

Engagement Incentive Grant
“Engaging the Engagers: What Excites the University Extension Agent?”
Culbertson, Fullagar, Mills, & Warner
Final Report

I. Summary of activity

a. Thesis of project or need addressed.

“Engaging the Engagers: What Excites the University Extension Agent?” is a research project designed to understand how the individuals charged with engaging the community can be most effectively engaged in their own work, as this personal engagement can in turn impact those with whom they interact. More specifically, this research examines the contagion effects of engagement and stress that cooperative extension agents may experience in order to better understand the impact on others with whom the agents interact. Additionally, this research examines levels of work-family conflict for the agents in an effort to identify potential ways to increase satisfaction, productivity, and retention of agents.

As we stated in our initial proposal, we believe that our research substantially contributes to both the relevant literature and also to the (work and home) lives of extension agents throughout the state of Kansas. It can also be argued to impact the lives of people in communities throughout our state, in that extension agents’ work necessarily has important practical implications for engaging the various communities in which they live and work.

b. Location of project

In January 2008 we attended breakout sessions at four extension agent meetings throughout Kansas (in Garden City, Colby, Eureka, and Manhattan) in order to introduce ourselves to all agents as well as share the general purpose of our study, the importance of the study, the details of participation, and the requirements and benefits for participating in the study. Additionally, we took the time at these meetings to answer any questions that arose from agents and gathered input on specific obstacles they could foresee hindering their participation (e.g., limited access to internet while traveling), which we took steps to remedy before actual data collection (e.g., providing paper copies of surveys with postage-paid return envelopes for those agents needing such accommodations).

In the following month (February 2008), we began data collection, which was conducted online and by mail (with the paper copies and postage-paid return envelopes).

c. Length of project

We attended the breakout sessions during January 2009. We collected data during February 2009 (for approximately 3 weeks). Data analyses and write-up has taken place and continued to take place since then, along with presentations of findings at various conferences.

d. What type of action(s) did your project take?

i. Outreach

Our project was not an outreach-oriented project.

ii. Teaching (service learning)

Our project was not targeted at service learning / teaching. However, we did disseminate our findings to extension agents during a breakout session presented at the K-State University Research and Extension Annual Conference.

iii. Scholarly research

Our project was primarily targeted at scholarly research. As described later in this report, we were able to produce several papers for publication as well as papers/presentations for national conferences based on the data we obtained in this project.

iv. Training

This project was not aimed at training. However, as noted later in this report, Maura Mills has incorporated some of the findings from this study in the design of her dissertation, where she has essentially created an intervention based on the preliminary findings of this research. In particular, given the benefits that we found of having heightened psychological capital, she has developed an intervention targeted at enhancing the resiliency aspect of psychological capital as well as one targeted at enhancing well-being.

e. Who were the project partners?

i. University and Extension partners

Dr. Daryl Buchholz, Associate Director,
Coop Extension Director

Stacey M. Warner, Leader Extension Operations,
Coop Extension Director

ii. Community partners

Office of Cooperative Extension, Kansas State University

f. In general, what roles did each partner play?

The Office of Cooperative Extension was important in terms of providing access to the samples, being a coauthor on an article, and disseminating the research to the extension community through national conferences.

II. What were the impacts of your work?

a. Juried essays / book chapters / conference presentations

Since data collection, we have made numerous efforts to disseminate our research, as outlined below.

The following paper has been accepted for publication (and is currently in press):

Weyhrauch, W., Culbertson, S.S., Mills, M.J., & Fullagar, C.J. (in press). Engaging the engagers: Implications for the improvement of extension work design. *Journal of Extension*.

The following papers are currently under review for publication:

Culbertson, S.S., Fullagar, C.J., & Mills, M.J. (revise and resubmit). Feeling good and doing great: The relationship between psychological capital and well-being. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*.

Mills, M.J., Culbertson, S.S., & Fullagar, C.J. A methodological critique and evaluation of two versions of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale. *Measurement: Interdisciplinary Research and Perspective*.

We are also currently writing an additional paper using the data collected under this grant:

Fullagar, C.J., Culbertson, S.S., & Mills, M.J. Engagement: Positive boundary-spanning between work and family. Targeted journal: *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*.

We have an additional paper in the conceptualization stage. It is intended to address methodological issues, considering the longitudinal nature of the data that we were able to collect under your generous grant. We are targeting this paper to the journal entitled *Organizational Research Methods*.

