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## A Phenomenological Study of Louisiana 4-H Agents Perceived Job Expectations

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A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF LOUISIANA 4-H AGENTS  
PERCIEVED JOB EXPECTATIONS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The School of Human Resource Education and Workforce Development

by

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December 2016

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This dissertation is dedicated to my daughter, Mackenzie Renee and my late grandfather, Edward Gros. Mac, you are my heart, my life and my world. You inspire me to want to be a better person and to do great things. You have been my biggest supporter and I thank you for that from the bottom of my heart. I hope that I have showed you how to be a strong woman and to always follow your dreams. You can do anything! There were so many times that I thought this was beyond my reach and you were quick to remind me that you would not allow me to quit. Thank you for helping me to accomplish this goal. I love you more.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	iv
ABSTRACT .....	viii
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Purpose of the Study .....	3
Research Questions .....	3
Methods .....	3
Rationale and Significance of the Study .....	4
Definitions .....	6
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE .....	7
Youth Development (YD) Competencies .....	7
4-H Youth Development.....	10
Self Determination Theory .....	13
Behavioral Research.....	15
Self-Efficacy .....	16
Workplace Attitudes .....	18
Employee Motivation.....	20
Job Expectations .....	22
Job Performance .....	24
Performance Evaluations.....	28
Accountability.....	31
CHAPTER 3: METHODS .....	33
Rationale for Research Approach.....	33
Population and Sample.....	37
Data Gathering Procedures .....	38
Data Analysis.....	39
Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations .....	44
Study Limitations .....	49
CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS .....	50
4-H Agent Turnover .....	53
Not Meeting Expectations or Expectations Too High .....	55
Excessive Workload.....	57
Understanding of Job Expectations .....	59
Numbers (Quantity vs Quality) .....	62
Interview Themes .....	63
Consistency of Programming.....	63
Expectations Related to Work.....	65
Skills Needed to Meet Job Expectations.....	66

Perceptions of Job Expectations.....	69
Parts of the Job Performed Well.....	72
Job Expectation Priorities .....	74
Determining Job Expectations .....	77
Communicating Job Expectations.....	80
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS .....	84
Purpose and Research Questions .....	84
Procedures .....	84
Conclusions, Implications and Recommendations.....	85
Theme 1: Agent Accountability.....	85
Theme 2: 4-H Agent Turnover.....	87
Theme 3: Not Meeting Expectations or Expectations Too High ....	89
Theme 4: Workload.....	90
Theme 5: Understanding of Expectations .....	91
Theme 6: Numbers (Quantity vs Quality) .....	93
REFERENCES.....	95
APPENDIX A: JOB EXPECTATION SHEET.....	101
APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS.....	103
APPENDIX C: PARISH LIST BY REGION.....	104
APPENDIX D: IRB APPROVAL AND CONSENT FORM.....	106
VITA .....	109

## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study was to examine perceptions related to job expectations as described by 4-H agents in the state of Louisiana. The study explored feelings, skills and knowledge associated with job expectations. This study used a qualitative approach to examine perceptions related to job expectations. A phenomenological study captured the essence of this experience.

The participants for this study included LSU AgCenter Extension 4-H agents who work in different parishes located in the state of Louisiana. The state is divided into five regions divided into parishes. Initially two agents from each region were identified to take part in the study. Because it is believed that all of the participants have had the same phenomenon, a purposeful sampling strategy was used. The 4-H Agents are all professionals in the area of Youth Development. Purposeful selection was done based on the defining demographics of gender, years of service and whether parish is rural or urban. Both male and female participants were chosen. Years of service were determined by a mix of agents having eight or more years and agents having less than eight years.

The interviews consisted of questions about skills needed to meet job expectations, positive and negative perceptions of job expectations, parts of the job performed well and not well, priorities when it came to expectations and how expectations should be determined and communicated. The six overarching themes that emerged from the interview transcripts included: (1) agent accountability, (2) 4-H agent turnover, (3) not meeting expectations/expectations too high, (4) workload, (5) understanding of expectations and (6) numbers (quality vs quantity).

## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

4-H is the largest youth development organization in the nation which includes 6 million youth (National 4-H, 2015). The 4-H program is distributed through 110 land grant universities and is a program of the Cooperative Extension Service and the USDA (National 4-H, 2015). The Louisiana 4-H program engages approximately 240,000 youth in the 4-H program through 1700 clubs (LSU AgCenter, 2014). 4-H is a research based program that provides youth with positive youth development programs and the skills necessary to become positive, productive adults. Programs can be accessed through 4-H Clubs, camps, after school programming, and school enrichment (National 4-H, 2015). The mission of the 4-H program states that “Through non-formal, research-based, experiential educational activities, 4-H participants gain knowledge and life skills that enable them to become positive, productive, capable and compassionate members of their communities” (LSU AgCenter, 2014).

With the support of volunteers, 4-H Agents have the role of delivering 4-H programs to youth. The highest regarded program of the Cooperative Extension Service is 4-H (Robinson, 1964). As a 4-H agent, there are many expectations to be upheld which can come from supervisors, clientele, co-workers and other leaders (Robinson, 1964). Studies have been done for many years to determine what the critical components of 4-H programs are. Early studies as far back as Georing’s (1980) study identify some of the same critical areas of the program that we still look at today which include: recruiting and training volunteers, conducting programs, program planning, maintaining an annual plan of work, public relations, needs assessment for communities, working directly with clientele, reporting impacts and outcomes, and

performing administrative tasks. In order for 4-H Agents to promote and conduct youth development programs, a set of expectations must be put in place to ensure positive, successful programming and provide agents with guidelines and accountability measures.

In order to be successful extension employees, faculty need to know what their specific job expectations are as well as have tools needed to be successful (Saunders & Reese, 2001). If extension agents do not understand these expectations, deem that it is difficult to meet them or feel they are not capable of meeting them, programming can fall short. It is important to consider an individual's own personal perception of self as it relates to fulfilling expectations. Raben & Klimoski (1973) tell us that establishing expectations for employees in their work may be related to their personal perception and competence to perform.

In order to set performance expectations, core competencies must be identified in order to develop appropriate training (Hahn & Raley, 1998). In the area of 4-H Youth Development these core competencies are known as the 4-H Professional, Research, Knowledge and Competencies Model (4-H PRKC). These six distinct areas identified by National 4-H Professional Task Force (2004) include youth development, youth program development, volunteerism, equity, access and opportunity, partnerships and organizational systems.

The accountability measures that are currently in place for extension agents in Louisiana include the establishment of job expectations which are discussed in a yearly evaluation of agents. The evaluation also consists of a portfolio which outlines the work

that agents do throughout the year. This evaluation assesses agent job performance based on these expectations.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine perceptions related to job expectations as described by 4-H Agents in the state of Louisiana. The study explored feelings, skills and knowledge associated with job expectations.

### **Research Questions**

1. What is Louisiana 4-H Agent's knowledge of job expectations?
2. What are Louisiana 4-H Agent's perceptions of job expectations?
3. What skills do Louisiana 4-H Agents associate with job expectations?
4. How does Louisiana 4-H Agents believe job expectations should be determined?

### **Methods**

This study used a qualitative approach to examine perceptions related to job expectations. A phenomenological study captured the essence of this experience. Creswell (2013) describes the essence of the experience which describes what and how they experienced it. The "essence" is the conclusion of the study (Creswell, 2013). Hermeneutical phenomenology was the approach used for this research to describe lived experiences. Structural and textural descriptions were written to capture the essence of the phenomenon which describes the underlying themes.

The participants for this study included LSU AgCenter extension agents who work in various parishes of the state of Louisiana. Two extension agents with 4-H appointments were selected from each region based on years of experience and

location of rural or urban parishes. Interviews were set up with the ten participants. Interview protocol was followed with an identical set of questions (see appendix B) for each participant.

The data was analyzed through organizing data, an initial read through to determine themes and then forming an understanding of them (Creswell, 2013). A thematic analysis was used as a way to encode the data and analyze the themes and patterns.

### **Rationale and Significance of the Study**

Due to the complex evaluations of extension employees, the evaluation process is extremely difficult and that is why it is important that expectations be developed (Heckel, 1978). In order to meet the requirements of the job expectations set forth, an extension agent must possess the competencies to complete these tasks. These tasks can include conducting advisory committee meetings, incorporating a variety of delivery modes, volunteer development and reporting, and evaluation. To be successful, the agent must be proficient in needed competencies (Lakai, Jayaratne, Moore & Kistler, 2014). In order for an extension agent to proficiently obtain the job expectations set forth, they should have a better understanding by learning what each expectation means. This is done through guidance of the regional 4-H coordinators, assistance from co-workers and statewide and regional trainings on the topics presented. They also must have an understanding of how these expectations fit into their programs. In order to achieve excellence and continue to be relevant, extension agents must continue to acquire new knowledge, skills and behaviors (Lakai et al., 2014). In order to stay relevant in the youth development field, they must stay abreast of best practices and

theory in the youth development field. This can be done through specific trainings such as on the job training, onboarding and professional development opportunities which can include but are not limited to conferences and webinars. Job performance can be defined as performance of employees that are consistent with specific expectations. This will lead to organizational effectiveness (Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012). When an organization is more effective, its employees have higher job satisfaction. When employees are fulfilled in their jobs, they are content and more committed (Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012).

There are several benefits expected to come from this study. One of the benefits is agent assessment of current job expectations. Through participating in this study, it gives agents the opportunity to voice opinions on what is expected of them. To some they will feel more empowered. This creates an awareness of true agent perceptions. Another benefit is the identification of skills needed to be successful as a 4-H agent. This could be used during the hiring process to inform potential candidates of skills needed and mentor new agents to help them acquire the skills needed. It is also the hope of the researcher that this will create positive change in the way that job expectations are determined and communicated, which will be a benefit to the organization by leading to more satisfied employees.

The role of the researcher was to plan and conduct the study. The researcher made the assumption that all of the 4-H Agents in all regions have had the job expectations communicated in a similar manner. Steps taken in this study that addressed this include: explaining the purpose and benefits of the study, not referring to

others with higher statuses, avoiding agreeing or disagreeing with participant answers, and not asking questions that may seem bias.

## **Definitions**

For the purpose of this study, specific terms were defined:

4-H- 4-H is the largest youth development organization in the nation which includes 6 million youth. The 4-H program is distributed through 110 land grant universities and is a program of the Cooperative Extension Service and the USD. The young people involved in the 4-H youth program learn life skills including citizenship and leadership (National 4-H, 2015).

4-H Agent- The 4-H Agent is a professional educator who is responsible for delivering the 4-H program and serves as the program manager (Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, 2016).

Regional 4-H Coordinator- The Regional 4-H Coordinator is a professional educator who is responsible for supervising the 4-H Agents who deliver 4-H programs. The coordinators also mentor, train, and evaluate 4-H Agents.

Attitude- A way of behaving that has been learned; a set of beliefs about an object or a situation causing an individual to respond to it in a particular way (Whaples & Ryden, 1975).

Job Expectations- The things that are expected of employees doing a specific job and are usually listed in the employee's job description.

Perception- A perception is the way a person comprehends or understands something; a mental impression.

Competency- The capability of someone to be successful at something

## **CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

### **Youth Development (YD) Competencies**

National youth organizations recognize the importance of professional development in the area of youth development (Quinn, 2004). Several critical issues have emerged in recent years that include the need for a simple definition of youth development and the agreement on the competencies that should be present in youth work (Quinn, 2004). An emerging field worldwide is that of the development of competencies (Boltes-Stone, 1997). Because the work of extension agents changes continually, these professionals must have a hand in identifying the skills, knowledge and behaviors that they need in order to be successful in their fields (Boltes-Stone, 1997).

Larson (2000) says that, development, after all, is a progression of growing and increasing competence. Hahn & Raley (1998) define youth development as “multidimensional, embracing (1) a process of human growth and development, (2) a philosophical orientation to social development and community and (3) a programmatic framework for youth services.” In the field of YD, present is developed theory which includes development of young people, principles of practice which relate to the competencies being promoted and method used that can be distinguished from treatment and prevention (Hahn & Raley, 1998). In order for employees to be competent and successful, they need to acquire the knowledge and skills in this evolving profession (Hahn & Raley, 1998). In order to set performance expectations, core competencies must be identified in order to develop appropriate training (Hahn & Raley, 1998).

In order for high-quality youth development to take place, professionals must possess certain characteristics (Astroth, Garza & Taylor, 2004). There has been much debate on what constitutes suitable training for YD professionals with tensions leaning toward the debate between YD workers who have less educational credentials but a wealth of experience and those who have less experience but hold a degree (Astroth et al., 2004). The field of YD continues to move forward with the requirements of more formalized education (Astroth, et al., 2004). With moving forward with the education aspect, there is also a need for core competencies to ensure positive outcomes (Astroth, et al., 2004). Astroth and his team (2004) discuss competencies in the YD field as the knowledge and skills and the individual qualities that youth development workers should possess to ensure positive youth development. Astroth et al. (2004) also state that core competences are the established measurements that form the basis for excellence in the work place, give to the mission of the organization, and allow professionals to be available for youth, organizations and communities.

Astroth et al. (2004) list ten basic competencies distributed by the National Collaboration for Youth that Youth Development workers should possess summarized below:

1. understands the basic principles of youth adolescence and can apply it,
2. have positive, caring youth-adult partnerships,
3. can adjust and conduct age appropriate activities with youth and evaluate these activities,
4. identifies the importance of culture and diversity,
5. includes youth and empowers them,

6. recognizes risk and tries to reduce the risk,
7. works close with families and communities in getting them involved,
8. demonstrates professionalism and team work,
9. acts as a positive role model, and
10. works and communicates with youth to promote asset building.

Several youth agencies such as YMCA, 4-H, The National Mentorship Partnership and the National Youth Sports Corporation have implemented these types of competency expectations within their programs for youth workers (Astroth et al., 2004).

During recent years in research, a contribution emerged from the Youth Development Institute of the Fund for the City of New York (Quinn, 2004). The contribution from this organization determined what the core competencies of youth development work included (Quinn, 2004). Outlined by Quinn (2004) these youth work core competencies include, developing programs, communication, implementing programs, advocacy-networking, evaluation, involvement of community and families, and intervention.

Quinn (2004) goes on to discuss the things that were learned and the best practices of these principles. There is more involved in professional development than just training. It is important that we emphasize training, but it also includes many other aspects. Some of these include recruiting, hiring, orientation, supervision, mentoring and evaluation (Quinn, 2004). If these components are not present for workers in the YD field, they have no guidance and direction on how to accomplish completing expectations set forth for their programs. Investing in professional development is essential (Quinn, 2004). Professional development, to be effective, is present at many

different levels (Quinn, 2004). Quinn (2004) ends with stating, for professional development to be effective, it must build on core competencies and knowledge. The YD field is starting to embrace the idea of linking higher education to youth work such as the model of the 4-H program (Quinn, 2004).

#### **4-H Youth Development**

4-H is the largest positive youth development organization in the nation which includes 6 million youth (National 4-H, 2015). The 4-H program is distributed through 110 land grant universities and is a program of the Cooperative Extension Service and the USDA (National 4-H, 2015). 4-H is a research-based program that provides youth with positive youth development programs and the skills necessary to become positive, productive adults. Programs can be accessed through 4-H Clubs, camps, after school programming, and school enrichment (National 4-H, 2015).

A task force was developed in 1998 by the National 4-H Impact Design team to study positive youth development programs and the characteristics it should encompass (Kress, 2004). In order for a youth development program to be effective, it should contain eight critical elements which include: a positive relationship with a caring adult, a safe emotional and physical environment, an inclusive environment engagement in learning, opportunity for mastery, opportunity to see oneself as an active participant in the future, opportunity for self-determination and opportunity to value and practice service for others (Kress, 2004). These elements serve as a framework for designing effective youth development programs (Kress, 2004).

In order to guide efforts when working with youth, 4-H professionals rely on research based information to guide them in providing quality youth development

programs. In 2004, comprehensive research was compiled which include competencies which are crucial in conducting 4-H youth development programs (National 4-H Professional Development Task Force, 2004). The 4-H Professional, Research, Knowledge and Competencies model (4-H PRKC) was developed through this research (National 4-H Professional Development Task Force, 2004). Six distinct areas were identified which included: youth development; youth program development; volunteerism; equity, access, and opportunity; partnerships; and organizational systems (National 4-H Professional Development Task Force, 2004). The youth development domain focuses on *understanding how young people learn*, which concentrates developing age appropriate activities for youth ages 5-19 taking into consideration their physical, cognitive and emotional growth (National 4-H Professional Development Task Force, 2004). Youth development theory and practice are also emphasized. The area of Youth Development Program emphasizes *creating quality experiences for young people* (National 4-H Professional Development Task Force, 2004). This defines knowledge and skill sets needed by youth development professionals in order to conduct needs assessments, set priorities, and meeting those needs with program implementation and evaluation (National 4-H Professional Development Task Force, 2004). Volunteerism focuses on *preparing volunteers to make a real difference* which includes recruiting and selecting volunteers (National 4-H Professional Development Task Force, 2004). Adult development and learning theory are also present in this domain. The next domain is equity, access and opportunity which emphasizes *ensuring that each young person has a chance to succeed* by creating environments where youth feel a sense of belonging and opportunities for reaching full potential (National 4-H Professional Development

Task Force, 2004). Partnerships are the next area which focuses on *uniting young people and adults for stronger communities* which encompasses the youth in the community and youth action (National 4-H Professional Development Task Force, 2004). The last domain focuses on Organizational Systems which *connects people and priorities for the greatest impact* (National 4-H Professional Development Task Force, 2004). This area describes strategies for communication, resource development, and risk management for quality programming (National 4-H Professional Development Task Force, 2004). The PRKC has been adopted by The National 4-H Trust (National 4-H Professional Development Task Force, 2004).

