

**An Innovative Assessment of Emotional Intelligence in Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Agents**

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### **Introduction**

The ability to reason within emotion-related situations is necessary for developing an individual's creative and cognitive functions (Sledman & Andevoro, 2007). Emotional intelligence is construed as the capacity for awareness control, expression of one's emotions, and handling interpersonal relationships judiciously and empathetically (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). Moreover, emotional intelligence is an unobservable construct, but is used as a tool to explain behavior (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). Emotional intelligence can assist in the perceiving, understanding, and regulating of emotions, and serves as a form of social intelligence (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). This involves the ability to monitor one's own as well as other's feelings and emotions to discriminate among them and use this information to guide one's thinking and action (Mayer & Salovey, 1997).

Social and emotional learning allows for a reduction in feelings of isolation and self-destructive behaviors (Elias, Bruene-Butler, Blum, & Schuyler, 1997). Moreover, an increase in achievement has been identified through enhanced social and emotional skills, with a correlating increase in quality of relationships between individuals as well (Akers, Frazee, Lockaby, & Miller, 2004; Akers, Miller, Frazee, & Haygood, 2004; Miller, 2001). According to Lam & Kirby (2002), emotional intelligence increases performance and productivity in the workplace and has been described as the ability to reason through emotions and emotion-related information (Mayer & Salovey, 1997).

### **How it Works**

The character traits and work habits of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Agents directly impact their interpersonal relationships with the communities in which they live, work, and interact. Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service serves every county in Texas with 250 offices. Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service outreach includes: 22 million annual direct teaching contacts by 568 county extension agents, 91,000 volunteers, and 496,000 Texas 4-H participants (TAMU, 2019).

The emotional intelligence portion of the innovation measures the following leadership qualities: self-awareness, awareness of others, authenticity, emotional reasoning, self-management, and positive influence. This innovation parallels previous work which used the Genos instrument to identify the emotional intelligence of School-Based Agricultural Educators (SBAE) (Frost, Haynes, Smith, Atchley, & Andrew, 2019). The Genos model consists of seven subcategories: emotional self-awareness, emotional expression, emotional awareness of others, emotional reasoning, emotional self-management, emotional management of others, and emotional self-control. Each of the emotional intelligence subcategories evaluates the overall emotional intelligence score of the individual. The Genos emotional intelligence instrument was used and responses will be based on a 5-point Likert-Scale with either a direct or inverse relationship (1= Almost Never; 2= Seldom; 3= Sometimes; 4= Usually; 5= Almost Always.)

The Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Agents who completed the Qualtrics survey assessed emotional intelligence levels and describe demographic information. The Genos instrument determines the differences in emotional intelligence levels based upon demographic information. Fifteen demographic questions sought to identify: gender, ethnicity, age, highest academic degree held, years of extension experience, university from which bachelor's degree was obtained, county, and number of agents in the county. The demographic responses of the county extension agents remained confidential.

Participants received an initial invitation email to complete the survey, followed by five reminder emails with a survey link, and a final thank you message. The survey is performed using the Qualtrics online platform. The Genos survey is designed to assess the emotional intelligence levels of the participants in the study. Participants include Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Agents with the titles of: agricultural and natural resources, family and community health, 4-H and youth development, urban and youth development, horticulture, marine and natural resources agents. This innovation aligns with the American Association for Agricultural Education's (AAAE) National Research Agenda and addresses Research Priority 3, "Sufficient Scientific and Professional Workforce that Address the Challenges of the 21st Century" (Roberts, Harder, & Bras hears, 2016).

### **Implications/Future Plans**

Analyzing the emotional intelligence of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Agents will help higher education identify the qualities of leadership needed to develop future coursework to educate the future of extension agents. The daily work of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Agents involves many interpersonal interactions with people. Additionally, this innovation could reveal the need for Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service to incorporate emotional intelligence training in the new agent onboarding program. The current Texas A&M AgriLife Extension onboarding process for new extension agents includes: the history, mission and purpose of extension within the Land-Grant system, evidence-based programming, role of agents and specialists, accountability, marketing and communications, and program specific sessions (TAMU, 2019). One onboarding session titled, "handling difficult situations as an agent" could provide an opportunity to strengthen emotional intelligence awareness and development in Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Agents (TAMU, 2019). This innovation can potentially impact educational programming in extension including: agent preparation, 4-H programming, outreach efforts, and communities in how education is taught and described in the future, and many others.

### **Costs/Resources Needed**

The cost associated with the Genos instrument included gaining permission for use, and inputting into Qualtrics platform to measure emotional intelligence of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Agents. Permission was received and emails were provided from the Associate Director of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, to conduct the survey. The cost of time to collectively build the Genos survey into the Qualtrics platform should be noted. The resources needed for the population to complete the survey consist of: computer access, email administration, and Qualtrics online survey program.

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