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Assessing Extension Educators' Motivation for Program Evaluation Using Self Determination Theory

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Abstract. Studies have shown the importance of program evaluation in Extension and its value in communicating Extension program successes. This current study was conducted to assess Extension educators' motivation toward program evaluation using the self-determination theory. Respondents perceived that they were not competent enough to engage in program evaluation but greatly valued program evaluation. Further analysis of our theory-informed survey data revealed that perceived competence and value positively predicted interest in program evaluation. Our findings contribute to Extension professional development discourse.

INTRODUCTION

Program evaluation among Cooperative Extension System educators is often emphasized to meet reporting and accountability requirements (Rennekamp & Engle, 2008) and to communicate the value of Extension (Franz, 2011). Extension systems often hire individuals who serve as program evaluation resources to Extension educators. These individuals are sometimes not able to work with every program for lack of time and limited capacity. Therefore, limited resources continue to be a barrier to program evaluation practices within Extension (Arnold, 2006). Building capacities among Extension educators is one way to mitigate the negative impact of limited resources on Extension program evaluation (Radhakrishna & Martin, 1999). Wise (2017) also acknowledged that Extension educators have a critical role to play in evaluating Extension programs. With adequate training, Extension educators will be able to measure and document their program outcomes and impacts (Radhakrishna & Martin, 1999; Wise, 2017).

Although the literature suggests capacity building as a means of improving program evaluation skills among Extension professionals (Radhakrishna & Martin, 1999; Arnold, 2006; Wise, 2017; Franz & Archibald, 2018), less apparent are studies that focus on underlying concepts that are precursory to program evaluation behaviors. These precursors include Extension educators' attitude and motivation toward program evaluation. In their study of 4-H educators, Lekies and Bennett (2011) found that 42% of their total respondents had mixed feelings toward evaluation.

The evaluation team at West Virginia University (WVU) Extension embarked on an evaluation capacity building effort for Extension educators. We developed a systematic program evaluation course catalog using the program development model by Conklin (1997) as a framework. Conklin's program development model emphasizes planning, design and implementation, and evaluation. We trained our Extension educators on designing evaluations, measuring outcomes, analyzing data, and reporting program success. While it was important to build evaluation capacities among our educators, we argued that it was necessary to understand Extension educators' motivation toward program evaluation if a sustainable evaluation practice is to be achieved. We approached this study with the intention of learning about our Extension educators' motivation, and using the findings to inform future professional development opportunities and recommend organizational changes.

We situated our inquiry on a theoretical concept called the Self-Determination Theory (SDT). SDT was developed by Deci and Ryan (1987) and has been applied to motivation studies across several disciplines, particularly in education. SDT posits that individuals will engage in a behavior or carry out a task through two routes of motivation: Intrinsic and Extrinsic. Individuals are intrinsically motivated when they carry out the task based on interest or enjoyment, resulting in high quality performance (Deci & Ryan, 1987). In contrast, individuals who are extrinsically motivated respond to rewards or reinforcements, thereby resulting in a contingent and minimal performance (Deci & Ryan, 1987). According

to SDT, intrinsic motivation is precursory to a state of being self-determined in carrying out a task (Ryan & Deci, 2000a). Based on the arguments of the SDT, we posited that intrinsic motivation would result in a sustainable evaluation practice among our Extension educators. The objectives of this study, therefore, were to:

1. Describe Extension educators' perceived competence, interest, value, and effort toward program evaluation.
2. Assess whether Extension educators' perceived effort, value, and competence predict intrinsic motivation toward program evaluation.
3. Identify factors that motivate Extension educators toward program evaluation.
4. Identify barriers that hinder Extension educators from evaluating their programs.

METHODS

This study was approved by the WVU Institution Review Board. The unit of this study is all Extension educators within WVU Extension. Extension educators were contacted through email to explain the intent of the study and to solicit their participation. The Intrinsic Motivation Inventory (IMI) developed by the Center for Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000a) was used as a tool to assess the self-reported measure of Extension educators' motivation toward program evaluation. The IMI tool includes items that measure seven variables, but we decided to use four variables that address the research questions we posed.

The four variables of interest in this study are interest, perceived competence, value, and effort. Cronbach's alpha for the scales were .918, .930, .931, and .870 respectively. We defined interest as the extent to which Extension educators are intrinsically motivated towards program evaluation. Perceived competence is the ability of Extension educators to evaluate their programs. Value is the perception of Extension educators on the usefulness of evaluation to their program. Lastly, effort was operationally defined as the time, energy, and resources Extension educators commit to program evaluation activities. The four variables were measured using a seven-point Likert-type scale (1= very untrue, 2= untrue, 3= somewhat untrue, 4= neutral, 5= somewhat true, 6= true, and 7= very true). Items measuring each of the variables were adapted to fit the context of our inquiry. Respondents indicated their agreement with the items. Table 2 highlights examples of items measuring each of the variables.