As Lerner et al. (2005) discussed, when programs are focused on the Five C's of youth development (competence, confidence, character connection and caring) there is a more likely chance that positive youth development takes place when youth adult partnership are present, opportunities for youth to build skills, leadership opportunities in civic engagement. In summary, if youth have positive relationships with people and organizations in their social circle, they will thrive by having positive experiences with self, family and community (Lerner et al., 2005).

The 4-H Study of Positive Youth Development is a longitudinal study which began in 2002 and was repeated for 8 years annually with over 7000 youth from 42 states (Lerner & Lerner, 2013). Positive youth development was defined by 5 C's competence, confidence, character, connection, and caring (Lerner & Lerner, 2013). The PYD study was the first designed to capture the 5 C's. It also studied the value and impact of positive youth development programs such as 4-H (Lerner & Lerner, 2013). The study revealed that: *4-H'ers excel in the following ways:*

- 4-H'ers in Grades 7-12 are nearly 4 times more likely to make contributions to their communities,
- 4-H'ers in Grades 8-12 are about 2 times more likely to be civically active,
- 4-H'ers in Grade 10-12 are nearly 2 times more likely to participate in science programs during out-of-school time,
- 4-H girls are 2 times more likely (Grade 10) and nearly 3 times more likely (Grade 12) to take part in science programs compared to girls in other out-of-school time activities, and
- grade 7 4-H'ers are nearly 2 times more likely to make healthier choices (Lerner & Lerner, 2013).

The history of PYD is very diverse (Lerner et al., 2005). From Lerner's et al. (2005) perspective, youth are not damaged and in need of being fixed, they should be looked at as a resource that needs to be developed. Community based programs such as 4-H youth development have the potential for promoting positive youth development in any community. By concentrating on the strengths of youth and not focusing on other barriers leads to PYD (Lerner et al., 2005).

### **Self Determination Theory**

Self Determination Theory (SDT) is a theory of motivation which focuses on human motivation from within and leads us to behave in certain ways (Self Determination Theory, 2016). At the core of the SDT the idea exists that people have three basic needs, autonomy, competence and relatedness (Deci & Vansteenkiste, 2004). If conditions these three basic human needs, it is believed to nurture high quality motivation and engagement (Self Determination Theory, 2016). If these three

psychological needs are met it fosters enhanced performance, determination and creativity (Self Determination Theory, 2016). If these three needs are not supported, it can have a negative impact on the situation (Self Determination Theory, 2016). The need to be effective in dealing with a situation is the need for competence (Deci & Vansteenkiste, 2004). Being able to interact and connect to people and feel belonging are associated with the need for relatedness (Deci & Vansteenkiste, 2004). Finally, the need to have a willingness of choice and validate their own actions is related to the need for autonomy (Deci & Vansteenkiste, 2004).

In order to explain phenomena based on motivation that emerged from research, six mini theories were developed to address one aspect each of the function of motivation or personality (Self Determination Theory, 2016). The first mini theory discussed is Cognitive Evaluation Theory (CET) which focuses on motivation from within, intrinsic motivation and the way one behaves for their own sake (Self Determination Theory). The second mini-theory discussed is Organismic Integration Theory (OIT) which discusses the forms of extrinsic motivation which is aimed toward outcomes related to the behavior itself (Self Determination Theory, 2016). Third, Causality Orientations Theory (COT) relates to a person's tendency to turn toward situations and regulate conduct in different ways (Self Determination Theory, 2016). Basic Psychological Needs Theory (BPNT) is the fourth mini-theory relates psychological needs to psychological well-being and argues that basic needs are essential for functioning (Self Determination Theory, 2016). The Goal Contents Theory (GCT) is the fifth mini-theory makes a distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic goals and their effect of motivation and well-being (Self Determination Theory, 2016). The sixth

mini-theory, Relationships Motivation Theory (RMT), focuses on relationships of friends, partners and groups and their desirability for individuals (Self Determination Theory, 2016).

## **Behavioral Research**

Behavioral research had several theories that supported the research being conducted. One theory that appears in behavior research is that of Bandura's Self Efficacy Theory (Anderson & Betz, 2001). According to Anderson and Betz (2001), the theory suggests:

One's belief concerning competence in specific behavioral domains influence choice, performance, and persistence in endeavors requiring or utilizing those behavioral competencies. Moreover, Bandura's theory asserts that the initial development of self-efficacy expectations spring from four experiential sources: personal performance accomplishments, vicarious learning or modeling, emotional arousal (anxiety), and social persuasion and encouragement.

Hackett and Campbell (1987) also noted that Bandura's theory provided support for their research done on gender differences in educational and job selections are associated to gender differences in self-efficacy.

Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behavior reveals that it is very difficult to explain the complexity of human behavior. According to this theory, the way a person behaves is a mutual function of purposes and perceived behavioral control. It also states that there are three determinates of intention which includes: Attitude toward the performance, the subjective standard which is the perceived social force to perform or not perform the behavior, and the degree of perceived behavior which is the simplicity

or difficulty of executing the behavior (Ajzen, 1991). In summary, Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behavior differentiates between the beliefs of behavioral, normative and control and between attitude, subjective norm and perceived behavioral control. Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller (2012) also reference Ajzen's theory confirming that specific attitudes are derived from general attitudes which in turn gives us the intent to perform a specific behavior.

### **Self-Efficacy**

In order for an individual to reach a certain expectation we have to consider the their personal perception of his or her ability and skill to perform (Raben & Klimoski, 1973). This can be regarded as self-efficacy. Judge & Bono (2001) define self-efficacy as the ability to determine if one is capable of coping, performing and becoming successful. In regards to career development, Anderson and Betz (2001) define social self-efficacy as confidence in an individual's capability to engage in the social interactional tasks essential to initiate and retain in social life and work activities. In furthering the construct of career development, it is essential to research the theory of self-efficacy (Hackett & Campbell, 1987).

According to Bandura & Adams (1977), the perception that one has about their self-efficacy can determine what activities they will perform, what their behavior will be, how much effort they will put forth and how long they will stay in diverse situations when facing obstacles and adverse situations. The more a person believes in their self-efficacy, the more active their coping efforts will be and in contrast, those who avoid what they fear will have defensive behavior (Bandura & Adams, 1977). In analyzing this, there are four sources of information that explains personal efficacy, which are:

accomplishments in their performance, seeing the success of others, words of persuasion, and mental stimulation (level of anxiety and vulnerability to stress) (Anderson & Betz, 2001; Bandura & Adams, 1977).

According to Ricketts, Carter, Place and McCoy (2012), individuals who practice self-leadership possess qualities such as autonomy and self-efficacy. Self-Leadership is defined as a practice where an individual can encourage themselves to be successful and self-direct and self-motivate to perform or achieve something in a desired way. (Rickett et al., 2012). Because of the changing landscape of extension it is important that extension has educators who are eager to take on responsibility, provide leadership and demonstrate decision making skills (Rickett et al., 2012). Rickett et al. (2012) discuss the three strategies of self-leadership which include: methods that focus on behavior, behavior-focused strategies, accepted reward tactics, and productive thought pattern approaches. The five sub strategies that are associated with behavioral focus strategies contain: observation of oneself, self-goal setting, self- rewards, self-punishment, and self-cueing (Rickett et al., 2012). The natural reward strategy sub category is concentrating on accepted rewards, which describe fundamental rewards constructed into the job or an employee being rewarded by the task itself (Rickett et al., 2012). The last dimension which is “constructive thought pattern strategies” defines its sub strategies as envisioning success, self-talk and assessing what they believe and think (Rickett et al., 2012). It is important for the professional development of extension workers that they are able to motivate themselves to succeed, and be able to identify how their thought processes direct them to success.

## **Workplace Attitudes**

The relationship between job attitudes and job performance has received much attention (Riketta, 2008). Riketta (2008) refers to job attitudes as the evaluation or personal significance of job-related goals. The two most researched job attitudes are job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Riketta, 2008). Aspects of employee job attitudes include leadership style and behavior (Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012). The leadership style that has had a more positive effect on employee emotions is transformational leadership (Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012, & Rowland et al., 2014). Transformational leadership is a leadership style in which leaders inspire and motivate followers to accomplish extraordinary results while helping them grow into leaders (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Judge and Kammeyer-Mueller (2012) state that transformational leadership can shield the relationship between emotion regulation and displeasure of the job.

One of the most common ways of classifying the basis of attitudes is affective (emotional) and cognitive (belief) (Petty et al., 1997). In general, most employees have an “overall” job attitude, but do not have only one job attitude (Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012). There may be many dimensions of attitude which can be determined by pay vs. supervision, pay raise vs. whole job and evaluation vs. behavior (Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012). It is critical that one doesn’t just look at job attitudes as generally, but at the specific levels those compose these attitudes (Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012).

Judge and Kammeyer-Mueller’s (2012) research discusses the difference between attitudes, perceptions and descriptions. They suggest that researchers should

be interested in relationships between individual level work outlooks and work performance. This work behavior can be linked to the completion of job expectations and help an organization as a whole. Organizational effectiveness is present when employee behaviors are consistent with role expectations (Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012).

One of the validated job satisfaction measures is the Job Descriptive Index (JDI) (Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012). The JDI measures the aspects of work, supervision, coworkers, pay and promotion (Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012). Because they are closely related, attitude measures and work environment descriptions should be differentiated when conducting research (Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012). Judge and Kammeyer-Mueller (2012) define job satisfaction as an evaluative state that shows satisfaction with, and positive feelings about their job. Because job attitudes can predict behaviors which are essential to organizations, its relevance is very important (Schleicher et al., 2015).

When extension agents meet expectations set forth, they spend many hours planning, preparing and conducting programs which include late nights and weekends. For many individuals, they measure their identity by their work which is a context that they devote many of their hours to (Judge, Scott & Ilies 2006). Because of this, the workplace contains many attitudes. These attitudes can be expressed in a positive or negative way. Judge and Kammeyer-Mueller (2012) state that Job attitudes are assessments of one's job that express their individual feelings toward views about, and attachment to one's job. One of the most prevalent and oldest areas of inquiry in organization psychology is job attitudes (Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012).

## **Employee Motivation**

Fernet, Austin and Vallerand (2012) tell us that in order to appeal to and hold on to capable employees with good qualifications, organizations must meet their needs through positive work environments that appeal to their motivation and well-being. According to the Self-Determination Theory (SDT), there are differences in the nature of motivation which may impact employees in different ways, they are known as “controlled” and “autonomous” (Fernet et al., 2012). Fernet et al. (2012) defines controlled motivation as actions that are done under internal or external pressure, as when people do their jobs to increase a sense of self-worth or to elude feelings of concern and fault or because they are pressured by demand, risk or incentive by an external factor. Fernet et al. (2012) describe autonomous motivation as behaving with desire, as when employees enjoy their jobs and are engaged, they experience satisfaction because they feel the value and importance. Motivation differs depending on the type of work environment (Fernet et al., 2012). The autonomy environment which is supportive, this is a nurturing motivational environment in which employees feel supported therefore having greater job satisfaction than those who are in a “controlled” environment (Fernet et al., 2012). As an organization it is vital that employees feel motivated as this can contribute to the success or failure of an organization.

Lindner (1998) defines motivation as a mental process that gives lead to one’s purpose and direction of their behavior. In order to satisfy needs, a person will behave in a specific manner (Lindner, 1998). A person’s drive to meet their needs will be their inner driving force. These may be related to personal needs or organizational needs.

Maslow's need-hierarchy theory, Adams' equity theory, Skinner's reinforcement theory, Herzberg's two-factor theory and Vroom's expectancy theory helps us to understand motivation (Lindner, 1998). The five levels of needs in Maslow's hierarchy theory include physiological, safety, social, ego and self-actualization (Lindner, 1998). Lower level needs have to be met in order to move onto higher levels. Lindner (1998) tells us that in Adam's theory, employees want fairness between themselves and their coworkers. Skinner's theory summarizes that positive outcome behaviors will be repeated while negative outcome behaviors will not (Lindner, 1998). Herzberg's theory has two factors, motivator or intrinsic factors, and hygiene or extrinsic factors (Lindner, 1998). Linder (1998) states that Vroom's theory is based on the idea that employee who put out effort will lead them to perform which will then lead to rewards.

Another theory that has been examined as related to employee motivation is the Motivation-Hygiene Theory which conveys to us that employees are encouraged more by a job that is fulfilling than by promotions and incomes (Harder et al., 2014). Because extension workers have a selfless orientation with their jobs, this is especially true in this field (Harder et al., 2014). Research on employee motivation in Extension dates back to the 1960's in which research back then discusses work climates being inadequate and organizational expectations being disconnected (Harder et al., 2014). Using this theory, Harder et al. (2014) categorize factors that motivate extension agent retention: training, staff development, mentoring, merits for good work, an attractive job, workplace support, and overall job satisfaction. Maintenance factors that also contributed to non-retention of extension workers included insufficient pay, poor salary to work load

proportion, other opportunities outside of extension, work and family balance, stress and time expectations (Harder et al., 2014).

In order for an organization to be successful, there is a need for motivated employees (Linder, 1998). It is also important that the managers of these employees understand their needs and what motivates them to perform their jobs (Lindner, 1998). Employee motivations change over time. Linder's (1998) descriptive study revealed that motivating factors of employees include: interesting work, good pay, employee appreciation, favorable working conditions, opportunities for promotion and growth, being "in the know" commitment to employees, sensitive/discreet discipline and compassion with personal issues.

### **Job Expectations**

In order to be successful extension employees, faculty need to know what their specific job expectations are as well as have the tools needed to be successful (Saunders & Reese, 2011). Because of the different facets of the job, it is very easy for new extension employees to become overwhelmed (Saunders & Reese, 2011). Although it sounds ideal for more experienced faculty to mentor new hires, they are the most reluctant to take on this role (Saunders & Reese, 2011).

Individuals who sense that they have high levels of self-esteem trust that they are competent, motivated and have job satisfaction and the tasks associated while individuals with low self-esteem feel less competent and less satisfied (Raben & Klimoski, 1973). This tells us that individuals perform in a way that they see their own self- image which tells us that they rely on internal balance (Raben & Klimoski, 1973). This leads to the discussion on one's personal perception of self as related to

expectations. Raben & Klimoski (1973) tell us that establishing expectations for employees in their work may be related to their personal perception and competence to perform. When expectations are established for an individual and it includes a task that the individual has had no experience, then the expectation rests on perception of their own competence, such as self-esteem (Raben & Klimoski, 1973). Given this information individuals will perform differently based on their self-esteem level and will motivate them to perform in ways that result in cognitive balance (Raben & Klimoski, 1973). For individuals who have high self-esteem, it is consistent to have a satisfactory expectation emphasizing competence, while a person with low self-esteem it is inconsistent (Raben & Klimoski, 1973).

Irvin & Meyer (1994) state that the met-expectations hypothesis proposes that an employee's expectation of the job before they are employed confirmation of employees' pre-employment expectations about the nature of their jobs leads to a greater level of job fulfillment and a greater level of commitment to the organization and of job satisfaction and therefore less likelihood of leaving the job. On the contrary, it has been debated that failure to meet expectations can lead to "reality shock" as a result leads to loss of satisfaction and commitment and greater turnover (Irvin and Meyer, 1994). In order to reduce "reality shock" one method proposed is to lower expectations prior to recruitment practices hence, diminishing the shock and less dissatisfaction (Irvin and Meyer, 1994). On theoretical grounds, the met expectations hypothesis combined with this method has been criticized (Irvin and Meyer, 1994). It does not seem to be discussed much in extension when expectations are not met and programs fail (Decker, 1990). If programs do not meet expectations, Decker (1990) suggests that we ask four

questions: Was there a discrepancy in the program model? Was the program carried out appropriately? Was the implementation of the program appropriately and as recommended or was the plan deviated from? Were expectations of the program impacts realistic and attainable? Was there an acceptable evaluation? In order to decide on the success or failure of a program these questions should be answered (Decker, 1990).

Typically in extension we have a “model” for all of the programs that we conduct, but unfortunately they are not always put into detail in writing to be used by others (Decker, 1990). When a program is not successful we should not automatically assume that it is based on the models, other things to consider are unrealistic expectations or poor implementation of the program as planned (Decker, 1990). Even the best program models being used can be unsuccessful if program implementation is inadequate (Decker, 1990). In order to make sure strategies are meeting program objectives, it is important to do evaluations (Decker, 1990). Setting unrealistic expectations for a program can lead to failure if the expectations are not related to the educational need, resources available and time needed (Decker, 1990).

