staff Chairs, County Extension agents, and support staff that met the set criteria in Arkansas via work email. The study questionnaires were completed online; the data were exported from Qualtrics into the statistical analysis software IBM SPSS Statistics (SPSS 28.0). All personally identifiable data (name, email, etc.) were deleted to ensure anonymity once imported. Descriptive statistics appropriate for each variable (i.e., frequencies for all categorical variables; mean and standard deviation for all non-categorical variables) were used to summarize the study

data. Correlational statistics measured the relationship between employee morale and the perceived leader-member relationship. ANOVA and t-test were used to help find out whether the differences between groups of data were statistically significant.

### **Demographic Characteristics**

The majority of respondents were non-Hispanic, white females in a County Staff Chair role. These individuals have worked 1-5 years in their current role. This study may not accurately represent the total population of County Extension staff. According to zipppa.com (2022), nationwide Extension agents are 64.7% white and 58% female, this site did not provide any other demographic information, nor did it provide information about support staff.

### **Conclusions**

#### **Objective 1-The Morale of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service County Staff**

County staff with the Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service had moderate to high levels of morale in each of the three constructs as measured by the SMQ. Cohesive Pride was the highest-rated construct among county-level staff, suggesting that county staff have a sense of belonging and being part of their county team. County-level staff also felt united in striving to achieve the goals and mission of their county office and Extension as a whole. Leadership Synergy was rated in the middle of the three constructs, suggesting that county-level staff believe leadership within the county office were providing the guidance and feedback they need to do their job. Furthermore, there is adequate group energy generated and released among county staff and their staff chair. Personal Challenge rated the lowest of the three constructs measuring morale, especially with statements related to challenges and burdens of the job. This could be interpreted that Extension staff may not feel incentivized or be personally satisfied with either

the situation in their county office or with Extension or they may feel that too much pressure is put on them to perform.

### **Objective 2-The Morale of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service County Staff Chairs**

Overall, staff chairs had moderate to high levels of morale in each of the three constructs. Cohesive Pride was rated highest construct among County Staff Chairs, suggesting that they have a sense of belonging and being part of their county team and they feel united in striving to achieve the goals and mission of their county office and Extension as a whole. Leadership Synergy was rated in the middle of the three constructs, suggesting that, for the most part, County Staff Chairs believe leadership from district directors is providing the guidance and feedback they need to do their job and there is adequate group energy generated and released among district directors and their staff. Personal Challenge rated the lowest of the three constructs, especially with statements related to challenges and burdens of the job. This can be interpreted that Extension Staff Chairs may not feel incentivized or be personally satisfied with either the situation in their county office or with Extension or they may feel too much pressure is put on them to perform. These results were similar to those found among County Staff.

### **Objective 3- County Staff's Perceived Relationship with Staff Chair Using LMX**

Scott (1967) listed several factors that could affect the morale in employees with some of the factors, including supervisors and co-workers. Other studies conducted from the 1970s and through the early 2000s agreed that many aspects of supervision could contribute to morale issues including micromanaging, poor communication, and lack of leadership (Amend, 1970; Carpenter, 1966; Giegold & Skelton, 1976; Gill, 2008, Loke, 2001; Ngambi, 2011; Rausch, 1971; Skaggs, 2008). Leadership is a critical element for enhancing organizational performance.

The LMX revealed that the majority of county staff (76.8%) perceived their relationship quality with the county staff chair to be high to very high, whereas 14.2% perceived their relationship quality to be moderate, and 10.9% perceived a low to very low-quality relationship with their staff chair. There were no statistical differences found among the four roles of the county staff, years of service, or gender. Higher scores revealed stronger, higher-quality leader-member exchanges, whereas lower scores revealed exchanges of lesser quality. In this study, county staff (agents and support staff) are County Extension employees who work under the direction of the County Staff Chair. In Arkansas, the County Staff Chair serves as the supervisor of the county staff. However, there were differences among the three districts in perceived leader-member quality, particularly between the Delta and Ozark districts ( $p = .01$ ), as county staff in the Delta District had significantly lower LMX scores than those who worked in the Ozark District.