We also asked survey respondents open-ended questions on program evaluation motivational factors and barriers. We used Qualtrics to administer the survey for convenience and easy data collection process. We sent out two reminders at two-week intervals to encourage a good response rate. The response rate was 60% (n= 73), and we had 66 usable responses. We ran descriptive and multiple regression analyses on closed-ended questions and thematic analysis on open-ended questions. Our survey targeted all Extension educators in our system. Respondents were mostly female and about half identified as 4-H educators (see Table 1).

RESULTS

OBJECTIVE 1: DESCRIBE EXTENSION EDUCATORS' PERCEIVED COMPETENCE, INTEREST, VALUE, AND EFFORT TOWARD PROGRAM EVALUATION.

Respondents mostly valued program evaluation, and this finding persisted when we broke our data down to career years (see Table 2 and Table 3). Perceived competence and interest were reportedly low.

OBJECTIVE 2: ASSESS WHETHER EXTENSION EDUCATORS' PERCEIVED COMPETENCE, VALUE, AND EFFORT PREDICT INTRINSIC MOTIVATION TOWARD PROGRAM EVALUATION.

$$INTEREST = \beta_0 + \beta_1 PERCOMP + \beta_2 EFFORT + \beta_3 VALUE + \mu_t$$

We hypothesized that perceived competence, value, and effort will positively predict intrinsic motivation. We used multiple regression analysis to test our hypothesis. The assumptions of normality, multicollinearity, and heteroskedasticity were met. Results showed that the three independent variables together explained 38.6% of the variance in intrinsic motivation (F (3,62) =14.644, p<.001). Looking at the individual contributions of the independent variables, result showed that

Table 1. Characteristics of Survey Respondents

Characteristic	N
Career Years in Extension	
Early (3 years or less)	16
Middle (4–10)	21
Late (>10 years)	29
Program Area	
ANR	18
4-H	31
FCD	17
Sex	
Male	17
Female	45
Prefer not to say	4

Note. n = 66.

Table 2. Variables, Sample Items, and Descriptive Result

Variables	Sample Items	*M*	*SD*
Perceived Competence	I think I am pretty good at evaluating my programs	3.81	1.36
Interest	I enjoy evaluating my Extension programs	3.87	1.32
Value	I think program evaluation is useful to Extension	6.28	0.94
Effort	I do not put much energy into program evaluation (R)	4.72	1.18

Table 3. Mean Scores on Study Variables According to Career Years

Years of Career	Perceived competence	Value	Effort	Interest
Early career	3.45	6.48	5.01	3.78
Mid-career	3.94	6.20	4.66	3.97
Late career	3.91	6.23	4.61	3.85

Table 4. Regression Coefficients of Perceived Competence, Value, and Effort on Intrinsic Motivation

Variables	*B*	*SE*	*t*	*p*	95%CI
Perceived competence	.43	.11	3.92	.001	[.21, .65]
Value	.35	.15	2.38	.020	[.07, .65]
Effort	.19	.14	1.36	.178	[-.09, .46]

perceived competence (β= .446, t=3.916, p<.001) and value (β= .251, t=2.382, p=.020) both positively predicted intrinsic motivation of Extension professionals toward engaging in program evaluation. Effort was not a significant predictor of intrinsic motivation (β= .166, t=1.361, p=0.178).

OBJECTIVE 3: IDENTIFY FACTORS THAT MOTIVATE EDUCATORS TOWARD PROGRAM EVALUATION.

Thematic analysis of open-ended question asking respondents to indicate factors that motivate them to evaluate their programs revealed three main themes: rewards and reporting mandates, program improvement and impact, and personal interests. Table 4 illustrates the themes and the sample quotes reflecting each of the themes.

OBJECTIVE 4: IDENTIFY BARRIERS THAT HINDER EDUCATORS FROM EVALUATING THEIR PROGRAMS.

Thematic analysis of open-ended questions asking respondents to indicate barriers to program evaluation revealed three main themes: time, lack of expertise, and lack of resources and technical assistance. Table 6 illustrates the themes and their reflecting sample quotes.

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND LIMITATIONS

The purpose of this study was to examine the motivation of Extension educators toward program evaluation. Educators' perceived competence and value were both significant positive predictors of intrinsic motivation, while effort was not a significant predictor. Furthermore, perceived competence predicted intrinsic motivation more than value. Looking at the descriptive scores of the four variables of interest in this study, we saw that perceived competence and interest mean scores were low overall among Extension educators regardless of their years of career (see Table 2). Results also indicated that overall, educators had a high mean score for value. We concluded that although Extension educators may value program evaluation, they still perceive that they are not competent enough to engage in it. This finding is similar to another study by Ghimire and Martin (2013), where Extension educators reported low competence and interest in program evaluation. We also found that mid and late-career educators contributed slightly less effort to program evaluation than early-career educators. This finding is probably

Table 5. Factors Motivating Program Evaluation

Themes	Frequency of Mention	Sample quotes
Rewards and reporting mandates	29	"Necessary for excellence in scholarship." "It is required as part of annual evaluation and promotion/tenure reviews."
Program improvement and impact	18	"To measure objectives and feedback from participants for program improvement." "To show the impacts of my programming."
Personal interests	8	"I want to know I'm actually making a difference." "They let me know if I am doing my job well."