### **Job Performance**

Job performance is defined by Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller (2012) as an employee action that is consistent with role-expectations which can lead an organization to success. As found by research, job performance is composed of different concepts which include task performance, organizational citizenship behavior, and withdrawal/counter productivity (Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012).

Psychologists have long been researching the link between job satisfaction and job performance which meta-analysis also suggest an association between the two (Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012). There has also been the establishment of a association between organizational commitment and job performance (Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012). Another topic of strong debate is the association between employee outlooks and creative performance in which this area remains uncertain as these two differ for individual levels and group levels (Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012 & Malik et al., 2015). Although there are several reasons to be concerned with studying the relationships among job attitudes and work behaviors, leaders are most concerned with the degree to which the attitudes are related to overall behavior (Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012).

The behavioral consequences of attitude are very important when it comes to outcomes of employee attitudes in organizations (Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012). The theory of planned behavior links attitudes to intentions to perform a specific behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller (2012), describe how commitment relates to behavior as a result of understanding of attitudes geared toward the organization, supervisor, and team to the development of exact commitments to goals which can lead to motivation to participate in a particular action.

According to Riketta (2008), there are at least four explanations of positive relationships between job attitudes and job performance, these possibilities include:

Case 1: Job attitudes cause job performance

Case 2: Performance causes job attitudes

Case 3: Performance and job attitudes cause each other

#### Case 4: Performance and job attitudes are causally unrelated.

The research finding from Riketta (2008), support the idea that job attitudes increase job performance. There is weak support for job performance shapes job attitudes (Riketta, 2008).

More than half of the workforce today is made up of employees who are mid-career (Carette et al., 2013). When it comes to knowledge of the job, they are very valuable resources due to their vast experience (Carette et al., 2013). In order for organizations to prevent these employees from burnout and negative consequences, it is vital for organizations to determine strategies to challenge these mid-year employees (Carette et al., 2013). One strategy that can be used to motivate these employees to meet job expectations is to give them challenging assignments (Carette et al., 2013). In order to challenge employees, this implies that performance expectations can be set reasonably high to motivate them to think of alternative or additional ways to meet that expectation (Carette et al., 2013).

Van Scotter (2000) defines “contextual performance” as helpful, cooperative, and innovative job performance behavior. Research shows that the value of contextual performance is supported by the supervisor scores of employee overall success (Van Scotter, 2000). If this is the case and employee effectiveness can be assessed by this performance, then supervisors can determine whether employees can be rewarded in other ways (Van Scotter, 2000). Contextual performance can benefit organizations in many different aspects. Personnel selection could benefit by adding this to the job performance criteria (Van Scotter, 2000). The nature of contextual performance can be examined in employee turnover to show that employees who have higher levels of

participation are no as likely to leave (Van Scotter, 2000). Research has shown that by making work more enjoyable and supportive will lead to job satisfaction (Van Scotter, 2000). Contextual performance increases organizational commitment when they feel that their jobs are more fulfilling and they have a positive work environment (Van Scotter, 2000). When employees seem motivated, team oriented and passionate about their jobs, their supervisors are more likely to give them a favorable evaluation. Van Scotter (2000) tells us that task performance and contextual performance are have been treated equally when evaluation employee performance.

In order to enhance job performance, often times organizations will offer rewards to their employees (Malik et al., 2014). There has been a debate about using rewards to enhance employee performance and its effectiveness (Malik et al., 2014). One of the concepts associated with performance that has shown increased interest is “Creative Performance” (Malik et al., 2014). Malik et al. (2014) define creative performance as producing goods, concepts, or procedures that fulfill two conditions, namely, they are fresh and new, and they are possibly appropriate for, or beneficial to, an organization. Three moderators have been recognized that affect the relationship between creative performance and rewards which include: the likelihood of rewards, feedback on job performance and the level to which there is a choice or a controlled situation (Malik et al., 2014). It is suggested that these effects depend on the type of reward and the situation in which it is being offered (Malik et al., 2014). Present day research is focusing on individual differences in employees and the positive and negative effects of rewards (Malik et al., 2014).

## **Performance Evaluations**

A vital part of any organization is managing employee performance (Kuchinke, Correthers & Cecil, 2008). Kuchinke et al. (2008) state, for any performance evaluation system to be effective, it depends on a number of things which include: the reason for the evaluation, the method and content, characteristic of the evaluator, and the exact job of the employee. In addition, Kuchinke et al. (2008) tell us that it is very important that the employee understands the overall scope of the appraisal system as it lends to the employees view of the organization and their appraisal process.

In order to make decisions about employee performance, it is necessary that organizations have an employee performance evaluation system in place. Heckel, (1978) says that one of the hardest responsibilities that an administrator will face is to precisely measure the job performance of an extension educator. Effectively managing this performance is even more important. There are many benefits of effectively managing employees which include satisfaction, less turnover, engagement and positive outcomes (Kuchinke et al., 2008). Because extension employees have relationships with their clientele, it is very easy to identify poor performance (Kuchinke et al., 2008).

Patterson (1987) discusses the many functions of appraisal systems which include: employee performance feedback, identification of training needs, organizational reward documentation, and foundation for merit increases or disciplinary actions, basis for organizational development, communication and authenticate selection methods and human resource guidelines to meet federal Equal Employment Opportunity

requirements. Along with the many functions come the many formats of appraisal systems which are described as:

1. Global ratings: A basic rating system that uses an overall assessment of performance without a determination between critical job measurements (poor, fair, good, excellent).
2. Trait-based scales: An explicit method used to measure job performance which can use qualities such as loyal, reliable, cooperative, initiative, and self-confidence.
3. Effectiveness-based systems: A structure built on "objective" results that measure the contribution of the employee and not so much how they behave or their actions. Management by Objectives (MBO) is a common example of this kind of performance appraisal method (Patterson, 1987).

In attempts to improve the performance appraisal system, Davis and Verma (1993) conducted a study of southern states which included: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Louisiana, Oklahoma, and Texas to determine how extension agents viewed the performance appraisal system. Questionnaires were sent out with 56 statements on various aspects of the performance appraisal system with the statements grouped into 15 categories (David & Verma, 1993). The 15 categories were then compared to that the present process consisted of and what the ideal process would look like; 588 responses were received (Davis & Verma, 1993). The 15 categories were the agent's rank and knowledge, satisfactory with current evaluation form, how the evaluation form is used, the number of times they were supervised, if the appraiser had appropriate training, how the evaluation scores would be used, goals of the evaluation interview, an

explanation if the format used, scope of pieces used in the form, educational performance evaluation, purpose of the evaluation procedure, connection with the plan of work, who is the appraiser, ability of agent to contest, and the agent knowledge of the score (Davis & Verrma, 1993). Davis and Verma (1993) reported that agents felt that the only appropriate thing of their present evaluation system was finding out the score with all other 14 constructs falling short of ideal.

In 1993 the University of Illinois Extension developed an evaluation system in attempts to improve the areas of “fairness, efficiency, and relevance” based on “12 critical skill areas” (Kuchinke et al., 2008). In 2003, this system was reevaluated to determine which areas needed improvement and to mirror the changes in the university, campus, and extension (Kuchinke et al., 2008). Over the next three years with the use of a strategic agenda, and a 13 member taskforce the new system was implemented in 2007 (Kuchinke et al., 2008). The taskforce gathered information from several other groups including other extension organizations, professional groups and academic departments through surveys, interviews and reviews and categorized the information into major points which were then analyzed over the next year to come up with the “Revised System of Performance Management at Illinois” (Kuchinke et al., 2008). The 10-12 set of competencies was revisited and revised into five large groups which consisted of: accomplishments of the program; the professional competencies; efficiency and growth of the organization; organizational development; and leadership and engagement (Kuchinke et al., 2008). By using these 5 competencies, they are able to incorporate into an annual report, required monthly reports, and with promotion documents and tenure reviews (Kuchinke et al., 2008).

In 2013 a study was done with Tennessee Extension agents to determine their perceptions of performance appraisal and to also examine their perceptions of any necessary enhancements to the system (Donaldson & French, 2013). The appraisal system in place consisted of twenty-seven criteria which fit into three categories that included: program development, program accountability and professionalism (Donaldson & French, 2013). The study revealed that agents had both positive and negative perceptions of the performance appraisal system with the vast majority agreeing that there needed improvement to their system (Donaldson & French, 2013). The most positive components of the appraisal system included: county directors contributing as evaluators, equity and progression toward professional development of agents (Donaldson & French, 2013).

### **Accountability**

When defining accountability we must keep in mind the two themes of context and notion (Frink & Klimoski, 2004). When describing context, it is centered around who and what is present in a given situation while notion refers to evaluation and feedback (Frink & Klimoski, 2004). Frink and Klimoski (2004) refer to accountability as person in a social context who may be observed or evaluated by oneself or another individual or group. Accountability can also be described as the degree to which an individual's actions are assessed by and external factor that has rewards or recognitions that depend upon that evaluation (Ferris, Dulebohn, Frink, George-Falvy, Mitchell & Matthews, 1997). Accountability can be perceived as internal force to be compliant (Ferris et al., 1997). This internal pressure is described as a need to meet a behavior that is acceptable (Ferris et al., 1997). This means that a person knows what they need

to do to meet the expectation and they are also aware of the consequences if it is not met.

Although accountability plays a crucial role in organizations, it is one of the most under examined under conceptualized elements (Thoms, Dose & Scott, 2002). It is a very essential principle in organizations which holds employees accountable for their behavior (Ferris et al., 1997). Organizations can fail if they do not commit to fully understanding accountability (Frink & Klimoski, 2004). In order for an organization to respond to accountability, formal mechanisms have to be put in place (Frink & Klimoski, 2004). In addition to formal steps, informal mechanisms can also be put in place which promotes informal accountability (Frink & Klimoski, 2004). These informal sources include: group norms, organizational culture, devotion to superiors and co-workers, and respect to clientele (Frink & Klimoski, 2004). When discussing accountability, there are several valuable outcomes that can result for organizations such as accuracy of performance, accuracy and focus (Thoms et al., 2002). Thoms et al. (2002), tell us that employees who are held accountable to their managers are more likely to be show greater performance, improve accuracy, and are more focused on the needs of others. Employees can find work more motivating when they feel accountable to co-workers in addition to supervisors (Thoms et al., 2002).

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODS**

The purpose of this study is to examine perceptions related to job expectations as described by 4-H Agents in the state of Louisiana. The study will explore feelings, skills and knowledge associated with job expectations. The research design used to capture the essence of this experience is a qualitative phenomenological study.

### **Rationale for Research Approach**

Qualitative research is a kind of research that does not use statistical procedures to yield findings (Strauss & Corbin, 2015). Cresswell (2013) says that qualitative research starts with assumptions and through different types of theoretical contexts addresses social or human issues of different groups or people. This type of research can describe a person's experiences, behaviors, feelings and emotions about a phenomenon, societal things or the function of an organization (Strauss & Corbin, 2015). There are many approaches that can be used to do qualitative research (Strauss & Corbin, 2015). Cresswell (2013) identifies five approaches which include: narrative research, phenomenological research, grounded theory research, ethnographic research and case study research. The approach used for this study is phenomenological research.

German philosopher, Edmund Husserl is known as the father of phenomenology in his era (Groenwald, 2004). Husserl believed that objects in the external world do not exist independently and people can be confident about how things appear to their consciousness (Groenwald, 2004). As stated by Groenwald (2004) Husserl believed that to be certain about something you must rely on your own individual experiences. The theoretical process named by Husserl was phenomenology, the science of pure

phenomenology (Groenwald, 2004). The pure science of phenomenology is discussed by Gibson (2003) as the science of pure consciousness and defines an essential nature of being as compared to psychology which is described as the science of facts. A phenomenological study can be described as several participants have been through the same phenomenon and find a common meaning of their lived experience (Cresswell, 2013). The researcher attempts to describe a phenomenon that all the participants have in common and compose it to a common experience rather than an individual experience (Cresswell, 2013).

Having a strong philosophical component, phenomenology is very common in the social sciences (Cresswell, 2013; Giorgi & Amedeo, 1997). This component is strong because it encompasses the exploration of lived experiences, the interpretation that these are conscious experiences and they are portrayed as essences of descriptions and not facts and analysis (Cresswell, 2013).

There are many structures of phenomenological studies discussed by Cresswell (2013). One structure that Cresswell (2013) discusses is exploring phenomenon that can be a theory or idea or the phenomenon with a group of participants who have all been through the same experience. Another structure that Cresswell (2013) discusses is a theoretical dialogue about leading a phenomenology and the basic concepts that go along with it which expresses the basic ideas of the individual's subjective and objective experiences. Bracketing is another structure in which the researcher has to set himself/herself aside (but not completely out) from their personal experiences and focus on the participant's experiences (Cresswell, 2013). This is a form of bracketing which means the researcher does not forget his or her own experiences but not letting it

engross the research while listening to other experiences (Cresswell, 2013). The usual data collection strategy used is interviewing the participants involved in the phenomenon (Cresswell, 2013). The procedure of data analysis involves using a systematic procedure which includes starting with a smaller piece of analysis (significant statements), and on to a larger piece (meaning units) and on to more complete descriptions (Cresswell, 2013). Once this is done, the detailed descriptions describe the what and how the individual has experienced (Cresswell, 2013). The phenomenology ends with the essence of the experience, which describes what and how they experienced it. The essence is the conclusion of the study (Cresswell, 2013).

Some of the key aspects to phenomenological research are discussed by Giorgi & Amedeo (1997). Phenomenology expresses the themes of consciousness as being comprehensive and the whole experience lived by an individual (Giorgi & Amedeo, 1997). Next, a deeper understanding goes into the word experience which translates the perception of real things but in this logic, we look at a wider meaning of experience which is perception. (Giorgi & Amedoe, 1997). Another point that Giorgi & Amedoe (1997) discuss is the meaning of phenomenon for phenomenology. Giorgi & Amedoe (1997) define this as the existence of any given exactly as it is known or experienced. In this analysis it is required that the meaning of the phenomenon be connected to the objective meaning (Giorgi & Amedoe, 1997). Giorgi & Amedoe (1997) discuss is intentionality, which means that realization focuses toward a specific thing that is not itself consciousness. Objects and subjects are not two separate entities, but the meaning of both relate to each other (Giorgi & Amedoe, 1997).

Two types of approaches to phenomenology discussed by Cresswell (2013) are transcendental or psychological phenomenology and hermeneutical phenomenology. Transcendental phenomenology focuses more on describing the individual's experiences and less on the researcher's interpretations (Cresswell, 2013). Hermeneutical phenomenology is used to describe research that consists of the experiences lived by the individual and understanding the scripts of life (Cresswell, 2013). There is not a set of rules or methods to phenomenology, but rather the researcher making an interpretation (Cresswell, 2013). For the purpose of this research, hermeneutical phenomenology was the approach used to research the essence of the lived experiences of the participants. Bracketing was also a focus in this research where the researcher tried to get a new perspective toward the phenomenon and set aside her own experiences (Cresswell, 2013).

Procedures discussed by Cresswell (2013), for conducting phenomenological research starts with determining the research problem and deciding if it is best studied by phenomenological research. The best suited problems are those that take into account numerous individual's lived experiences of a certain phenomenon which should be of interest to study (Cresswell, 2013). Extensive philosophical assumptions that appear in phenomenology are distinguished and specified by the researcher (Cresswell, 2013). The data is collected from participants who have been through the experience of this particular phenomenon and it is recommended that five to twenty-five individuals be interviewed (Cresswell, 2013). In addition to other open-ended questions, individuals are asked about their experiences of the phenomenon and circumstances or conditions have had an effect of what they experienced (Cresswell, 2013). The data from the first

and second research questions are used and significant statements or themes are highlighted to provide an understanding of the individual's experiences (Cresswell, 2013). Once these themes are identified, they are used to write a textural description and describe what the participants experienced (Cresswell, 2013). Imaginative variation or structural description can also be used to write descriptions of context or setting that influenced the experience of the phenomenon (Cresswell, 2013). Cresswell (2013) also reminds us that the researchers can also write about their own experiences. Once the structural and textural explanations are written, the researcher can write a composite description to capture the core of the phenomenon. This describes the common experiences that all have an underlying theme (Cresswell, 2013).

### **Population and Sample**

The participants for this study included LSU AgCenter Extension 4-H Agents who work in different parishes located in the state of Louisiana. The state is divided into five regions which include Northeast, Northwest, Central, Southwest and Southeast Regions and then divided into parishes (see appendix C). Initially two agents from each region were identified to take part in the study. Because it is believed that all of the participants have had the same phenomenon, a purposeful sampling strategy was used. The 4-H Agents are all professionals in the area of Youth Development. Purposeful selection was done based on the defining demographics of gender, years of service and whether parish is rural or urban. Both male and female participants were chosen. Years of service were determined by a mix of agents having eight or more years and agents having less than eight years. Within the promotion process of the LSU AgCenter Extension Service, if requirements are met, agents can be promoted fully at eight years

of service. Rural areas consist of non-metropolitan areas with fewer than 2500 people (Economic Research Service, 2015). Urban relates to a city of 50,000 people or more (Economic Research Service, 2015). Saturation was reached with 10 participants.