The implications are that those county-level staff employed in the Delta District did not feel that their leader-member relationship quality with their staff chair was as high as those employed in the Ozark District County staff. Graen's (1976) framework assumes there is a three-stage progression between the leader and member, with those stages being: a) role-taking, b) role making, and c) role routinization. Through this progression, the LMX grows over time in response to repeated experiences of social exchange. For those county staff employed in the Delta District, the implication is that as a whole, county staff move through the stages of LMX at a slower pace than staff members in the Ozark District. Furthermore, there is also an implication that trust within the relationship takes more time to build in the Delta District. Although this study could not ascertain the reason for this, one assumption that could be the slower progression through the stages of the LMX may be related to the socioeconomic background of clientele in



this district compared to the other districts, and some county staff members may come from that socially disadvantaged background.

As there have been no studies with other Cooperative Extension entities in other states using the LMX, there is no research to compare these outcomes. However, Linden and Graen (1980) found members reporting high-quality relationships with their leaders assumed more responsibilities and contributed more to their work units, and they were regarded as high performers. Garg and Dhar (2014) shared that high-quality LMX led to higher levels of organizational commitment. Implications for this study were that County Staff that indicated higher-quality relationships with their Staff Chair also had higher morale.

#### **Objective 4- Staff Chairs Perceived Relationship Quality with County Staff Using LMX**

The UAEX Staff Chairs indicated higher-quality relationships with their county staff compared to the relationship quality county staff respondents indicated with their Staff Chair. In Burns and Otte's (1999) research, a high-quality relationship was shown to include understanding by the leader of the member's job, consideration, information, and support given to the member by the leader. Leaders who understand emotion seem to encourage followers to be more successful (Grossman, 2000). According to Burns and Otte (1999), in preliminary exchanges, judgments are made, and the leader and member form opinions of each other. If the leader forms a positive opinion, the leader will assign greater responsibilities to the member, and the member will experience more support. Leaders have a substantial effect on the functioning of organizations and their members (Yukl, 2005).

Leader-member exchange theory suggests that leadership is a personalized exchange in which leaders act differently toward each follower. This further implies that followers develop different groups based on the quality of their interpersonal relationships in-group (higher-quality

relationship) and out-group (lower-quality relationship). Leader exchanges with insiders are based on support and trust. Leader exchanges with outsiders are mechanical and authoritative. The theory holds that in-group members perform better and are more contented than out-group members (Buford et al., 1995).

### **Objective 5- County Staff's Morale and Perceived Relationship with Their Staff Chair Correlation Between Follower LMX Scores and SMQ Constructs**

This study concluded that the perceived leader-member relationship for county staff members were positive and significantly influences morale in all three constructs of the SMQ. These findings were consistent with current research (Anand et al., 2018; Kuuvaa & Buch, 2018; Martin et al., 2016; Newman, et al., 2017; Matta et al., 2015) that presented the positive effect of high-quality leader-member exchange relationships on follower outcomes of trust in the leader, job satisfaction, work performance, work engagement, and organizational citizenship behavior; and their negative effect on role overload and turnover intention and the negative effect of poor quality LMX relationships on organizational commitment and job satisfaction. Johnson and Bledsoe (1974) came to the same conclusion that leader behavior and Extension employee morale was “significantly and highly related” (p. 16). The perceived relationship quality between leaders and followers is essential for employee morale.

### **Overall Morale by Gender, Role, Years of Service, and District**

When all county staff roles were combined, there were no significant differences among the three constructs of the SMQ and gender. However, when looking at the different roles in the county offices, there was a significant difference between the Extension personnel role and cohesive pride. While it appears that Staff Chairs felt that cohesive pride was high, the remainder of the staff felt it was marginal at best, with agriculture agents exhibiting the lowest score,

followed closely by support staff. However, there was no significant difference between the Extension role and leadership synergy or personal challenge.

This study found no significant difference between years of service and the three constructs of the SMQ. Although not significant, it was interesting to note that County Staff that had worked 26+ years had the largest ( $M = 22.11$ ) mean score in the Personal Challenge construct. This study determined no significant difference between the districts and the three constructs of the SMQ. However, it was interesting to note that the Delta District had the lowest mean score ( $M = 19.19$ ) in the Cohesive Pride construct.