Additionally, Maura Mills has incorporated some of the findings from this study in the design of her dissertation, where she has essentially created an intervention based on the preliminary findings of this research. In particular, given the benefits that we found of having heightened psychological capital, she was interested in developing an intervention targeted at enhancing the resiliency element of the construct, in addition to interventions to develop individual work-related well-being.

In addition to the aforementioned papers, we also disseminated our grant-funded research via conference presentations. In October 2008 we presented a portion of the study's findings at a well-attended break-out session at the K-State University Research and Extension Annual Conference:

Culbertson, S.S., Fullagar, C.J., Mills, M.J., & Warner, S. (2008, October). *Engaging the engagers: What excites the university extension agent?* Breakout session presented at the K-State University Research and Extension Annual Conference, Manhattan, KS.

Additionally, the following presentations were made at the national Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology (SIOP) conference, April 1-4, 2009 in New Orleans, Louisiana:

Culbertson, S.S., Fullagar, C.J., & Mills, M.J. (2009, April). *The impact of psychological capital on hedonic and eudaimonic well-being*. Poster session to be presented at the annual meeting of the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology, New Orleans, LA.

Culbertson, S.S., & Mills, M.J. (Co-chairs). (2009, April). *Exploring allies, enemies, and (lack of) boundaries in work-family interactions*. Symposium to be presented at the annual meeting of the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology, New Orleans, LA.

Fullagar, C.J., Culbertson, S.S., & Mills, M.J. (2009, April). *Engagement: Positive boundary-spanning between work and family*. In S.S. Culbertson & M.J. Mills (Chairs), *Exploring allies, enemies, and (lack of) boundaries in work-family interactions*. Symposium to be presented at the annual meeting of the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology, New Orleans, LA.

Mills, M.J., Culbertson, S.S., & Fullagar, C.J. (2009, April). *The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale: An evaluation of two versions*. Poster session to be presented at the annual meeting of the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology, New Orleans, LA.

b. Web site

No website was created based on this project.

c. Training materials

No training materials resulted from this project.

d. Performances / exhibitions

No performance or exhibitions resulted from this project.

e. Reports

No technical reports were created based on this project.

f. New teaching areas or techniques

No new teaching areas or techniques were created based on this project.

g. Changes in public policy

No changes in public policy resulted from this project.

h. Community or organizational changes

i. Capacity built to continue work?

At this stage there are no plans to continue this research.

i. Grant funding

i. Additional funding you secured

No additional funding beyond the matched funds from the department and the investigators' research funds was secured.

ii. Funding your community partners secured

No additional funding was secured from our partners for this project.

j. Jobs saved or created

No jobs were saved or created from this project.

k. Other

III. Was there a third party assessment or evaluation conducted for the project?

a. University assessment of your work

No third party assessment or evaluation of our work was conducted through the university.

b. Community assessment of your work

No third party assessment or evaluation of our work was conducted through the community.

IV. Self assessment of your project

a. Successes

Our trips to the four meetings were deemed successful, as the response rate was greater than anticipated. We had 106 total agents participate in our study to some degree, many of whom were very enthusiastic about the work we were doing and expressed a sincere interest in our eventual findings. In addition to the agents, we also had a total of 39 agent spouses or live-in partners participate in our research so that we might gain some additional insight into how agents' work affects that (home) aspect of their lives. These numbers (and the percentage of participation vs. the amount of attrition) were far better than what is typically seen in this type of research.

We are also quite pleased with the number of papers and presentations that have come from the data thus far.

b. Challenges

While we consider the overall project to be a success, it – like all research projects – was not without its challenges. First, this was a very time-intensive project, not only for us, but also for participants: We asked participants to complete surveys twice a day for the span of two weeks. Therefore, perhaps the biggest challenge we encountered was participant attrition throughout that time period.

V. Include final budget

Unclassified salaries & benefits

1 GRA (Psychology)	
- 2 Summer months	\$2,800

Travel Funds

Participant Solicitation

247 miles @	\$94
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Manhattan - Garden City (1/23/2008)	38c	
	1 Night @	
Overnight Hotel (1/23/2008)	\$100	\$100
	99 miles @	
Garden City – Colby (1/24/2008)	38c	\$38
	240 miles @	
Colby - Manhattan (1/24/2008)	38c	\$91
	240 miles @	
Colby – Manhattan (1/24/2008)	38c	\$46
Total Travel		\$415

TOTAL **\$3,415**