### **Data Gathering Procedures**

A common method used in quantitative analysis for collecting data is interviewing. The researcher conducted interviews with the participants. The participants were contacted through phone calls and emails to set up interviews. The interviews took place at the 4-H Agent's parish office or the location of their choice. An interview protocol was used which consisted of determining date, time and place of the interview. Before the interview began the researcher discussed confidentiality.

Participants received an explanation of the steps taken to ensure confidentiality such as the IRB process and consent form and their identity not being revealed. The purpose of the research was also explained. In this discussion, the researcher informed participants of the importance of giving honest answers to the questions and how this may benefit them in their jobs by applying some of the ideas and changes that they express. Specific questions were determined prior to the interview (see Appendix B). Once the interview began, participants were given a copy of the job expectation sheet after they were asked what they felt were the expectations related to their work (see appendix A).

It was very important that the researcher took steps to reduce bias of the study and establish trust between the researcher and participant when conducting research. Because the researcher is employed by the same organization as the participants, it

was important that the researcher take steps to establish trust. This was done through signing consent forms and ensuring confidentiality.

When designing, the researcher must take steps to ensure that the design does not discourage from accurate reporting by the participant (Krosnick, 2000). We can improve this by having a better understanding of the procedures used (Krosnick, 2000). These procedures were outlined by Cresswell (2013) as determining the research problem, address assumptions, collect the data through interviews, identify themes, and writing a composite description to capture the essence. Although it may be difficult, the researcher must not let their own personal experiences and assumptions drive the course of the research. The researcher made the assumption that all of the 4-H Agents in all regions had the job expectations communicated in a similar manner. Steps taken in this study to address this include: explaining the purpose and benefits of the study, not referring to others with higher statuses, avoiding agreeing or disagreeing with participant answers and not asking questions that may seem bias.

### **Data Analysis**

A challenge for qualitative researchers is analyzing data and deciding how the data should be represented through tables, collections, and narratives (Creswell, 2013). The process of analyzing data discussed by Cresswell (2013) includes organizing the data, doing an initial read through, determining the themes and forming an understanding of the themes. These steps are all connected and described as a spiral of activities that are linked to the representation and breakdown of the data (Creswell, 2013). The core elements for analyzing data include coding the data, examining the

codes into larger categories or themes, and showing and comparing in the charts and graphs (Creswell, 2013).

When doing qualitative research it entails a set of questions (Braunn & Clarke, 2006). The researcher begins with an overall research question that determines the direction of the study which can be very broad or very narrow (Braunn & Clarke, 2006).

Also to be considered is the data that was retrieved through the questions that the individuals replied to (Braunn & Clarke, 2006). Last, there are questions that lead us to the coding and analysis of the data (Braunn & Clarke, 2006). All of these questions don't have to necessarily be related, they have to be analyzed to find repeated patterns and themes (Braunn & Clarke, 2006).

Once a researcher completes the interview process and has collected data, he or she has to determine how to analyze it. One method that is used in analyzing data is thematic analysis (Aronson, 1994). The meaning of thematic analysis is stated by Braunn and Clarke (2006) as a way of finding, studying and recording patterns or themes found within data. Although thematic analysis is seldom acknowledged, it is commonly used in qualitative research. Boyatzis (1998) states several meanings for thematic analysis: a way of looking at it; a procedure to be used with qualitative data; a procedure for coding qualitative data. When using thematic analysis to analyze data, themes and patterns of lived experiences are identified (Aronson, 1994). Braun and Clarke (2006) state that the first thing that a researcher should learn in qualitative analysis is thematic analysis because it is basic skill that will guide them in other aspects of qualitative analysis . As noted by Braunn and Clarke (2006), one of the

advantages of using thematic analysis is that it is flexible as it allows the researcher to define themes in many ways.

A short overview of thematic analysis is also given by Aronson (1994) in the steps in performing a thematic analysis which include: data collection, determining which data relates to patterns being studied, combining patterns into sub-themes, forming a valid reason why themes were chosen. Aronson (1994) says that themes can be taken from patterns which can come in many different forms such as experiences, meanings, feelings, and conversations. To determine themes, ideas and experiences must be brought together and shown as a complete picture of shared experiences (Aronson, 1994). Braunn and Clarke (2006) go into much more detail on the step-by-step process of performing a thematic analysis. There are two main ways that a theme or pattern can be identified using thematic analysis which include lowest going up or inductive or highest going down or theoretical/deductive (Braunn & Clarke, 2006). In choosing to use an inductive method, the patterns that appear throughout are tightly connected to the information, while the inductive method emphasizes not trying to adapt the data into the researchers pre-existing insights (Braunn & Clarke, 2006). When making this choice one must decide if they want to code according to the research question (theoretical/deductive) or do they want to code to have a research question emerge (inductive) (Braunn & Clarke, 2006).

Guidelines for guidance are given to us through Braunn and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis. Because this process is so flexible, they are not rules, just guidelines. Bruann and Clarke (2006) describe this as a process where you can go back to any of the phases if needed and it is not an outlined process where one phase has to be

completed before moving on to the next. The first and second of the six phases include becoming familiar with yourself and your research by going through data and writing initial thoughts and concepts and generating initial codes by looking at interesting things across the data set (Braunn & Clarke, 2006). The next three steps include looking for themes, studying themes and identifying themes by organizing codes into possible themes, continuing throughout to explore and refine themes with overall analysis and creating clear descriptions for each theme (Braunn & Clarke, 2006). The last phase that Braunn & Clarke (2006) discuss is producing the report which is the final chance to choose compelling examples linking the analysis to the research question and literature.

Questions are pointed out that should be asked at the ending phase of the analysis to make sure your logical assertions go beyond just the surface of the data (Braunn & Clarke, 2006). These questions include: What is the meaning of the theme? What can you assume from it? What are the inferences of this theme? What are the circumstances that played a part in it? Why do people discuss it in a certain way? What does the overall picture tell us about the topic? (Braunn & Clarke, 2006).

Although conducting a thematic analysis can seem pretty simple, there are some things that must be considered in order to make sure the researcher does not end with an analysis that is not a good one (Braunn & Clarke, 2006). Braunn and Clarke (2006) discuss six possible downfalls to avoid, beginning with not actually analyzing the data, it is not just a set of facts, it has to be analyzed. Second, avoid using the data collection questions as themes, which shows that no analytic work has been done. Third, the researcher should make sure that his/her themes relate to the central aspect of the research, make sure the themes work and provide a thorough account of the data

(Braunn & Clarke, 2006). The discrepancy between the data and the analytic claims is the fourth pitfall discussed by Braun & Clarke (2006). This happens when the claims made by the researcher are not supported by the data, or there is a contradiction to the claims made (Braunn & Clarke, 2006). A discrepancy between the concept and the analytic claims, or between the question being researched and the type of thematic analysis used is the fifth pitfall identified by Braunn & Clarke (2006). Last, the analysis must include theoretical assumptions, explain how it was done, the purpose and include essential information (Braunn & Clarke, 2006).

Although qualitative research and quantitative research differ in criteria, the approach to analyzing the data of qualitative research should be done very thoroughly (Braunn & Clarke, 2006). There is the existence of criteria for conducting thorough qualitative research (Braunn & Clarke, 2006). It is important indeed to consider a method that is suitable to the research question that you are answering and the broader theoretical assumptions (Braunn and Clarke, 2006). Braunn & Clarke (2006) have demonstrated that using a flexible method such as thematic analysis can be beneficial in a variety of epistemologies and research questions.

The data analysis in the research will follow the steps in Creswell's (2013) Phenomenological Analysis and Representation. The steps from Cresswell (2013) are listed below:

- describing the experiences of the phenomenon being studied (the researcher's experience) in attempts to put aside personal biases of the researcher

- the researcher will determine significant statements and then develop a list of these statements non-repetitively then group them into themes
- the researcher will write textural descriptions of what the participants experienced, what happened, and this will include direct quotes from participants and structural descriptions of how the phenomenon happened which reflects on setting and context
- using textural and structural descriptions, a composite description of the phenomenon will be written and this represents the essence of the experience

### **Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations**

There are four philosophical assumptions of a researcher when conducting qualitative research which are ontological, epistemological, axiological and methodological (Cresswell, 2013). The ontological assumption asks the question what is the nature of reality and is characterized by certainty can be seen through many perspectives (Creswell, 2013). The implications for practice include reporting different viewpoints as themes emerge (Creswell, 2013). The Epistemological assumption seeks to answer, what calculates knowledge, and how are assertions of knowledge justified and what is the relation of the researcher and what is being studied and is categorized by subjective information from providers; researcher seeks to separate themselves from the study (Creswell, 2013). The implications for practice include the researcher relying on quotes and data retrieved from the participants and seeks to understand and collaborate with the participant (Creswell, 2013). The Axiological assumption seeks to answer what role do values have; this is characterized by the researcher acknowledging

that there are biases present in research (Creswell, 2013). In the implications for practice, the researcher openly talks about morals and standards that shape the narrative and also includes the interpretation of the researcher (Creswell, 2013). The methodological assumption answers the questions, what is the research process and what is the meaning of research (Creswell, 2013). The methodology also known as the processes for qualitative research and are categorized as inductive, emerging and formed by the experience of the researcher in gathering and analyzing the data (Creswell, 2013). This research is inclusive which means it is not solely from theory or inquirer perceptions but from the bottom up (Creswell, 2013).

A very important factor in establishing trustworthiness is ensuring credibility (Shenton, 2004). Guba (1981) discusses four major concerns that must be addressed as related to trustworthiness: *Truth Value*- How can a researcher create assurance of the truth in findings of a review for the subjects in which the circumstances in which the inquiry was done? *Applicability*-To what degree can the findings be applied to other contexts with other individuals? *Consistency*- How can the findings be replicated with the same participants in the same situation? *Neutrality*- How can one determine the amount to which the outcomes of an inquiry are a function only of participants and conditions of the inquiry and not of the perceptions, experiences and interests of the researcher? There are strategies that can be used to increase the worth of qualitative research which can be addressed in different stages which are designing the study, during the collection of data, and after the data has been interpreted (Krefting, 1991). Krefting (1991) provides a comparison for comparing criteria by research approach. The qualitative approach to the criterion of truth value is credibility; applicability refers to

transferability, consistency to dependability and neutrality to confirmability. Krefting (1991) also provides summary of strategies to establish trustworthiness which include credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. To establish trustworthiness in credibility, some of the criteria include: triangulation, data gathering techniques, using an interview procedure, member checking, establishing authority as researcher and peer examination (Krefting, 1991). Establishing trustworthiness for transferability the researcher must do time sampling, compare samples to demographics and provide detailed accounts (Krefting, 1991). Trustworthiness in dependability is established by triangulation, checking and re-checking codes, providing a detailed description of the research methods used and continue with peer examination (Krefting, 1991). Finally, Krefting (1991) establishes trustworthiness in confirmability with confirmability review, triangulation and reflectivity.

The established concepts that the researcher can use to support confidence that they have precisely recorded the phenomena are discussed below (Shenton, 2004). The research methods used must be well established within qualitative research as well as science in general (Shenton, 2004). It is important that the researcher become familiar with the cultures and norms that he or she is studying and this should take place before initial data collection begins (Shenton, 2004). Although most qualitative research usually uses purposive sampling, using a random sample can refute any bias (Shenton, 2004). The use of different methods such as interviews, focus groups and observation for data collection is called triangulation which can compensate for limitations (Shenton, 2004). Procedures should be put in place to ensure honesty of the participants who should be given the option to decline participation (Shenton, 2004). Reflection should be

done throughout by the researcher by doing an ongoing evaluation of effectiveness of techniques, to record impressions and emerging theories (Shenton, 2004). The credibility of the researcher is very important in qualitative research as this is the main instrument of collecting data and its analysis (Shenton, 2004). Shenton (2004), states that the single most important thing that a researcher can do is member checks which can take place during the data collection and at the end of data collection by ensuring that the data is accurate. A detailed explanation of the phenomenon that is being studied can help with promoting credibility (Shenton, 2004). Finally, Shenton (2004) considers it very important to be able to examine previous research to relate his or her findings.

When conducting qualitative research, there are ethical considerations that may be factors. It is important to be able to identify these factors and determine how to address them. These can arise at the beginning, throughout, and ending of a research project. Qualitative researchers must prepare for possible ethical dilemmas from beginning to end (Banister, 2007). These researchers must continually focus on not allowing themselves to become personally consumed with their studies, but strive to put emphasis on forming a good balance between them personally and the subjects of their study (Banister, 2007).

Creswell (2013) states that before the study begins it is necessary to get approval from the college or university institutional review board before collecting any data for the research project. Codes of ethics have been published by research organizations and institutional review boards (Banister, 2007). Banister (2007) also gives an overview of the ethical perspective possessed by researchers which begins

with how ethical research behavior is governed in the United States. Research is governed by "The Common Rule" and detailed by the National Institute of Health which are then maintained by the Institutional Review Board established within entities (Banister, 2007).

Several ethical issues which are discussed by Creswell (2013), include at what stage of the research the ethical issue occurs, what type of issue and how the issue can be addressed. Prior to the study the researcher should seek approval by submitting an IRB, determining ethical criteria in the professional areas, get approvals and permission from participants and location, and make sure the publications are properly done (Creswell, 2013). The following things are directed by IRB's: informed consent by participants, individuals can decide to withdraw at any time without consequences, researchers must eliminate unnecessary risks, and participant benefits must outweigh risk (Banister, 2007).

When beginning to conduct the study, the researcher should reveal the purpose of the study to participants, advise them about signing consent forms, respect diversities, and obtain correct consents (Creswell, 2013). In the stage of collecting data, do not disturb the site, avoid being deceptive about participants about the study, make sure they are well informed, do not disrespect authority and avoid any questions that may be leading and avoid discussing personal views and sensitive information (Creswell, 2013). While analyzing data do not report only positive results, account for different ideas and findings and respect participant privacy (Creswell, 2013). Reporting data should be done honestly, avoiding plagiarism, not reporting information that could be deemed harmful to participants, and including upfront, suitable and clear

communication using appropriate research language (Creswell, 2013). When publishing the study, Creswell (2013) tells us that data should be shared with all, avoid duplicate publications and if requested, be compliant with it comes to ethical issues and conflicts of interest.

In order to establish trustworthiness, the researcher provided a clear understanding to participants of what the research entailed as well as how the findings would be presented. Throughout the interview process, participants were also informed that they could opt out at any time. Member checks were done throughout to ensure that the researcher had a clear understanding of the data that was collected. In order to protect the privacy of the participants, all transcribed interviews were password protected.

### **Study Limitations**

This study focused on 4-H agent's perceptions of job expectations. Perspectives were given from ten agents from over seventy employed in the state of Louisiana. Because the researcher is also an employee of the LSU AgCenter, it was important to establish trust to be able to capture the true experiences of the individuals. It was also difficult for the researcher to bracket personal perceptions due to assumptions that the researcher already had. For some qualitative researchers, phenomenology may be considered too structured (Cresswell, 2013). When using phenomenology as a research approach, it is important that the researcher ensure that all of the participants have experienced the same phenomenon. This is very important for the researcher to be able to capture the true essence of the research.

## **CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS**

In this chapter the analysis from interviews will be presented as they relate to the interview questions that were asked in relation to this study. Formal interviews were set up with ten Extension Agents with a 4-H appointment who work in the state of Louisiana. In order to maintain confidentiality of participants, a very broad description is given. The participants consisted of two agents from each of the five regions. Agents selected were both male and female. Eight female agents were interviewed and two male agents were interviewed. The years of experience of agents selected range from one year to twenty five plus years. Participants selected were from both rural and urban parishes with five agents being from urban and five agents being from rural parishes. At the beginning of the interviews the agents were given a copy of the job expectations (see appendix A). The list of job expectations was used as a reference throughout the interview process. The participants were given a copy of the job expectation list at the beginning of the interview and were asked if they were familiar with the written job expectations. All participants indicated that they were familiar with the job expectations. The list consisted of nine expectations with a description under each one. At the completion of the interviews the recordings were transcribed into text. Data analysis was done by analyzing the interviews and examining the different themes that emerged. The essential meanings of the themes are described below.

### **Overarching Themes**

The six overarching themes that emerged from the interview transcripts included: (1) agent accountability, (2) 4-H agent turnover, (3) not meeting expectations or expectations too high, (4) excessive workload, (5) understanding of expectations and

(6)numbers (quantity vs quality). It was obvious that the participants had strong opinions about the six items mentioned above which provided dense descriptions of their thoughts and experiences. These thoughts and experiences expressed by the participants will be presented in the chapter.

### **Agent Accountability**

It was very evident that 4-H agents feel that other co-workers may not be held to the same standards as others. Many of the participants revealed that some parishes do the minimum to get by while others struggle to make sure they are meeting all expectations. Others felt that agents are not showing up when help is needed at certain events.