## **Discussion**

The LMX theory describes the dyadic relationship between a leader and each subordinate. Burns and Otte (1999) “describe the dyadic theory, when applied to leadership describes leadership in terms of the pair relationship existing between people in leadership roles and each of their subordinates, emphasizing the influence of individual variables flowing both ways” (p. 228).

Whereas LMX theory is one of the most extensively researched leadership theories, many formal studies have examined the effect of LMX on different follower job outcomes (Baker, 2019). This study went further into looking at employee outcomes by exploring leader-member relationships and their connection to employee morale. According to Wilson-Evered et al. (2001), most definitions of morale reference satisfaction, motivation, high energy, and enthusiasm at the individual or group level. Mason (2000) defined employee morale as a staff’s mental and emotional condition in the work environment. It is the level of psychological well-being based on the job. In short, it is the employee’s state of mind as related to their job.

It has been since 1974 that employee morale research has been conducted within the

scope of the Cooperative Extension Service organizations. It is safe to say that many changes have occurred since that time, including technology, the structure of the Cooperative Extension service, staffing numbers, the evolution of the roles of Extension staff and staff chairs, etc. With those changes come new challenges that change the work environment and the way Extension personnel work. Because this is the first known study to utilize the SMQ with Cooperative Extension Service there is no research to compare the response rates. However, when compared to schoolteacher response rates were similar (Yeang Lam, 1988).

The results of this study suggest that leader-member relationships can affect employee morale in all three constructs measured. The higher quality relationships employees perceive they have with their staff chair the higher their morale will be. This study agrees with those conducted by researchers (Buch et al. 2016; Dhar & Mishra, 2001; Fernet et al., 2015; Gerstner & Day, 1997; Gill, 2008; Hernandez, 2011; Jones, 2012; Loke, 2001; McKnight et al., 2001; Ngambi, 2011; Rooney et al., 2009; Rothfelder et al., 2013; Skaggs, 2008) that surmised that leaders and leadership style can affect morale, employee turnover, and job satisfaction.

When looking at leadership-member relationships, the LMX showed that 34% of the county staff reported that they did not know where they stood with their staff chair or how satisfied their staff chair was with the work they do. That implies that in those circumstances, there is no clear communication from the staff chair of expectations and how satisfied the staff chair is with the work being done by county staff members. It is also worth noting that there is a slight disconnect in the perceived relationship between County Staff and Staff Chairs, where approximately 77% of county staff perceived their relationship with their staff chair as high to very-high only 68% of staff chairs felt they had a high to very-high quality relationship with their staff. The same is true for low to very-low quality relationships. Where 8.7% of county staff felt

they had a low to very low-quality relationship with their staff chair only 3.5% of staff chairs reported a low-quality relationship with county staff members.

### **Recommendations for Practice**

Recommendations for Extension administrators is to use this study or its surveys as tools to identify individuals that have the capacity to build high-quality relationships with staff members, thereby promoting higher morale within their organization. It has the potential for administrators to identify leaders or future leaders within their organization by identifying those who have high-quality relationships. It is also recommended that those who cannot progress in relationship development with staff members be assisted through training to achieve the desired relationship quality with staff members. Extension administrators can use this study to identify what aspects of the workplace determine employee morale levels, and as this study showed, it was different depending on their role.

Although research on morale within Cooperative Extension Service has been conducted, it has been more than half a century since the last article was written on the subject. It is recommended that there be continued research in other states and evaluation of multiple levels of leadership to see if middle and upper management influence morale and affect employees from the top down.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Whereas this study evaluated the morale of Staff Chairs, their morale was not compared to the morale of their subordinates. This opens the doors for future research to be conducted to see if there is a relationship between leader morale and subordinate morale. Although the research of (Burford et al., 1995; Johnson & Bledsoe, 1974) has shown that low morale can

affect productivity, it is recommended that a follow-up study could determine if Leader-Member Exchange affects the productivity of employees and/or clientele response.

There is a potential for studies to explore employees who stayed versus those who left a work environment, the Leader-Member Exchange and the morale of those who stayed versus those who left. Another angle to explore, then, may be to compare the career stages of employees who leave Extension and what is different at those career stages for employees who stay. Because each state's Cooperative Extension Service is set up differently than Arkansas, it is recommended that future research could be conducted to determine if systems differ in leader-member exchange and morale.

