

**Capacity Building of Leadership Competencies for Extension Personnel: A Case Study of
the University of Georgia Extend Advanced Leadership Development Program**

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Introduction

Cooperative Extension is tasked with performing the outreach component of the land-grant university's tripartite mission (USDA, 2011b). Extension organizations have been faced with challenges that range from reinventing programmatic efforts to competing for continued funding. These challenges have generated the need for Extension organizations to build their leadership capacity through leadership development programs (Lamm et al., 2016). These programs aim to develop effective leaders who can navigate the complex challenges facing Extension organizations in the 21st century.

A two-tier leadership development program was developed to respond to the leadership gap in the Extension employee base. The first program, Extension Academy for Professional Excellence (EAPE), was designed to teach early and mid-career Extension agents leadership skills. EAPE focuses on the participants' understanding of the "self" as a leader. Once participants successfully complete EAPE, the next phase is the 2-year Extend Advanced Leadership Development program. This phase, building on the EAPE program, focuses on understanding and leading the organization. More specifically, the Extend program is designed based on Robert Katz's Model of Primary Leadership Skills. This model represents the nine leadership competencies, including technical competence, managing resources, managing people, social perceptiveness, emotional intelligence, managing interpersonal conflict, creating visions, strategic planning, and problem-solving. The two-tiered leadership development program aims to engage employees and further their understanding of leader development to bridge the leadership gap.

Conceptual Framework

Robert Katz's (1955) Three-Skill Approach to Leadership is the conceptual framework that guided this study. The approach is based on the idea that a leader's effectiveness is congruent with their ability to solve complex organizational problems (Northouse, 2021). Katz proposed that effective leadership is contingent on three basic personal skills: *technical*, *human*, and *conceptual*, which was changed to *administrative* (*showing technical competence, managing resources, and managing people*), *interpersonal* (*being socially perceptive, showing emotional intelligence, and managing interpersonal conflict*), and *conceptual* (*creating visions, strategic planning, and problem-solving*) skills and included three competencies in each area.

Methodology

The study incorporated a mixed methods approach focusing on evaluating the impact of the Extend program on developing the nine leadership competencies. More specifically, using the first two levels of Kirkpatrick's Four-Level Training Evaluation Model (1959; 1975; 1993) to guide data collection. Kirkpatrick's model consists of four levels that aid training and development professionals in evaluating the impacts and demonstrating the value of their programs. The four levels of the Kirkpatrick Model are reaction (level 1), learning (level 2), behavior (level 3), and results (level 4) (Kirkpatrick, 1959; 1975; 1993). For this study, participants were asked at the end of each institute to complete a questionnaire that had both Likert-type questions about what they learned related to the nine competencies (level 2) and their satisfaction with the training structure and content (level 1). The questionnaires consisted of 11 Likert-typed questions and seven open-response questions. A content specialist and an evaluation specialist for validity reviewed the questionnaire. The quantitative data were analyzed for measures of central tendencies, and the open-response text was analyzed using a deductive

analysis approach for learning about the nine leadership competencies and an inductive approach for emergent themes about their responses to the program.

Results

Since the early 2000s, EAPE and Extend have produced more than 170 alums; however, in 2015, the leadership curriculum was reorganized based on Katz's Theory of Leadership. A cohort of 20 Extension faculty that participated and graduated from both EAPE and Extend programs in 2022. After completing the program, a cohort of 20 members were given the opportunity to participate in the study that measured knowledge and behavior changes. Most participants confirmed that the leadership competencies of interpersonal skills, communication skills, and team dynamics were most meaningfully impacted because of their participation in the program. All program participants reported implementing a learned leadership competency in their current role. Additionally, most participants reported noticing a positive colleague response because of their implemented behavior changes. Overall, all participants reported that the program benefited their professional growth.

Impact on Profession/Recommendations

The findings from this study will contribute to scholarly literature and the advancement of research specific to Extension faculty and leadership development programs. There is an overabundance of literature specific to the development of extension programming. However, there remains a gap in the research that addresses the need for Extension organizations to develop the next generation of leaders. Extension budgets are becoming more strained, and resource competition is increasing. Extension organizations must make informed decisions on the investments into leadership programs; however, the potential long-term impacts of these programs must be extensively evaluated.

Furthermore, there is limited empirical evidence on the connections between leadership development program participant learning and organizational outcomes (Collins & Holton, 2004; Dinh et al., 2014; Gardner et al. , 2010). Effective evaluation has been shown to document program achievements, but more importantly, it has been shown to inform facilitators with the intention of a continuous improvement process by adjusting different aspects of the program (Frechtling, 2010; Patton, 2008).

Future recommendations are to continue to evaluate the program and make appropriate changes to the curriculum and expand the focus of the study to the other two levels of the Kirkpatrick model. The aim of the study is to identify the long-term organizational impact resulting from this leadership development program.

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