Two of the participants expressed that there was a problem with agents not showing up for assignments and events. The first participant stated, “One thing I see a problem with and I am sure you see it to and I am sure you have heard this complaint many of times too. There needs to be more agents at more regional events. That is one problem I see. At every regional event we see the same agents whether it’s the district show, whether it’s shooting sports, it’s the same agents every time. I think that needs to be an expectation and have way more emphasis to attend at least two regional events per year.” Another agent expressed anger when she stated, “I think the one thing that stems negatively to me is if you are assigned a duty and you don’t show up for that duty. As an agent that was assigned two duties and showed up for both of them, that makes me angry.” It is the understanding of the researcher that 4-H agents are assigned specific assignments. During these assignments, not all 4-H agents show up to what they were assigned to do.

Parallel to these comments another agent stated, “There is a difference in participation in our region. We have some that don’t even show up; I don’t know how they get away with it. They don’t participate in any events you know or they send two kids and we have 50 there and they have two and I’m like how come they didn’t get in trouble and their parish is bigger than ours.” Another participant had similar views when she stated, “I know that some parishes do a lot and some parishes do the minimum to get by and I don’t think that is fair to those that do, you know, bust their butts to make their program a good one, you know. I think it needs to be looked at really, really close and the budget we are in, where they are not hiring new agents to fill the ones that have left, but we have two agents in a parish that is not high functioning.” The researcher interpreted that “high functioning” were those that were meeting the expectations.

Another concern expressed by participants was the issue of all agents not held to the same standards. One participant stated, “It seems like with different agents they may allow this agent to do that and then turn around with another agent and say you are not doing that and you are not going to do that.” With another participant adding, “Some agents, and it’s been from day one when I got in, you got, it seems like in certain situations you got some agents that they let do this and other agents if they don’t do it they ready to nail the nail in the coffin. I don’t know if it has anything to do with job expectations, but I mean, a lot of stuff don’t seem like a level playing field.” Agent accountability can be viewed negatively when agents don’t feel that everyone is held to the same standards. The lack of accountability of some agents has a direct relationship to the negative attitudes of others.

## **4-H Agent Turnover**

It is becoming evident that the 4-H program is losing 4-H Extension Agents at an alarming rate. Regional 4-H Coordinators indicated that over ten agents quit this summer over a three month time span. Conversations with these agents who have left suggest that the turnover relates to agents finding more appealing jobs, family situations, lack of job satisfaction, burnout and poor job performance. Most of the agents who resigned from the AgCenter indicated that they would come back if situations and circumstances were different. Interviewees who are still working in the 4-H program voiced their concern over the agent turnover. When one participant was asked during the interview if they had any other comments, they replied, "Quit running people off!"

During discussions with the participants one concern that came up was the feeling that there was not always support from administration. One participant stated, "If we had more support from administration our jobs would be so much easier. This is it, support your agents, I am not saying don't follow the rules, but you know, support us. We are the ones in the firing lines; we are the ones just getting frustrated and leaving." This particular agent felt that she was in a situation with her parish clientele and administration did not support her by backing her decision. Along the same lines another participant expressed that there is a disconnect from administration to field offices when she said, "It's administration and it's field office, there is a true disconnect. We have been saying that for years. Their reality is not our reality and it's not getting any better because we are losing agents, like we are losing them faster than we can

keep them.” This agent’s quote was interpreted that the state office doesn’t really know what agents are doing on a parish level.

Other participants also expressed concern about agents leaving because of having to do more, the stress of the job and feeling inadequate. One participant showed concern for poor job satisfaction by stating, “I think it’s important to have job expectations. I think if you lose people that is why, it’s because they don’t know what to expect and when they find out what’s expected of them they say, wait, what? So, they feel inadequate, that brings across poor job satisfaction and when you don’t have job satisfaction you go looking for something else.” Another participant stated, “The ones who care are the ones that really have that work ethic to do what they are supposed to do and they are being pushed to do more and more. I mean, we are losing agents.” One of the interviewees communicated that the job was stressful and people will not stay for that. He stated, “I don’t see very many of the people, the employees we are hiring now that will ever retire with the AgCenter. I mean, it will be a small number because they just, they can’t stay with one thing. I mean they can just work so many years and they gotta get out and do something else. They can’t continue to do what we are doing and take the stress that we have and continue to do it.” Agents feel that they are often put in stressful situations and they are also experiencing burn out in their jobs. In the present situations, agents are asked to attend five or more overnight trips per year. These overnight trips can include but are not limited to: new agent orientations, 4-H summer camp, 4-H challenge camp, 4-H University, agent trip assignments and professional development opportunities. Many agents feel that they can find jobs that don’t require as much time away from home and family.

## **Not Meeting Expectations or Expectations Too High**

Most of the participants expressed that expectations were too high, they were not meeting expectations or they were not realistic. Some of the participants felt that they were doing a little of each expectation but not doing 100% on all of them. Several patterns emerged from this theme which included: the administration issue, lack of agents and expectations being too high.

Some agents expressed concerns about what administration expected of them.

One participant stated,

It is a lot, the expectations that the upper echelon has of us, do more with less, it can be very, very stressful and when you throw in those expectations and when you don't meet those expectations, it can get even more stressful because you are like, ok, I am spending every hour of my day doing my job, what more do you want? And then it's not even just during the 8-4:30 period. I mean, sometimes there are meetings until 9 at night. And then you are expected to be back in the office for 8 the next morning, you know, or chaperone a trip and you are expected to be back in the office Monday morning. So, I think the expectations on the job from an agent's perspective is not very realistic.

Another Agent felt the same when it came to administration and expectations being realistic. She stated, "I think the breach between administration and field offices needs to be closed and closed quickly. If we are going to have any sort of future for field agents, I think the expectations need to be realistic and they need to be based on parish to parish assessment." In a parallel statement about "parish to parish assessment" another participant stated, "It's not realistic to say this is a template for all parishes because each parish has their own different ins and outs you know, one can't be like the other." In further discussion agents felt that the job expectations were not realistic due to having one agent per parish or the parishes having different programs due to size or demographics of parishes.

Some of the agents interviewed felt that the job expectations could actually be reached if they had more than one agent in their parishes to help them. This was expressed throughout with the first participant stating, “I mean, all of them are reasonable in that I get where they are coming from and what they want you to do it’s just hard as an agent to do them very well at times. Sometimes I feel like I am doing a lot of this on my own. If we had more help I feel like we would be a whole lot better off.” In a similar response an agent stated, “I do feel that the expectation can be reached, but maybe not to the degree they could be reached before when there were two agents to accomplish the work.” As it stands now, expectations are the same for each parish whether they have one, two or three agents working in that parish. Agents who are working in a parish with no other 4-H agents to help meet the expectations seemed to be the most stressed.

Although most agents know what is expected of them on the job, they don’t always feel as if they are doing a good job meeting the job expectations. Even agents who are self-motivated seem to be overwhelmed. One agent stated, “I know what they are expecting of us at the same time they are kind of overwhelming in that sometimes it is very hard to reach these things and not because I don’t want to or I am not trying to. I mean there are only nine of them on this sheet, but when you think about how much it takes to accomplish some of these things it’s a lot. How we are operating is almost not sustainable. We have to cut something to be able to accomplish this.” Another participant had a much more vivid response when she said, “To be in plain language, I feel like I am doing a “half way” job because I can’t do everything I would like to do because I can’t spend 100% of my time on any of these because there is just not

enough time to do it. I understand what they expect of me, but it is getting harder to give that, to meet that expectation.” One participant explained that meeting the expectations was a struggle when she said, “Trying to meet all of these expectations and do them well is something I struggle with. Sometimes I just feel like I have to get certain things done and I don’t know which one is the priority. So I think that is my biggest struggle.” There continues to be a struggle for agents in meeting job expectations. Although they may understand them, they still struggle with the task of trying to do them all and do them well.

### **Excessive Workload**

Workload was a theme that surfaced the most throughout the interviews conducted. When discussing workload, it is referred to as the amount of work the agents are expected complete which can include but not limited to all of the things listed as job expectations. These include day to day operations, reporting, parish programs, and participation in regional and state events as well as overnight travel. Although it may be explained to agents when they are hired what the job entails, they don’t get the full picture of the true expectation of the job. Many agents have indicated that it takes three years to learn and understand the job.

During the interview process, agents repeatedly stated that this was not an 8:00 a.m.-4:30 p.m. job as well as reminded me that it was a lot of nights and weekends. One participant stated, “Well, it’s definitely not an 8:00a.m.-4:30p.m. job. Some days, a few days it may be 8:00a.m.-4:30p.m. but most of the time it’s 6:30a.m.-9:00p.m. depending on if you got early club meetings and then of course weekends and you know some people think we are off for the summer and they don’t realize, no, summer

is usually the time we are traveling.” Another individual had a comparable reaction when she stated, “It supposed to be an 8:00a.m.-4:30p.m. job but that doesn’t always happen, a lot of times I stay later and then there is of course camps and other activities and other events. I try to stay organized with my schedule. Sometimes I feel like it’s a juggling act because it is so much that you are trying to figure out and thrown at. I feel like a lot of times I work after hours a lot. I feel like sometimes it is not an 8:00a.m.-4:30p.m. job, it’s an all the time job”. Parallel to that, another participant stated,

Organization is key because we are pulled in so many different directions, multi-tasking is key, like I said earlier, this job is not an 8:00a.m.-4:30p.m. job. You know, like with Smart Bodies, it was 6:45 to whenever. Like with shooting sports we have coaches’ meetings until 9 at night. You know, once a month so to say that it is an 8:00a.m.-4:30p.m. job you have to be willing to put those hours in. You have to be willing to be accessible whenever your kids need you. Yeah, I mean, pretty much getting texts at 8:30p.m. at night or whatever; you have to be willing to put in the time.

When discussing workload and the demand, many agents expressed negative feelings. One agent stated, “One of the main things as far as negative is they just continuously say you gotta do this, you gotta do this, you gotta do this, I mean they just keep on and it really discourages me more than encourages me.” Another participant felt the same way when she stated,

We get, yeah, you are doing a good job but you need to do this. It kinda fosters some negativity with us agents. It’s like man we are doing all this and we’ve got meetings until 9:00p.m. some nights and we are working weekends and we’re working on days off that we are supposed to have a holiday, but, you need to do more. It’s always been, ever since I started, it’s always been do more with less. I feel like now it’s like do more with less, less, less.

Another theme that surfaced when workload was discussed was the thought of agents not really knowing what to expect when accepting the job as a 4-H Agent.

Because the job is so demanding, some employees have not figured out how to maintain the work-life balance. One agent stated, “How can you keep up with your workload and maintain your classes and your grades and maintain your family?” Others thought that this was a concern especially when new agents are first hired. One participant stated, “I don’t think some of them you know, we say, is it going to be a problem for you to go to overnight meetings or be gone overnight? They say oh no, it’s not a problem, but they don’t know it may be 25 days.” Another agent related back to the interview and stated, “when I came in during the interview it was considered to be a 40 hour week and they say you will be asked to work weekends and some nights whatever the case may be, well that turns into 60 hour weeks in a heartbeat and before you know it, that racks up pretty good.” Keeping with the same theme one participant stated, “if you are younger coming in and you don’t fully understand it, it be very detrimental to, as far as, how to go on about your life with this job that is so demanding, because it is a lot, it demands a lot.”

Most of the participants whether they were a newer agent or a more experienced agents felt that agents don’t really know what to expect when they begin the job of a 4-H Agent. They also thought that the job expectations needed to be better explained in order to understand them.

### **Understanding of Job Expectations**

Throughout the interviews participants felt that they didn’t always know what was expected of them. Because there were so many expectations it was hard to decipher which expectations took priorities over the other. One participant stated, “Sometimes I am not sure what is expected of me. A lot of times they are like, ok, you have to do

these things but sometimes those things overlap so then it's like ok, now which one do I choose. Some expectations are clear and other times they are not because they overlap and it's like, ok, which one is more important."

Many of the participants noted that it took them more than a year to really understand the job and what was expected. A few of the participants reverted back to when they first started and looking back now didn't know what to expect. One agent stated, "As far as the state things that we are expected to do, that is one thing that I didn't realize when I first started that we are expected to attend all of these." Another agent discussed something similar when she said, "So, when I first started, I didn't know it was going to be that way. But now I have kind got of my system set up, how I react, how I respond to stuff." Another participant stated, "When somebody gets into the job, we are just not doing a good job of telling the job expectations because when they get in the job they say, I didn't know I was going to have to do that." Although some agents felt overwhelmed when they were hired, several of them felt that they have gotten more organized through the years.

Currently in the AgCenter, when agents are hired and begin the job they rely on co-workers if they have one and regional 4-H coordinators to help them to understand job expectations and learn the details of the job. All new agents are expected to attend New Agent Orientation but this orientation may not be offered until six months or more on the job. Agents felt that the AgCenter was not doing a good job of actually explaining what the job expectations are or what each one means. One participant stated, "Go through the list with agents and actually come up with ideas, real things, not just, "you need a functioning advisory committee." Well if I don't really know what that is...tell me,

I need specific instructions. If I need specifics, new agents are going to need specifics.”

In a similar response one agent added, “On paper these things may not seem as hard to accomplish as once you get into it, so, I mean, I think they should be given and explained although coming in as a new agent, you still don’t get it”. One of the participants believed that she didn’t receive enough training to accomplish certain aspects of her job when she said, “I somehow missed the boat. No one ever showed me or ever taught me how to do a portfolio and I get my lunch eaten every year about my document. But, I don’t know how to do it. But, if no one ever showed me how, you know, I get bits and pieces.”

Several of the participants felt that their first year of employment was overwhelming and didn’t completely understand the job expectations until years after. It has often been said that the first year of an extension agent’s employment is very hazy, the second year you start to understand better and by the third year they really comprehend and understand it. One agent stated, “During my performance evaluation they tell me, ok, you need to do this, you need to do this, well this is not good. You know, they go through the motions with it but it’s not until year three or four you finally figure out, ok, this is what I need to be doing.” In a parallel response another participant said, “I am learning while I am going through, you know, you can talk and tell me this is what you are gonna have to do and we expect this and we expect that, but until you really start working and see what it’s all about, you really not going to be able to do too much until you really know and can really understand what it all entails.” Another agent felt that they didn’t have a clue what was happening when she was hired, she stated, “I know for my interview I didn’t have a clue I had to do all those things. I learned through

the years you know, but I don't know if job expectations were introduced until years later."

### **Numbers (Quantity vs Quality)**

Associated with the job expectations of 4-H Agents are numbers. The numbers expectation is present in state and regional events as well as enrollment. Several of the participants reverted back to "numbers" as being a very negative association with their jobs. One agent thought that only negative expectation associated with her job was numbers. She stated,

The only negative I feel sometimes and I know within the AgCenter we are always talking about numbers and so you know you are expected to reach this certain number or you know for camp, or you are expected to have this many numbers at 4-H University and all these things you know they kind of look at that you know and they pull out your enrollment and those kinds of things. I guess it's just the number thing that I think sometimes is just the negative. We are trying you know, but I think sometimes the number aspect thing might be negative.

In a similar response another agent said,

Numbers, I am just going to throw that out there. Numbers you know they used to say we used to be told when I started that it was numbers and then a couple of years ago we were told that it is not the quantity but the quality of your programming which I liked because I think that realistically that's what it should be. It seems like lately it has been more of a numbers game. So, I just think, to have numbers just for the sake of numbers, it is not doing anything for the youth in the parish. If you are offering quality 4-H programming to say ten students and another program they got twenty but you know the program is not good, I think those smaller groups benefit more than the larger groups, that's just my opinion.

In a parallel response to this, a third participant stated, "I guess the only thing I always look back to is the numbers. You say, ok, we expect you to participate in these activities but we expect you to have this many people here and this many people there. You know it's like we try our best to do that and if you base it because if you don't meet

those numbers...I guess it's the numbers; attaching numbers to certain things." Another participant indicated that enrollment numbers were an expectation when she said, "I think they want me to have 1000 kids. But I mean I can't say I have 1000 kids, but I think every time we have a meeting that is basically what they say." Some agents feel overwhelmed when it comes to having numbers as an expectation. There is a constant discussion and quality vs. quantity and many agents seemed confused as to which one of these should be the priority.

Overall, the comments were negative when associated with workload. Most thought that they were being asked too much as far as workload. Some thought the expectations were too high and that they were continually being asked to do more. When workload becomes overwhelming it fosters the loss of job satisfaction. While working long hours, nights and weekends, the issue of trying to have a healthy family-work balance also surfaces.

### **Interview Themes**

The following themes that will be discussed were not overarching themes but emerged as a result of individual questions. The interviews consisted of questions about skills needed to meet job expectations, positive and negative perceptions of job expectations, parts of the job performed well and not well, priorities when it came to expectations and how expectations should be determined and communicated.