This study did not evaluate if there was a difference in age and LMX or morale. There is potential for studies to explore generational differences in LMX and morale, to evaluate if there is a difference in how the generations form relationships or if there are different factors that affect morale between the generations.

This study did not evaluate if there was a difference in race and LMX or morale. From a race/ethnicity perspective, this study lacked diversity of participants, with 97.4% non-Hispanic, and 87.7% white participating. A broader demographic of participants alone may be an area for future research. Within diversity, more research could look at the socio-economic area in which Extension staff is employed on the effects of LMX and morale.

In this study, both leaders (Staff Chairs) and members (County Staff) rated the Cohesive Pride construct highest from the SMQ. The Cohesive Pride construct appeared to fit in very well with the LMX theory in terms that it defined work relationships with co-workers and leaders, reflecting a sense of cooperativeness. The LMX theory could be enhanced by including the six statements of the Cohesive Pride Construct in future research.

## Summary

The fundamental nature of leadership is the ‘influential increment’ over and above routine conformity with management instructions. Managers have authority; leaders have influence. The most successful managers act as leaders. Effective leadership is crucial to an Extension service.

This study showed that perceived relationship quality with the leader (Staff Chair) could affect member (County Staff) morale. The higher quality of the relationship that was perceived the higher the employee morale. It is important to maintain or build high morale in the Cooperative Extension Service to increase job satisfaction, be productive, reduce employee turnover, and maintain clientele relationships.

The LMX survey could be strengthened by incorporating the six statements related to Cohesive Pride from the SMQ. Cohesive Pride rated highest of the three constructs by both county staff and Staff Chairs. Cohesive Pride help define work relationships with co-workers and leaders, reflecting a sense of cooperativeness.

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APPENDIX A  
LMX-7 QUESTIONNAIRE

## LMX 7 Questionnaire

*Instructions:* This questionnaire contains items that ask you to describe your relationship with either your leader or one of your subordinates. For each of the items, indicate the degree to which you think the item is true for you by circling one of the responses that appear below the item.

1. Do you know where you stand with your leader (follower) ... [and] do you usually know how satisfied your leader (follower) is with what you do?

|        |              |           |              |            |
|--------|--------------|-----------|--------------|------------|
| Rarely | Occasionally | Sometimes | Fairly often | Very often |
| 1      | 2            | 3         | 4            | 5          |

2. How well does your leader (follower) understand your job problems and needs?

|           |          |               |             |              |
|-----------|----------|---------------|-------------|--------------|
| Not a bit | A little | A fair amount | Quite a bit | A great deal |
| 1         | 2        | 3             | 4           | 5            |

3. How well does your leader (follower) recognize your potential?

|            |          |            |        |       |
|------------|----------|------------|--------|-------|
| Not at all | A little | Moderately | Mostly | Fully |
| 1          | 2        | 3          | 4      | 5     |

4. Regardless of how much formal authority your leader (follower) has built into his or her position, what are the chances that your leader (follower) would use his or her power to help you solve problems in your work?

|      |       |          |      |           |
|------|-------|----------|------|-----------|
| None | Small | Moderate | High | Very high |
| 1    | 2     | 3        | 4    | 5         |

5. Again, regardless of the amount of formal authority your leader (follower) has, what are the chances that he or she would "bail you out" at his or her expense?

|      |       |          |      |           |
|------|-------|----------|------|-----------|
| None | Small | Moderate | High | Very high |
| 1    | 2     | 3        | 4    | 5         |

6. I have enough confidence in my leader (follower) that I would defend and justify his or her decision if he or she were not present to do so.

|                   |          |         |       |                |
|-------------------|----------|---------|-------|----------------|
| Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly agree |
| 1                 | 2        | 3       | 4     | 5              |

7. How would you characterize your working relationship with your leader (follower)?

|                       |                    |         |                     |                     |
|-----------------------|--------------------|---------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Extremely ineffective | Worse than average | Average | Better than average | Extremely effective |
| 1                     | 2                  | 3       | 4                   | 5                   |

By completing the LMX 7, you can gain a fuller understanding of how LMX theory works. The score you obtain on the questionnaire reflects the quality of your leader–member relationships, and indicates the degree to which your relationships are characteristic of partnerships, as described in the LMX model.