Table 6. Barriers to Program Evaluation

Themes	Frequency of Mention	Sample quotes
Time	21	"I don't make time to do it often. I don't think about it ahead of time." "Time. As soon as one project wraps there are three others that need doing."
Lack of expertise	20	"Not always knowing what questions to ask in the evaluation without being leading or biased." "Lacking the knowledge and skills to develop an effective evaluation for programs."
Lack of resources and technical assistance	11	"Lack of available evaluation support." "Until recently, there were no good evaluation tools available to me."

because early career agents are still working towards tenure and thus need to show the impacts of their programs in faculty files. The increasing request for Extension program accountability (Franz, 2011) could have led to early career Extension educators getting more professional development opportunities on evaluation than their late career counterparts received in the past.

Our results are promising, and they have implications in the areas of Extension system policies and professional development, given the low level of interest and competence among Extension educators. Extension systems could advance professional development opportunities for educators. In addition to the pre-service and in-service training style commonly used in Extension to promote competence, educators can be encouraged to work with evaluation specialists as fellows on different program evaluation projects. This fellowship opportunity creates an experiential avenue for educators to be exposed to the different evaluation stages, from the design thinking stage to the reporting stage. Ghimire and Martin (2013) also suggested raising evaluation champions among Extension educators to improve competence levels and increase interest.

In this study, we also assessed whether perceived competence, value, and effort predicted intrinsic motivation toward program evaluation as posited by the SDT theory. We saw that educators in this study had low interest in program evaluation, meaning that they were not intrinsically motivated toward program evaluation. According to Ryan and Deci (1987; 2000b), intrinsic motivation ensures that an individual engages in a behavior and performs optimally and sustainably on the behavior. Given that program evaluation is one of the core competencies needed by Extension educators (Franz & Archibald, 2018), we suggest that Extension systems assess intrinsic motivation towards program evaluation among prospective Extension educators during interview process. Diaz et al. (2019) listed important program evaluation challenges faced by new Extension educators. The challenges the authors listed in their paper can be used to frame interview questions. For instance, the authors found that *determining program impacts and how to measure those* was an extremely important program evaluation challenge. Interviewers can ask interviewees questions such as, "How will you know if your educational program is impactful? Walk us through how you will determine the impact of your program." We hope that introducing such questions during interview may help interviewers to assess interviewees' intrinsic motivation towards program evaluation or, at least, their level of competence. Future research may explore how to assess intrinsic motivation during interview and onboarding process and/or how to attract prospective Extension educators who are intrinsically motivated towards program evaluation.

Although intrinsic motivation is the most stable source for consistent behavior performance (Ryan & Deci, 2000a), Extension can still support extrinsically motivated educators to conduct program evaluation. Qualitative data suggested that educators in this study are extrinsically motivated to a great extent toward program evaluation. We can understand extrinsic motivation as a continuum that runs from completely external and motivated by reward or punishment to a more internal form of carrying out behavior because of meeting the goals of a social group (Ryan & Deci, 2000a). Extrinsic motivators, such as tenure and promotions, rose to the top among motivators that were likely to influence program evaluation behavior among early-career educators in this study compared to mid-or late-career educators. This finding supports the "reward" end of the extrinsic motivation continuum. Extension administrators should continue defining program evaluation expectations necessary for promotion within the career ladder. For tenured educators, rewards or recognitions could be built into program evaluation efforts to keep them engaged in the practice long after tenure has been achieved.

Extrinsically motivated educators can be further supported by working with them to reach the other end of the extrinsic motivation continuum, i.e., an internalized form of being determined to perform a behavior to meet a collective goal. This support can be achieved by fostering a top-down "sense of relatedness" (Ryan & Deci, 2000b, p. 64) around program evaluation goals. Extension systems can foster a sense of relatedness by clearly communicating program evaluation expectations; developing a community of practice to create a sense of shared purpose; building trust among program unit leads, specialists, and agents; and celebrating evaluation project accomplishments. This shift in workplace culture could move educators along the continuum towards more internalized forms of extrinsic motivation. By building relatedness and competence in Extension systems around program evaluation goals, we believe Extension educators will move away from being entirely externally motivated to having internalized motivation for conducting program evaluation.

Finally, we did not reach a census sample in this study, meaning that those who participated volunteered to be part of the study. We acknowledge that the results of this study are those of the Extension system in which it was conducted. It will be interesting to replicate this study and its approach in other systems for a more holistic view of Extension educators' motivation toward program evaluation.

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