### **Consistency of Programming**

All of the interview participants were asked to describe their work. This question was asked so the interviewer could determine if there was consistency on what they felt their work was among agents in the field. There were several areas that agents

discussed when they described their work. The themes that emerged from this question were: school club meetings, Jr. Leadership clubs, Shooting sports clubs and livestock clubs. It was evident by all of the participants that they were expected to do school club meetings by visiting schools each month. Each of the agents met with a different number of school clubs according to the parish that they worked in. School club meetings ranged from 4 school clubs to more than 30 school clubs. One of the participants felt that 4-H club meetings were her main focus when she stated, “our main focus is club meetings and making sure that we can reach kids with programming and let them know how to join 4-H and what events that our parish 4-H has and try and get them to come out for things that we offer for them.” It was evident that all of the participants had Jr. Leader clubs in their parishes. One participant stated, “I am in charge of the Jr. Leaders which is also one of my major focuses. Our Jr. Leader club is really coming along. Last year we actually had officers that really planned the things that our Jr. Leader club did. We did a lot of service learning last year.” Shooting sports was another program that most of the participants discussed. One agent stated, “I meet with the kids especially when we do enrollment, shooting sports and project clubs. I try to see them as early as I can. We have probably 30 shooting sports kids and that’s all disciplines, and I do the shooting sports program.” The other program discussed by many was the livestock program. One agent replied, “I do a lot with the livestock stuff we have. This is my favorite part of the program, I love the livestock program, the livestock shows and I really like our livestock people, and they are coming together.” It was obvious to the researcher that while all of the parish programs might not look

exactly the same, agents were working along the same lines as far as the program as a whole.

### **Expectations Related to Work**

Agents were asked what they thought were the expectations related to their work. Several notable interpretations surfaced from this. One thing that was noteworthy was the letting go process that was done several years ago within the AgCenter where agents were allowed to evaluate their programs and let something go. One of the participants had a strong opinion of this process as well as the thought that she is being manipulated into doing certain programs. She was very adamant about her response when she stated,

I think it was absolutely idiotic that years ago you know when we went through this letting go process and I cannot tell you one thing that I let go because, if you mentioned or said oh well, we are not going to send kids to JLC this year, well that was...you couldn't do that. We were told we could let go and I guess I will say it, this probably doesn't have anything to do with your question but I am going to say it. What really makes me mad as an agent, as an adult, is that other adults try to make it seem like I am making the decisions about what I am doing. When it is really what they want. Here's my deal...don't waste my time making me come up... if you want me to go to 4-H Day at the Capitol, if you want me to send four kids to JLC, if you want me to do workshops at Challenge Camp, I just want you to tell me that. Just tell me, don't try to play me, and don't say it would be better to do this. No, just tell me, tell me what to do and I will work towards doing it.

A couple of the agents felt that the expectation related to their jobs was growth and improvement in their programs. One of the participants stated, "Well I feel that my supervisors want to see growth and that's just kind of the main thing. They want to see improvement from year to year, whether it's the number of kids that I have taken to camp or you just really, improvement and growth in every area." In a similar response

another participant said, “For me to grow; they really want me to grow big, but we have grown. We have a trend you know so it’s growing.”

Other agents felt that one of the main expectations was the traditional 4-H club meetings. One agent stated, “I feel that we are expected to have an overall 4-H program that includes traditional clubs, club setting, with members involved in that but also to get outside of that and then do outreach, enrichment.” Another participant felt the same expectation when she said, “They expect us to do club meetings and reach youth in school settings and do programs and educational things with them. That is extremely important.” A third participant expressed the same thought and stated, “Well the expectations are to go to the different club meetings once a month. Make sure that the club members are informed about the activities and make sure the activities are delivered and that also to keep membership and continue to grow the program.”

### **Skills Needed to Meet Job Expectations**

When participants were asked what were the skills they needed to meet job expectations, the most prevalent answer was organization and time management. One agent said, “I think you have to be organized to some degree. Now, here again, because of all the personality types I think all the organization is different for each of these groups. My organization of course is having a calendar, or having a schedule, or having a list, I know not all personality types are like that. I had four calendars. I have a big desk calendar, we have a big calendar on the wall, I have a little one I carry with me. My goal was to get down to one. It took me several years to get there. So, I think organizational skills.” Another agent replied, “Time management. I think that a lot of agents, especially new ones do not understand that.” One agent identified both skills

when she said, “I would say organization, organizational skills and time management because you are juggling and doing a lot of things you know, it’s not one activity, it’s multiple activities at a time.” With organization being key, another participant stated, “Organization, organization is key because we are pulled in so many different directions, multi-tasking is key, like I said earlier, this job is not an 8-4:30 job. Organization, record keeping, basic general knowledge of word, power point, basic computer skills is key.” Another agent responded, “I think you need to be able to work with kids and work with others very well and I think you need to be a good time manager and organized. As long as you have those skills it doesn’t matter how smart you are, how good at one thing you are, I think as long as you can do those four things you will be ok.” An agent replied similar when she stated, “So I think you need to be somebody that is very organized. I do my best and I take notes and I pay very close attention to my calendar and I try to do things not on the day it’s due. Some thing you know, oh, that needed to be done. You know, it happens because it gets away from you. But I really, every day check my schedule and try to be extremely organized and professional.” The last participant responded, “Organization skills are always a plus because as agents we have a lot of things going on. You have got to be able to switch gears, multi-task, find that balance and where you need to be able to put things to line them out to be able to get to them in a timely manner.” Most of the respondents felt that organization and time management skills were needed to be able to meet the job expectations. Because there are so many facets to the job of being a 4-H agent, it is important that new agents being hired understand that they should work heavily on organization and time management to be able to fulfill all of the job expectations set forth.

A second set of themes that emerged when discussing skills needed to fulfill job expectations was communication and public relations. Several of the participants felt that these two skills were needed in order to be able to work effectively with youth and adults. One agent said, "Communication skills, I think you need good communication skills." Relating to people was important to one agent when she stated, "As a 4-H Agent I think the number one skill is that you have to be a people person. You have got to be able to relate to people. You gotta have people skills. Another agent responded, "I think you need to work with others well, as long as you can talk to people, as long as you can manage your time and stay afloat, you are ok." One participant stated, "I gotta be a better communicator, yeah, so, you have to communicate thoroughly." One agent talked about the importance of communication when recruiting volunteers by saying, "Communication is another one. You have to be willing to talk to people especially when you are doing recruitment for volunteers. Again, communication, you gotta be able to talk to people, not just people in your parish and in your community, but also on the state level. If you need help those are the ones you need to talk to. I still falter in that as far as communication wise." Another responded, "I think you have to have good communication skills. You are dealing with the public and you are dealing with people's kids. You know you want to make sure they trust you and they understand your mission." Working with the public and diverse audiences is sometimes a struggle for 4-H agents. Agents see good communication and good public relations skills as a positive attribute. When agents see these things related they feel that they can better move forward in meeting their job expectations.

## Perceptions of Job Expectations

Participants were asked to describe their feelings about meeting job expectations. All of the participants gave positive and negative responses. The following responses were the positive reactions given by agents on the topic of having to meet job expectations. One participant stated,

I do think having the job expectations is a positive thing, I do because I am a black and white person. When I get that sheet, I say functioning advisory, I say yes, we've got that, club enrollment, how are we doing in that...we've got it. Do we participate? Yes, we participate in all of those things. I am ok with that. it was harder and you know back when I started, I don't think it was that defined. I do see how things have gotten better organized, and for my personality, and a lot if it is personality, I like that. I like having a check off list, I like being able to say I am accomplishing this and oh maybe I need to work on this, I'm ok with that. I am one of those people that I'm ok with it as long as they are realistic job expectations.

Several agents thought that job expectations were positive because it was right in front of them and they knew what was expected. One agent replied, "You know, it's great to have expectations because you know what you are striving for. Here it is right here, this is what I am trying to do, so I think it is great." Another agent stated, "The positive is knowing what your supervisor wants you to do. Whether you do it or not, you got it there in front of you to know that you have got to do this or they want you to do this, or try to do this and on some things, I will, and I know others do too, they say well I have tried this and done this and I can't get anybody to do it or you know. I at least attempt them all, I just don't tell them no." One participant stated, "I like the fact that they are written down and I can look at them and know that I can compare what I do and know that I am meeting the job expectations. In a similar response a participant stated, "I think the positive things about job expectations is that you know up front what you are being

expected to accomplish and what your objectives are as far as you are expected to meet yearly or however often you may be evaluated, so, I think it is a positive thing because you know what you are being expected to do. I always think that it is a positive thing to have.” Another agent pointed out specific areas of job expectations and the positives of these when she stated, “I think it is positive because each part of this is what we need to be working towards so I think it is a positive thing to have and to look over and maybe to even keep in front of you. You know, service learning is extremely important; our Jr. Leaders do a lot of service learning for our community. You know, evaluation and reporting impacts is a great way to see what we have done. Diversity, you have to keep that in front of you and make sure you say things right. So, yeah, I think this is a positive thing and I think it is a great thing to keep in front of us.” One agent had a different but interesting view of the job expectations by looking at them as room for growth when he stated, “Positive aspects of meeting these expectations is that there is always room for growth. There is never really no set standard where you got to meet them and that’s it. You can keep going, instead of thirty kids for 4-HUniversity you can bring fifty next year. I think that is the way we are supposed to look at it.”

Some of the agents had both a positive and negative perception of the job expectations. One participant believed it was some of both when they stated, “I have to say it’s about 60% positive, 40% negative considering what I went through with this and then you have to take into account what those new agents know and what their background is.” Another participant stated, “I think it is good in that I know what you are expecting of us. At the same time they are kind of overwhelming in that sometimes it is very hard to reach these things.”

The negative perceptions that arose during the interviews included lack of support, the continuous workload and the need for training. One agent discussed lack of support by saying, “We should all have some type of job expectations but it’s kind of difficult sometimes to meet those expectations. You know, whether it’s due to financial restraints or whatever, it just makes it difficult. It doesn’t matter what the situation is, this is still what those expectations are. This is great because you know what you are striving for, but it’s just hard when you don’t have the volunteers or you don’t have the support so it makes it difficult when you don’t have that type of support.”

Two of the participants had concerns with the amount of work expected. The first participant stated, “One of the main things as far as negative is they just continuously say you gotta do this, you gotta do this, you gotta do this, I mean they just keep on and on and it really discourages you more than encourages you. You do what you can and that’s all you can do.” In a parallel statement another participant said,

On the negative side, because of staffing it is hard to meet these expectations because I feel like I am being pulled in a lot of directions. A lot of the times I can’t give 100% to one of these expectations because I had to meet another expectation without being able to complete the other expectations. I can’t spend 100% of my time on any of these because there is just not enough time to do it. Time is one thing, but also mental focus, it’s hard to focus on one thing when you have to think about something else, and something else and something else. So I guess that would be the negative part of it. I understand what they expect of me, but it is getting harder and harder to give that, to meet that expectation.

Some of the participants viewed job expectations in a negative way if proper training did not take place. One agent stated,

I think if they expect us to follow these expectations as a new agent coming in they need to be taught these expectations. Basically you are flying blind if you don’t have a co-worker that can help you and there are several parishes that only have one. It’s basically like you are thrown to the wolves and then come

evaluation time it's like "but we showed you this paper" and then you are just like yeah, you showed me this paper and yeah you showed me these words but if I don't have any practical knowledge to implement those I don't know what you want me to do. So, in my opinion the negative is that yeah we are being given job expectations but if you don't know then how can you be held accountable to follow them.

In a similar response to training, another participant stated, "There needs to be some training especially when you get into new agent orientations that some of these things need a lot more emphasis on the job expectations."

### **Parts of the Job Performed Well**

There were three themes that emerged when agents discussed the parts of the job that they perform well. These themes included good relationships with the community, organization and teamwork. One agent who thought she performed best at public relations stated, "Well I think I perform the public relations part well with our relationships with our school board and with community." In a like response another agent replied, "I think I perform well in working with our community and just kinda getting them involved because like I said, a long time ago we used to have a huge program and the community was involved in it. So, you know, I am striving to get back to that point so I know a lot of people there, I know a lot of officials there and they have been working with us." A third participant stated, "Being able to talk to people, because when I get talking I don't shut up. Especially when you kinda have that little connection with someone and they understand where you are coming from. It's all about understanding other people's perspectives and how they view things."

In a question posed early on about skills needed to meet job expectations, the topic of organization seemed to emerge with many of the participants. In a likewise answer, participants also determined that organization was something they did well.

One agent said, “I think I am a very good organizer so I can multi-task and organize and do all of that well.” Another stated, “I am best at keeping things on track; time management I am big on.” A third participant replied, “I try to stay organized. I am not doing a calendar on outlook but I have a big calendar on my desk that I still write stuff out to make sure I am organized and be where I am supposed to be. I think in all the years, I think I forgot about one club meeting that was one I changed or something.” One of the agents thought that she was very organized and felt that this helps her survive by stating,

I think that I am very organized in that, ok, here is what we need to do to get this accomplished, we get it don't and we move on. I try my hardest to make sure that I don't procrastinate and that everything gets done that absolutely needs to be done and on time and in enough time. That's my biggest focus in trying to stay steady, stay moving and stay afloat is prioritizing and getting things organized and writing a list, ok, what needs to be done right now in order for me to survive this next week or this next month or to make sure that these three big events we have are successful. So, I think I am kinda good at that and I can keep on time and on task and organized to get it accomplished.

The other part of the job that agents felt they performed well was teamwork. Working with co-workers was one thing that one of the participants thought they did well when they stated, “I think as a co-worker you have to take your strengths and know what your co-worker, know what their strengths are so I think In that whole respect we balance each other really well so there are things that she does well. You just have to learn, you know, there are some things you are good at doing that your co-worker is not and it's just like a balance beam and I think we balance it well.” In a similar response another agent said, “I try to meet with the agents that I have got. I try to meet with them and talk about their programs and keep them informed. They both help me. They both help with Achievement Days we have and they help some with training. They come in,

so, teamwork and collaboration.” A third participant stated, “I think I am a team player so I can work with a variety of people as well.” The themes that surfaced when agents were asked to talk about parts of the job they performed were all very positive. All of the participants were confident that they were doing something good in their jobs.

Funding has always been and always will be a top priority for 4-H Extension agents. In most parishes in the state of Louisiana the responsibility to find funding lies with the 4-H agent as well as the 4-H foundation boards in their respective parishes. Many agents struggle with funding their parish programs. One agent stated,

I think the part of the job that I struggle with, I am from a very poor parish and we do have donations from the public officials you know and they support and help kids get to camp. But, I guess it's me, I want to do more. I guess not being able to reach as many of the kids that I would like to reach. For me it's just knowing that there's so many kids out there and they want to be a part of but because of cost they can't and some we are able to get donations for, but some we just can't, you know, we just can't help everybody.

Another agent replied, “I probably struggle with funding for the program and going out and recruiting funding for our programs and sponsors and all those types of things.” It was evident in one of the agent's responses that it is a struggle to know that youth can't participate in certain programs due to funding or the lack of. The other things that agents struggled with were the feeling that expectations were too high and the loss of 4-H Agents.

### **Job Expectation Priorities**

During the interview process agents were asked to prioritize the job expectations and chose which three they thought were most important. The most prevalent answer said by all of the participants was delivery modes with volunteer development coming in

second and rounding out with teamwork. Most of the participants believed that delivery modes were most important with one agent stating, "Variety of delivery modes utilized: the organized club program is the bread and butter for the 4-H program." Another participant said, "Well, one is the variety of delivery modes utilized you know because you have to have a lot of different ways to really get the kids engaged and so, I think that's delivery modes, that's important." A similar response was given by another participant when she said, "4-H contacts through club meetings and contests is one of the main important ones. I think that it is the most important thing to keep your program going." One agent gave a detailed description of why delivery modes are so important when she stated,

I think that having a variety of delivery modes, like having things on a school level for kids who might not necessarily get to parish level things but having parish level things for those kids who want to go above and beyond and are willing and able to do that. I think that the more diverse things that you have, the more kids can do, the better relationships you have with them, the more longevity and retention you have for that child throughout because they are more involved and have more of a commitment. So I think that having different levels of involvement and more opportunities for these kids to get involved, it's important.

Another participant also felt that delivery modes is key to reaching youth when she said, "A variety of delivery modes utilized because all kids are different and they all have different personalities, different interests, so if you have a variety of different delivery modes then you are going to get them involved and you are going to reach them, more kids." With a similar response another agent replied, "The variety of delivery modes utilized because I think club meetings are very, very important. At one point club meetings at 4-H weren't given as much importance as it should have been. I am now seeing a turn around to where they are given a level of importance." It seems that most

of the participants felt that delivery modes were most important in reaching youth and also retaining youth in their programs.

Volunteer development and community relations was also a topic that emerged to the top when discussing priorities. An agent stated, "Volunteer development and community relations: 80% of this job is public relations. We have to develop relationships with our governing bodies, school board and police jury as well as the people who allow us to use schools." Another agent thought the success of the program depended on volunteers by stating, "Volunteer development and community relations because your program is not going to be successful without having that volunteer involvement in your program." Parallel to that statement another agent replied, "I think your volunteer development and community relations is important because if you don't have volunteers you are not going to be able to accomplish anything." One participant felt that this was the number one priority when she stated, "Volunteer development and community relations are to me, number one. If your volunteers like you and your community likes you, you are going to be fine." Volunteers have always been the heart of the 4-H program by allowing agents to expand programming.

Teamwork was discussed in detail by one agent when she stated,

Just that whole teamwork, innovations and collaborations, we can't do this job by ourselves. We have to be able to work with other people; we have to be able to reach out to other people. I think that's important. There are a lot of smart people across the state to share information with and be able to get it to the kids. So, you have to be able to work as a team and you have to be able to collaborate with other people especially now. I don't just mean people in extension, also the volunteers and the public and you know anywhere you can get help is a benefit to you and your program. You have to be able to do that and not all people are able to work with other people. So, you know when I see that I usually see the program suffer if they can't get along with their co-workers or their volunteers. I

think in order to maintain your program, to grow your program, to enhance your program, you have to be able to work as a team.