You can complete the questionnaire both as a leader and as a subordinate. In the leader role, you would complete the questionnaire multiple times, assessing the quality of the relationships you have with each of your subordinates. In the subordinate role, you would complete the questionnaire based on the leaders to whom you report.

### ***Scoring Interpretation***

Although the LMX 7 is most commonly used by researchers to explore theoretical questions, you can also use it to analyze your own leadership style. You can interpret your LMX 7 scores using the following guidelines: very high = 30–35, high = 25–29, moderate = 20–24, low = 15–19, and very low = 7–14. Scores in the upper ranges indicate stronger, higher-quality leader–member exchanges (e.g., in-group members), whereas scores in the lower ranges indicate exchanges of lesser quality (e.g., out-group members).

APPENDIX B  
STAFF MORALE QUESTIONNAIRE (MODIFIED)

### Staff Morale Questionnaire (SMQ)

**Instructions:** For each question, select one choice only and respond to all questions.

Scoring scale: A four-point scale is used, ranging from one to four. (1) indicates that you strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) agree, and (4) strongly agree.

| #  | Questions  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|----|--|---|---|---|---|
| 1  | I would rather work with my present colleagues than any other group of colleagues in another county. |   |   |   |   |
| 2  | In this county, agents have a sense of belonging and of being needed.                                |   |   |   |   |
| 3  | The agents in this county cooperate to achieve common professional objectives.                       |   |   |   |   |
| 4  | Every agent on this staff contributes toward the achievement of the Extension mission.               |   |   |   |   |
| 5  | I would perform my duties equally well and under less pleasant conditions than I have at present.    |   |   |   |   |
| 6  | I do work beyond my normal working hours.  |   |   |   |   |
| 7  | When I believe that suggestions made by my immediate supervisor are of little value, I ignore them.  |   |   |   |   |
| 8  | Members of this staff can be relied upon to work with steady persistence.                            |   |   |   |   |
| 9  | I have the opportunity to show what I can really do in this county.                                  |   |   |   |   |
| 10 | I know what is going on in Extension   |   |   |   |   |
| 11 | My supervisor offers constructive criticism in a manner that makes me want to do a better job.       |   |   |   |   |
| 12 | I understand Extension policies and why they are in place.   |   |   |   |   |
| 13 | Arkansas Extension is run efficiently and effectively.   |   |   |   |   |
| 14 | My immediate supervisor seems to want everything to depend solely on his/her judgment.               |   |   |   |   |
| 15 | My immediate supervisor encourages agents to participate in the formulating of significant projects  |   |   |   |   |
| 16 | Duties delegated to agents are clearly and explicitly defined.                                       |   |   |   |   |
| 17 | Agents are encouraged to pursue educational opportunities.   |   |   |   |   |
| 18 | In general, agents show a great deal of originality and initiative in their programming.             |   |   |   |   |
| 19 | To me, there is not a more challenging profession than being an Extension Agent.                     |   |   |   |   |
| 20 | Agents display confidence and keenness when called upon for a special effort.                        |   |   |   |   |
| 21 | I have tried to be innovative in my programming techniques on my initiative.                         |   |   |   |   |

| #  | Question   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|----|--|---|---|---|---|
| 23 | The programming I am currently doing gives me a feeling of success and pride.  |   |   |   |   |
| 24 | I feel that I am an essential part of my local community   |   |   |   |   |
| 25 | There is no complaining, arguing, and taking sides among my colleagues.  |   |   |   |   |
| 26 | To what extent do you feel that your colleagues act as a unified staff rather than a collection of independent individuals |   |   |   |   |
| 27 | Keeping up professionally is too much of a burden  |   |   |   |   |
| 28 | Are you provided with the best possible resources consistent with your county's aims and finances                          |   |   |   |   |
| 29 | My immediate supervisor would support me and back me up if something went wrong, that was not my fault.                    |   |   |   |   |
| 30 | I wish to share in the organization and running of my county office.   |   |   |   |   |
| 31 | Past successes in Extension cause me to strive for similar success in the future.  |   |   |   |   |