Another participant looked at teamwork as a networking tool by stating, “Networking with my co-workers and how they can help me, that really helps me a whole lot.

Learning from others and picking up the phone and calling another agent and saying hey, have you ever had trouble with this, how you doing this, how can you help me?

Just networking with my co-workers is one of the biggest tools.” Working with people in

the parish was especially important to one agent. She stated, “Teamwork and

collaboration because you need to be able to work with everyone and you need to be able to work with people in your parish. It is extremely important; you need to make sure

those people like you and you have coffee with them and when they come into your

office with muddy boots. If you don’t have a good rapport with your parish with people in

your parish that are important they are not going to like you and they will go to your

director and they will let you know. I think it is really important.” It is critical that 4-H

agents can work with their co-workers, youth, volunteers and people in the community.

When everyone works together, it is the basis for a more successful program.

### **Determining Job Expectations**

Participants were asked how they thought job expectations should be determined. The majority of the participants felt that job expectations should be

determined on a state level as well as a parish by parish basis. The first participant

stated, “I think there should be some statewide broad expectations. I think maybe also

in turn also something more specific to your area and your parish and that too.” Another

participant said,

I think maybe they could have some set statewide. Like I would like you to accomplish, like do a service learning project or whatever and then have parish by parish, add some individual ones. I think there should be maybe some job expectations that just fit your parish and make sure you can accomplish what needs to be accomplished, maybe give you some more priorities of what needs to be done before other things to kinda keep us on the right track and for us to stay afloat and feel like we can do all these things successfully. I think that maybe if we weren't shorthanded that this would be a whole lot easier. We would have no problem checking all of these off the list. I don't know, I think it should be both, like, I think it should have some that the whole state can meet and then maybe these individually.

In a similar response, an agent stated, "Maybe parish, well, both. I think parish by parish because every parish is different. Every parish has a different work load. Parish by parish and as far as what programs they have depends on the number of kids and how far you can be stretched. Statewide I think it's important because you want to try to get your 4-H'ers involved in different state activities. I think everybody should attempt to try." One agent stated that some expectations have to be different but some the same when she said, "I think it should be both. First of all it needs to come from the state as far as what they expect us to do and I think it should be statewide. We should have the same expectations but on the same hand I think that a parish differs from parish to parish so I would think the person like the parish chair could give some input in that as well. You know, demographics, attitude and you know we have a traditional program here. Common sense tells you that expectations have to be different but I think some expectations should be the same." Several of the participants thought that state expectations were good for everyone to have but also felt that it was important to look at what each parish was doing.

With a somewhat different opinion, some of the participants felt that the job expectations should be determined only on a parish by parish basis with no expectation statewide. One of the agents stated,

I was going to say, I think these have to be unique to an agent's parish because I never understood until I had worked, and it probably only took me six months to figure out that sixty-four parishes in Louisiana means sixty-four different 4-H programs, sixty-four different ways of running your advisory, sixty-four different ways of involving volunteers, not involving volunteers, you know, even region to region has changed I think so much. I think a lot of it has to do...it goes back to that parish make up. is it more rural, is it more urban, what is the make-up of your clientele.

In a similar response an agent stated, "I definitely don't think it should be statewide. I think it should be based on parish by parish. As far as how to determine it, basically look at what each parish does. I mean I think you should be evaluated on the work that you do." Another participant thought that the regional 4-H coordinator should sit down and help determine what the expectation plan is. She stated,

Well I think your regional coordinator should sit down with you and between the two of you, you know, plan, this is what we expect of, is this what you are thinking, the same thing because right now it guess it's state wide. I don't think It should be a state wide one because it is so different in all these parishes and I mean, and it may certain things too, I mean, I know you got the job expectations, but, still when you are by yourself and you got other agents, if you got two or three agents in another parish...I think it would work better if the regional coordinator, the regional 4-H Coordinator sat down and said, OK, this is what I have put together myself as far as job expectations for your parish, as you as the 4-H agent and let's go over them.

Only a few of the participants felt that the same expectations should be followed statewide. The first participant stated, "It would probably be good to have the consistency of being state wide and you know this is going to be the expectation here, the expectation there. I would say consistency yet if it's it like this here and just be the

same way across the state because once you go changing this for this parish or have a different set of this for this parish; it's just not going to work." In a parallel response another participant stated, "It should all be the same because right now there are probably parishes right now that probably get the modified edition. No, we should all have the same and we should all have the same time frame to get there because otherwise they will never get anywhere". In the current situation, all of the 4-H Agents across the state of Louisiana have the same expectation to follow. It is currently on a statewide basis with no input on a parish by parish basis.

### **Communicating Job Expectations**

Participants had a few different opinions when it came to the question of how job expectations should be communicated to agents. The three procedures that were discussed included: Through interviews (the hiring process), during New Agent Orientation and meetings at the start of employment. The most common response was through agent interviews. One agent replied,

I think when you are hired, you know, of course when you are hired and then you come in you know you need to be aware of those expectations are. I mean some of it can be done when we do interviews. Some of that you know is talked about somewhat in there at the beginning. You should be aware of what your expectation is. I don't think it needs to be first brought up when you are being evaluated. I mean, cause then it's like well, I wish I would have known this all along. You know what you are working toward or working for. I mean I think definitely I think it's something that maybe needs to be revisited you know throughout your employment and if things need to be adjusted or anything that needs to happen.

In a similar response, another agent replied,

You know I think we do a poor job with interviews. We still do those same questions. This makes no sense; we are doing the same questions we did when I interviewed. I really just doesn't apply right now, to me it doesn't. I don't know, but when somebody gets the job, we are just not doing a good job of telling them the job expectations. They get in the job and say I didn't know I was gonna have

to do that. It may be that a sheet like that or something similar can be given to them and they say this includes doing this, but not limited to this. I don't know how you can, but is it possible to do it before they are hired? I mean, I don't know because when they are hired you give them this list and they go, I didn't know I was going to be involved in this and that. We already have so many forms for them to fill out but I mean, I know it's when we are doing interviews for 4-H agents we touch on several of these things, but we don't ever really get to the meat of it.

Another participant felt that agents should know what to expect when they take the job when she said, "When you get hired, no, before you get hired. Look this is what I am expecting you to do. Do you agree with it, do you see yourself doing this? Then, I think once you get hired give it to them once again and say ok, you said you were going to do this, here you go, make sure you do it. Like I said, before you get hired and when you get hired. You got'em before, you know what you had to do before you got hired and we still expect you to do those things. I mean, that's fair, you knew from the beginning, up front." In a comparable response another agent responded, "Agents should see job expectations for the first orientation or possibly even before they are hired, you know what I mean. That gives you a great idea, like do you think that you could perform all of these? Even towards the end of the interview say, here are our job expectations, take it home, look it over and if we decide to choose you as our candidate this will give you a good idea of what to expect." Another agent had the same thought when she stated, "From the very beginning, when they are interviewing I think they need to know exactly what's expected of them". I know for my interview I didn't have a clue I had to do all those things. I learned through the years you know, but I don't even know if this was even introduced until years later. So, yeah, I think they need to know from the get go what is expected of them and if they can deliver those things and if they can't then

maybe this is not the job for them.” Many of the agents felt that they should know what is expected of them even before they are offered the job.

Another group of agents felt that new agent orientation would be the appropriate time to introduce agents to job expectations. One agent stated, “In these new agent orientation things, because if you don’t get it from whatever you call the higher up people then it’s left up to somebody like me to train her. The job is so fast paced and so, we are flying by the seat of our pants too, agents in the parish. I feel fortunate that I had an agent train me. Some agents don’t have that. Some agents do not have that.” In a related response, another agent stated, “I think if you are a new agent this needs to be covered at new agent orientation. I understand you know they are there to meet other agents but this needs to be concrete. It needs to be taught to them at this time. I think even if you are a seasoned agent that a refresher is not a bad thing.” Other agents mentioned new agent orientation as a good time to do this but then felt that it would be too late; they should be given at an earlier time.

The last option that was discussed in regards to communicating job expectations was when the agent is first hired. One of the agents stated, “I think when we first start it should be introduced, but it should be introduced again because you know when you first start its overwhelming. You have all this information and now maybe a year of two later, maybe I really know what you are talking about.” Another agent described why it should be done early on instead of waiting for new agent orientation when he stated,

It has to be when the regional coordinator meets with the agent at first. As soon as the agent meets with the regional coordinator it needs to be done. Do not try to wait until new agent orientation. Those things are spread out so far that a lot of agents get on the job training way before your first orientation. I think there needs to be a special orientation, like a new hire orientation for just agents and not just AgCenter personnel in general. When they first get hired, whether they get hired

on in the summer, or the middle of the school year, whatever time of year, this needs to be stressed right away because they might be in the middle of programs that need to keep going. They need to understand real quick what is expected of them.

Communication is a key element in any organization or job situation. Knowing what is expected of you from the beginning can lead to a more successful program.

## **CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND RECCOMENDATIONS**

### **Purpose and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study is to examine perceptions related to job expectations as described by 4-H agents in the state of Louisiana. The study will explore feelings, skills and knowledge associated with job expectations. The objectives of the study were the following:

1. What is Louisiana 4-H Agent's knowledge of job expectations?
2. What are Louisiana 4-H Agent's perceptions of job expectations?
3. What skills do Louisiana 4-H Agents associate with job expectations?
4. How do Louisiana 4-H Agents believe job expectations should be determined?

### **Procedures**

The participants for this study included LSU AgCenter Extension 4-H agents who work in the various parishes in the state of Louisiana. The state is divided into 5 regions which include Northeast, Northwest, Central, Southwest and Southeast Regions. Two agents from each region were identified to take part in the study. Because it is believed that all of the participants have had the same phenomenon that is being studied, a purposeful sampling strategy was used. Two of the 4-H agents interviewed were male and eight were female. They are all professionals in the area of Youth Development. Purposeful selection was done based on the defining demographics of gender, years of service and whether parish is rural or urban. Years of service was determined by a mix of agents having eight or more years and agents having less than eight years. Within the promotion process of the LSU AgCenter Extension Service, if requirements are met, agents can be promoted at eight years of service. Rural areas consist of non-

metropolitan areas with fewer than 2500 people (Economic Research Service, 2015). Urban relates to a city of 50,000 people or more (Economic Research Service, 2015). Saturation was reached with the interviews of ten agents.

The researcher conducted interviews with the participants. The participants were contacted through phone calls and emails to set up interviews. Some of the interviews took place at the parish office of the 4-H agent and other locations that they felt comfortable meeting. Because the researcher is employed by the same organization as the participants, the researcher takes steps to establish trust. An interview protocol was used which consisted of determining date, time and place of the interview. Before the interviews began, the researcher discussed confidentiality. Participants received an explanation of the steps taken to ensure confidentiality such as the IRB process and consent form and their identity not being revealed. The purpose of the research was explained. In this discussion, the researcher informed participants of the importance of giving honest answers to the questions and how this could benefit them in their jobs by applying some of the ideas and changes that they express. Once the interview began, specific questions that were determined prior to the interview were used (Refer to Appendix A). Once the interview began, participants were given a copy of the job expectation sheet that was being used (Refer to Appendix B).

## **Conclusions, Implications and Recommendations**

### **Theme 1: Agent Accountability**

It is very evident that 4-H agents feel that other co-workers may not be held to the same standards as others. Many of the participants revealed that some parishes do the minimum to get by while others struggle to make sure they are meeting all

expectations. Others feel that agents are not showing up when help is needed at certain events. Agent accountability can be viewed negatively when agents don't feel that everyone is held to the same standards. The lack of accountability of some agents has a direct relationship to the negative attitudes of others. It is also evident that participants felt there was nothing in place to implement consequences of agents who are not accountable. In a study conducted on accountability and organizational characteristics it showed us that although accountability is essential to an organization, these measures of accountability are not always present and are not always implemented (Ferris, Dulebohn, Frink, George-Falvy, Mitchell, & Matthews, 1997). It is necessary to make sure the proper degree of accountability is determined by achieving a good balance between too much and not enough (Ferris et al, 1997).

Implications for practice include addressing agent accountability. It is important that employees be held accountable for not meeting program expectations, lack of participation in required events and activities, and poor job performance in general. In order to do this, an expectation should be added to the Job Expectation sheet which actually states "Agent Accountability." This heading should clarify the events and programs that agents need to attend as well as programs they are required to offer. Agent participation in regional events should also be evaluated and outlined. Goal setting should also be implemented to determine the direction of the program as well as challenge agents to achieve standards of excellence. Additional studies can be done to determine how attitudes toward agent accountability affect program quality. When agents don't feel that their coworkers are held to the same standards, and their attitudes change, it could essentially affect their own programs. As Schleicher et al (2015)

pointed out, because job attitudes can predict behaviors which are essential to organizations, its relevance is very important. To ensure organizational effectiveness, it is recommended by the researcher that agent accountability should be consistent across the state. Due to the downsizing issues with the AgCenter, we must address these changes and modify what agent accountability looks like. Organizational effectiveness is present when employee behaviors are consistent with role expectations (Judge & Kammyer-Mueller, 2012). When employees have positive attitudes about their jobs they are more likely to adhere to expectations which in turn leads to successful outputs for the organization.

## **Theme 2: 4-H Agent Turnover**

It is becoming evident that the 4-H program is losing 4-H Extension Agents at an alarming rate. Regional 4-H Coordinators indicated that over ten agents quit this summer over a three month time span. In a study done by Harder, Gouldthorpe & Goodwin (2014), they describe agent turnover as a chronic challenge. Studies have shown that job satisfaction and the highest turnover rate is among 4-H agents (Whaples, 1983). Conversations with these agents who have left suggest that the turnover relates to agents finding more appealing jobs, lack of job satisfaction, burnout and poor job performance. Interviewees who are still working in the 4-H program voiced their concern over the agent turnover. Agents feel that they are often put in stressful situations and they are also experiencing burn out in their jobs. In the present situations agents are asked to attend five or more overnight trips per year. Many agents feel that they can find jobs that don't require as much time away from home and family. Several studies have been done on agent turnover and retention. One study done by Safrit and

Owen (2010) identifies a retention model that categorizes seven themes for retaining extension professionals. The themes identified in the model include: recruiting authentically and communicate actual expectations, expand on experience and ability of employees, provided adequate training, Advocate to ensure employee will grow and learn in their new position, empower employees, which enable them to thrive, support the building of networks, and showing appreciation through intrinsic and extrinsic recognition (Safrit & Owen, 2010). This model mirrors some of the ideas that agents expressed during interviews on the topic of agent turnover.

An Implication for practice includes determining the need of 4-H agents in the areas of work-life balance. Safrit and Owen (2010) tell us that one reason for agents leaving the extension organization is the high requirement of agents having to work nights and weekends. Employees should be given a voice in expressing what their needs are and in turn how these needs can be addressed by the organization. Additional research can be done with agents who resign to determine the reasons they leave. This could be done through exit interviews. Interviews could also be administered to agents who are terminated to find out why they felt they were not successful in fulfilling job expectations.

Research tells us that in order to appeal and hold on to capable employees with good qualifications, organizations must meet their needs through positive work environments that appeal to their motivation and well-being (Fernet et al, 2012). It is necessary that we learn what motivates employees. Linder (1998) tells us that it is important that the managers of employees understand their needs and what motivates them to perform their jobs. Linder's (1998) descriptive study revealed that motivating

factors of employees include: interesting work, good pay, employee appreciation, favorable working conditions, opportunities for promotion and growth, commitment to employees, sensitive and discreet discipline and compassion with personal issues. In order to satisfy employees in relation to the tremendous workload of extension agents, it is recommended by the researcher that an official comp/flex time policy be incorporated as all agents do not currently receive this. Training should be offered in the training on work-life balance to teach agents a healthy balance of the two. Because the foundation of extension is built on research-based information, internal issues should also be addressed by research-based information (Harder et al, 2014).

### **Theme 3: Not Meeting Expectations or Expectations Too High**

Most of the participants expressed that expectations were too high, they were not meeting expectations or they were not realistic. Some of the participants felt that they were doing a little of each expectation but not doing 100% on all of them. There continues to be a struggle for agents in meeting job expectations. Although they may understand them, they still struggle with the task of trying to do them all and do them well.

The extension administration should determine an improved method of determining job expectations which can include input from state level as well as parish level. Bradley, Driscoll & Bardon (2012) identify ways to reduce stress related stress. By reducing these stressors, it can help agents to be more focused when it comes to meeting job expectations. Some of the topics identified were: balancing work and family life, taking responsibility for career development, focus on specific program areas, define needs and meet with support staff and volunteers to help, stay organized, build

and foster relationships with community, be professional, identify funding resources, evaluate use of time, streamline to a specific focus and address problems quickly (Bradley et al, 2012). Agents should remember these specific ideas when expectations become overwhelming. In addition to these specific concepts, an evaluation of each parish should be conducted to determine specific expectations for each parish program. In addition to parish evaluations, other qualitative studies could be conducted in order for agents to voice their opinions of specific areas that their job expectations should cover. By doing this it gives the agent buy-in by allowing them to have a voice in what their programs will entail. Because of the facets of the job, it is very easy for new extension employees to become overwhelmed (Saunders & Reese, 2011). Job expectations should be put in place but it is recommended that the way job expectations be determined be evaluated by administration. Demographics and number of agents per parish should be taken into consideration when determining these.

#### **Theme 4: Workload**

Workload has always been an issue for agents that date far back. Although it may be explained to agents when they are hired what the job entails, they don't get the full picture of the true expectation of the job. Many agents have indicated that it takes three years to learn and understand the job. Most thought that they were being asked too much as far as workload. Some thought the expectations were too high and that they were continually being asked to do more. When workload becomes overwhelming it fosters the loss of job satisfaction. While working long hours, nights and weekends, the issue of trying to have a healthy family-work balance also surfaces. Work/life issues were studied and results indicated that these issues are of great concern to extension

employees (Kutilek, Conklin, & Gunderson, 2002). The results of the study indicated significant consistencies with the results of this study. The most serious challenges identified in Kutilek et al (2002) studies were heavy workload, evening and weekend responsibilities, and lack of control or job independence.

Implications for practice include having agents go through the letting go process which will guide them in determining low impact and high impact programs. This will allow agents to decide which programs are relevant to the needs of the youth of their parishes. A qualitative study with agent input could provide relevant information to help determine exactly what areas of the job prove to be the toughest in terms of workload and burn. It is also very important to communicate to employees before they are hired, the volume of work that is associated with the job of a 4-H agent. It is recommended by the research to look at things that can actually be removed from the letting go process and don't penalize agents if they determine it is not beneficial to their program. Other strategies to consider include compensation time, telecommuting and flexible work schedules.

### **Theme 5: Understanding of Expectations**

Throughout the interviews participants felt that they didn't always know what was expected of them. Because there were so many expectations it was hard to decipher which expectations took priorities over the other. They also thought that the job expectations needed to be better explained in order to understand them. Although understanding was a negative perception, there were positive attitudes toward the need for job expectations. It was apparent that participants saw value in having job expectations. The understanding of job expectations plays a crucial role in the success

of an agent as a youth development professional. Irvin & Meyer (1994) state that the met-expectations hypothesis proposes that an employee's expectation of the job before they are employed confirmation of employees' pre-employment expectations about the nature of their jobs leads to a greater level of job satisfaction and a higher level of commitment to the organization and of job satisfaction and therefore less likelihood of leaving the job. This leads to the question of when job expectations should be discussed.

Job expectations should be discussed during the interview process, then again at first meeting with regional coordinator and again at new agent orientation. At new agent orientation the training should be structured in a way that enough time is dedicated to train agents on how to fulfill the expectations. A more concise training should be developed to ensure the understanding of these expectations by agents. Success of the agents will depend on their understanding of job expectations. Further research can be done to determine if a relationship between training on job expectations and successful programming. It is recommended that job expectations should be looked at more frequently and early on the career path. The job expectation sheet should be referred to on a regular basis. A more concise training should be developed to ensure the understanding of these expectations by agents. It is the responsibility of the organization to provide proper training for agents to fully understand job expectations. In order for employees to be competent and successful, they need to acquire the knowledge and skills in this evolving profession (Hahn & Raley, 1998).

## **Theme 6: Numbers (Quantity vs Quality)**

Associated with the job expectations of 4-H Agents are numbers. The numbers expectation is present in state and regional events as well as enrollment. Several of the participants reverted back to “numbers” as being a very negative association with their jobs. One way to avoid using numbers to measure impact is to improve writing impact reports. Virginia Cooperative Extension Service responded to this need by providing strategies to enhance reporting (Franz & McCann, 2007). In order to improve writing impact reports the following things were implemented: new faculty hires which focused on programming, administration and faculty training, individual and small group technical assistance, development of reporting tools and tying impact reporting to performance and recognition (Franz & McCann, 2007). If extension agents are taught how to measure and report their program impacts, this could take the burden off of constantly looking at numbers.

There is a disconnect between state and field office. Administrators should strive to have a better understanding of the quality programming that is delivered in parishes. It is critical that administrators increase their understanding of employee motivations and their need to seek other employment. One way to ensure understanding is for state office to visit programs delivered in parish settings. Further research should be done to determine if a high quality program has a higher retention rate of youth as compared to a program that focuses on quantity of numbers. 4-H parish programs should be evaluated on quality of program rather than quantity. Agents should be given proper training to properly measure impacts of their programs.

There was an overall consistency in in the themes in this research when it came to the agent accountability, agent turnover, understanding of expectations, and workload. Many concerns were expressed in these areas. These should be addressed by the organization to ensure job satisfaction of employees and organizational effectiveness.

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## APPENDIX A: JOB EXPECTATION SHEET

Innovate Educate Improve Lives

We are leaders in research-based education that addresses critical needs in Louisiana communities. In an effort to develop Louisiana youth into productive citizens and leaders of future generations, and to encourage the public, elected officials and the school systems to view 4-H youth and family development as essential in the development of youth, the following criteria are encouraged to become a part of all parish programs. Distributed by the LSU AGCenter 4-H youth Development Department.

1. **Functioning Advisory Committee** – One annual meeting/year expected with youth voice included and stakeholder led; includes feedback and report on previously identified issues; top three issues identified, program planned to address issue(s) and program evaluated. – *Adheres to Policy Letter # 22*
2. **Variety of delivery modes utilized: Club Enrollment** - based on established goal for parish using potential reach Includes school based clubs (4-H, EFNEP, Cloverbuds), community clubs, project clubs **Project based programs/clubs at parish level** - Project based workshops & contests, etc. (Examples - Jr. Leadership, Shooting Sports, Horse, Photography, Food & Fitness, Rabbit, SET, etc.) *Suggested Minimum of 2 project clubs and 4 workshops*  
**4-H Enrichment Participation-** Examples– School Gardens, Science based, YEP, Ag Awareness Smart Bodies, YWW, After-school
3. **Participation in regional and state events:**  
**\*4-H U Participation \*Summer 4-H Camp Participation**  
**-Beyond Summer 4-H Camp and 4-HU-** Cultivates support of club enrollment through participation in regional and state programs, events and activities (camping, leadership opportunities, contests, trainings/educational programs)  
**Suggested Parish Participation** – Minimum participation in 4 events to include 4-H Day at the Capitol and JLC.
4. **Professional Development/ Professionalism** - Agent is involved in regional and state committees, accepts leadership roles at regional, state and national levels, presents at meetings, active in professional organization(s) Suggested Actions- Extension Professional Organization active membership and attend professional conference, at least one committee assignment or leadership role, one presentation in a professional development setting to include but not limited to LAE4-HA, agent/faculty trainings at regional or state levels, volunteer trainings, etc.
5. **Volunteer Development and Community Relations** – Networks and builds relationships with volunteers and community. Both youth and adult volunteers take on a variety of leadership roles. Adheres to Policy Letter #23

6. **Teamwork / Innovativeness/Collaboration** – Agent is involved in issue based parish and regional programs which incorporate different areas of AgCenter programming  
Expected Actions –Team members will exhibit mutual respect and communication with each other, and report team accomplishments and impact of at least one major program appropriate for yearly reviews and marketing the parish program.
7. **Service-Learning** - Incorporates service-learning into some aspect of the parish based program. Can be implemented through club, enrichment, etc.  
Suggested Action – Follows service-learning guidelines and complete state service-learning report
8. **Evaluation/ Reporting of Impacts to Governing Bodies** – Agent develops parish based evaluations as well as being involved in regional and state level evaluations. Agent supports school system's accountability efforts (core competencies, etc.) and maintains a relationship with school system, other governing bodies, and stakeholders. Expected Action – Completes one parish based program evaluation, one state level program evaluation and submits report annually to governing bodies.
9. **Diversity** - The LSU Agricultural Center hereby states that no person, on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, handicap, or veteran's status, shall be discriminated against. Thus the 4-H program should be strengthened and expanded to assure that all eligible youth are afforded opportunities. Reach of parish program should mirror parish demographics within 5% +/- . Adhere to Policy Letters #23 and #23a

## **APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

The following questions were used during the interview protocol:

1. Describe your work.
  - a. What do you feel are the expectations related to your work?
- Hand out job expectation sheet after 1<sup>st</sup> question
2. Are the job expectations clear and do you understand them?
3. Describe your feelings about meeting job expectations?
  - a. What do you feel is positive about having job expectations?
  - b. What do you feel is negative about having job expectations?
4. What do you think are the skills needed to meet job expectations?
  - a. What parts of the job do you perform well?
  - b. What parts of the job do you struggle with?
5. How do you think your job expectations should be determined?
  - a. Are there any job expectations that should be on this list but are not?  
What are they and why?
  - b. Are there any job expectations that are on this list but should not be?  
What are they and why?
  - c. How should the job expectations be communicated to agents?

## **APPENDIX C: PARISH LIST BY REGION**

### **Central Region Parishes**

Allen Portal  
Avoyelles  
Beauregard  
Evangeline  
Grant  
LaSalle  
Point Coupee  
Rapides  
St. Landry  
Vernon

### **Northeast Region Parishes**

Caldwell  
Catahoula  
Concordia  
East Carroll  
Franklin  
Madison  
Morehouse  
Ouachita  
Richland  
Tensas  
Union  
West Carroll

### **Northwest Region Parishes**

Bienville  
Bossier  
Caddo  
Claiborne  
DeSoto  
Jackson  
Lincoln  
Natchitoches  
Red River  
Sabine  
Webster  
Winn

### **Southeast Region Parishes**

Ascension  
East Baton Rouge  
East Feliciana

Jefferson  
Livingston  
Orleans  
Plaquemines  
St. Bernard  
St. Charles  
St. Helena  
St. James  
St. John  
St. Tammany  
Tangipahoa  
Washington  
West Feliciana

**Southwest Region Parishes**

Acadia  
Assumption  
Calcasieu  
Cameron  
Iberville  
Jefferson Davis  
Lafayette  
Lafourche  
St. Martin  
St. Mary  
Terrebonne  
Vermilion  
West Baton Rouge

## APPENDIX D: IRB APPROVAL AND CONSENT FORM

1



mkeenan@agctr.lsu.edu

LSU AgCenter Institutional Review Board (IRB)  
Dr. Michael J. Keenan, Chair  
School of Human Ecology  
209 Knapp Hall  
225-578-1708

### Application for Exemption from Institutional Oversight

All research projects using living humans as subjects, or samples or data obtained from humans must be approved or exempted in advance by the LSU AgCenter IRB. This form helps the principal investigator determine if a project may be exempted, and is used to request an exemption.

- Applicant, please fill out the application in its entirety and include the completed application as well as parts A-E, listed below, when submitting to the LSU AgCenter IRB. Once the application is completed, please submit the original and one copy to the chair, Dr. Michael J. Keenan, in 209 Knapp Hall.
  - A Complete Application Includes All of the Following:
    - (A) The original and a copy of this completed form and a copy of parts B through E.
    - (B) A brief project description (adequate to evaluate risks to subjects and to explain your responses to Parts 1 & 2)
    - (C) Copies of all instruments and all recruitment material to be used.
      - If this proposal is part of a grant proposal, include a copy of the proposal.
    - (D) The consent form you will use in the study (see part 3 for more information)
    - (E) Beginning January 1, 2009: Certificate of Completion of Human Subjects Protection Training for all personnel involved in the project, including students who are involved with testing and handling data, unless already on file with the LSU AgCenter IRB.
- Training link: (<http://grants.nih.gov/grants/policy/hs/training.htm>)

1) Principal Investigator: Renee Castro Rank: Agent Student? yes

Dept: HRE Ph: 225-936-7327 E-mail: rcastro@agcenter.lsu.edu

2) Co-Investigator(s): please include department, rank, phone and e-mail for each

- If student as principal or co-investigator(s), please identify and name supervising professor in this space  
Dr. Melissa Cater,  
225-578-2903  
[mcater@agcenter.lsu.edu](mailto:mcater@agcenter.lsu.edu)  
Dept: AEEE

3) Project Title: A Phenomenological Study of Louisiana 4-H Agents Perceived Job Expectations

4) Grant Proposal?(yes or no) no If Yes, Proposal Number and funding Agency

Also, if Yes, either: this application completely matches the scope of work in the grant Y/N

OR

more IRB applications will be filed later Y/N

5) Subject pool (e.g. Nutrition Students) LSU AgCenter Extension 4-H Agents

- Circle any "vulnerable populations" to be used: (children<18, the mentally impaired, pregnant women, the aged, other). Projects with incarcerated persons cannot be exempted.

6) PI signature  \*\*Date  (no per signatures)

**\*\*I certify that my responses are accurate and complete.** If the project scope or design is later changed I will resubmit for review. I will obtain written approval from the Authorized Representative of all non-LSU AgCenter institutions in which the study is conducted. I also understand that it is my responsibility to maintain copies of all consent forms at the LSU AgCenter for three years after completion of the study. If I leave the LSU AgCenter before that time the consent forms should be preserved in the Departmental Office.

Committee Action: Exempted ☒ Not Exempted ☐ IRB# HE 16-9

Reviewer Michael Keenan Signature Michael Keenan Date 5-18-2016

### Part 1: Determination of "Research" and Potential for Risk

- This section determines whether the project meets the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) definition of research involving human subjects, and if not, whether it nevertheless presents more than "minimal risk" to human subjects that makes IRB review prudent and necessary.

**1. Is the project involving human subjects a systematic investigation, including research, development, testing, or evaluation, designed to develop and contribute to generalizable knowledge?**

(Note some instructional development and service programs will include a "research" component that may fall within HHS' definition of human subject research)

☒ **Yes**

☐ **No**

**2. Does the project present physical, psychological, social or legal risks to the participants reasonably expected to exceed those risks normally experienced in daily life or in routine physical or psychological examination or testing? You must consider the consequences if individual data inadvertently become public.**

☐ **Yes Stop.** This research cannot be exempted—submit application for full IRB review.

☒ **No Continue** to see if research can be exempted from IRB oversight.

**3. Are any of your subjects incarcerated?**

☐ **Yes Stop.** This research cannot be exempted—submit application for full IRB review.

☒ **No Continue** to see if research can be exempted from IRB oversight.

**4. Are you obtaining any health information from a health care provider that contains any of the identifiers listed below?**

A. Names

APPROVED BY  
LSU AG CENTER  
IRB AS HF 16-9  
ON 5-18-2016

Appendix C – Consent Form

1. Study Title: A Phenomenological Study of Louisiana 4-H Agents Perceived Job Expectations
2. Performance Site: Louisiana State University Agricultural Center
3. Investigators: The following investigators are available for questions about this study on M-F, 8:00 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.  
Renee Castro, 225-936-7327  
Dr. Melissa Cater, 225-578-2903
4. Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this study is to examine perceptions related to job expectations as described by 4-H Agents in the state of Louisiana. The study will explore feelings, skills and knowledge associated with job expectations.
5. Participant Inclusion: Individuals who are employed by the LSU AgCenter and serve in the Position of 4-H Agents throughout the state of Louisiana.  
Participants will be chosen by years of service and parish location.
6. Number of participants: 10
7. Benefits: There are no anticipated direct benefits to individuals participating in this study.
8. Risks: There are no anticipated risks to individuals participating in this study other than those encountered in daily life.
9. Right to Refuse: Participants may choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss of any benefit to which they might otherwise be entitled.
10. Privacy: Results of this study may be published, but no names or identifying information will be included in the publication. Participant identity will remain confidential unless disclosure is required by law.
11. Signatures:

I understand the above information and have had all of my questions about participation on this research project answered. I may direct additional questions regarding study Renee Castro, 225-936-7327, [rcastro@agcenter.lsu.edu](mailto:rcastro@agcenter.lsu.edu) or Dr. Melissa Cater, 225-578-2903, [mcater@agcenter.lsu.edu](mailto:mcater@agcenter.lsu.edu). If I have questions about participants' rights or other concerns, I can contact Dr. Phillip Elzer, Institutional Review Board, (225) 578-4182, [elzer@agcenter.lsu.edu](mailto:elzer@agcenter.lsu.edu). I agree to participate in this study described above.

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Participant's Signature

## **VITA**

Renee Castro is a native of South Louisiana. She graduated from Thibodaux High School in 1992. Renee attended Nicholls State University, graduating in May 1996 with a Bachelor of Science degree in Agribusiness. She worked for Cane Machinery and Engineering Company (CAMECO Ind.) during high school and college. She began working on her Master's degree in August 1996.

Renee joined the LSU AgCenter in Assumption Parish as an Assistant County Agent in November 1997. She and her co-worker oversaw the 4-H Youth Development Program. In December 1996, Renee completed her Master of Science degree in Vocational Education at Louisiana State University. In 2008 she was promoted to Regional 4-H Coordinator of the Southeast Region.

As Renee has continued her education, she considers herself a life long learner and began to pursue her doctorate in 2013 from Louisiana State University. She is a candidate to receive her degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the fall commencement ceremony in December 2016.