A Phenomenological Study of Millennial Generation Cooperative Extension Educators' Development of Core Competencies

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A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF MILLENNIAL GENERATION COOPERATIVE EXTENSION EDUCATORS’ DEVELOPMENT OF CORE COMPETENCIES

by

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A DISSERTATION

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A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF MILLENNIAL GENERATION COOPERATIVE EXTENSION EDUCATORS’ DEVELOPMENT OF CORE COMPETENCIES

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University of Nebraska, 2011

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This purpose of this qualitative research study was to describe the experiences that contribute to the development of core competencies among Millennial Generation, county-based Extension educators in the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension Division. Fourteen educators were randomly purposefully selected to participate in the study. Participants were born in 1977 or later as determined by Tapscott (2009). Educators’ tenure in Cooperative Extension ranged from two months to seven years.

Three themes and associated sub-themes emerged from semi-structured interviews: (a) Blindfolded and Scared—educators were confused, overwhelmed and in need of support; (b) Developing the Big Skills: A Daunting Task—focused on discovering competencies and the various modes of learning them; and (c) Doing Something Meaningful: It’s Important to Me—Millennials discuss what is important to them in the workplace and beyond. It takes a family of mentors and a community of networks to meet the needs and fully realize the potential of our next generation of Extension educators. The essence of Millennial Extension educators’ core competency development journey was about finding pathways to success in the Extension organization, among colleagues and within their communities—it was about relationships.
Dedication

I dedicate this work to my children Ashleigh, Nathen, Seth and Joshua. I look forward to your millennial leadership!
Acknowledgements

This journey commenced more than a decade ago with the encouragement of colleagues and graduate student cohorts. Following some time off from coursework, Dr. Susan Williams, supervisor and friend, encouraged me to continue pursuit of a Ph.D. She inspired me to continue the journey in quest of this career milestone.

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I am also grateful for the remarkable cooperation of Millennial Extension educator colleagues who agreed to participate in this study without hesitation. They offered candid, detailed accounts of their respective core competency development journeys. Thank you for sharing your time and perspective!

Finally, thanks to God who perpetually reminds me that “In him [Christ] who is the source of my strength I have strength for everything” (Phil. 4:13 New American Bible).
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Chapter One: Introduction

In recent decades a new cohort of individuals has arrived on planet Earth. As the century turned and the Millennium transpired these individuals quietly infiltrated our world—our workplace. You may have noticed them. Their attire might be casual, a smartphone is likely nearby, and their optimism abounds. Enter a new dawn, a new era, a new generation—the Millennial Generation.

Twenty-First Century Cooperative Extension welcomes a new generation to the workplace—the Millennials, individuals born between 1977 and 1997 (Tapscott, 2009). Green (2008) describes Millennials as having a lifestyle that is gender neutral, technology literate, and confident in their abilities. Espinoza, Ukleja and Rusch (2010) suggest that non-Millennial managers will be left confused about how to manage and motivate their teams.

What does the organization need to know to survive in the future? Lucia and Lepsinger (1999) posit that regardless of the issues facing an organization “...the solution begins and ends with its people. It is the company’s workforce that must adapt to any change, align behavior with new business priorities, or be readied to meet the challenges of tomorrow.” Work place adjustments that accommodate the changing characteristics and expectations of the next generation of Extension educators will be a part of the solution according to Albion and Gutke (2010).

The literature flourishes with authors and leaders who testify to Extension’s ability to evolve, problem solve, and serve as a catalyst for societal change (Brunner, 1962; Bull, Cote, Warner & McKinnie, 2004; Cooper & Graham, 2001). Bull et al.
(2004) describe Extension as “…a living, evolving, market-driven organization that responds to society’s changing needs” (p. 5).

Recruiting and developing highly competent Extension professionals is critical to Extension’s future success. To remain successful, Extension must attract, develop, motivate and retain successful educators that will make a difference in a dynamic educational environment (Garst, Hunning, Jamison, Haiston & Meadows, 2007; Maddy, Niemann, Lindquist, Bateman, & Engel, 2002). The Extension Committee on Organization and Policy (ECOP, 2002; ECOP, 2010) recommended that Extension must adapt and improve the quality and skills of Extension professionals to transform Cooperative Extension.

Young, early-career Extension educators will be a significant influence in the Cooperative Extension system for the next 60 years. In 2011, the Millennial Generation represented 28 percent of the United States (U.S.) population compared to the Baby Boomers’ 26 percent. Twenty-five percent of the U.S. workforce is already comprised of Millennials compared to the Boomers 38 percent (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010).

As the early Boomers complete their last couple decades of employment the Millennials prepare to become the predominant workforce generation. Now we must turn out attention to the generational cohort that will assume responsibility and leadership for next generation Extension success.

This generation arrives at the workplace with new mindsets and priorities (Ensle, 2005). Organizations who excel at motivating these young professionals are well positioned to be effective and thrive in the future. Success depends upon employees,
supervisors and administrators working together (Buford, 1990; Chesney, 1992; Strong & Harder, 2009; Lindner, 1998). “Knowing what motivates employees and incorporating this knowledge into the reward system will help Extension identify, recruit, employ, train and retain a productive workforce” (Lindner, 1998, p. 6). Orrell (2007) posited that recruiting and retaining Millennials would be a competitive business.

To attract and retain future employees, organizational culture may need to change. Ensle (2005) challenged Extension administrators to understand how individual values of young Extension professionals are affecting the Extension system and vice versa. Goleman (1998) cites a national survey of American employers where six of seven desired traits for entry-level workers were non-academic. Changes in the Extension organization may demand policy change or asking questions that lead to change. Stephen Covey (2004) suggests, “Seeking first to understand, then to be understood” (p. 99).

Recognizing the concerns about recruiting and motivating talented educators, Extension should look to competencies to guide recruitment and professional development according to Scheer, Cochran, Harder and Place (in press). Competencies are the knowledge, attitudes, skills and behaviors that make the organization a success and help the organization adapt to a changing workplace environment (Cooper & Graham, 2001; ECOP, 2002; Maddy et al., 2002; Pickett, 1998; Stone & Bieber, 1997).

Chizari, Karbasioun and Lindner (1998) posit that “An adequate number of well-trained Extension personnel are the basic resource for a successful Extension System” (p. 1). The retention of Extension educators was identified as a challenge by the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges (NASULGC) Extension Committee on Organization and Policy’s Leadership Advisory Council (ECOP-LAC,
Ensle (2005) referred to Extension educator turnover as a significant problem for Cooperative Extension nationwide. Safrit and Owen (2010) note the challenge of retaining county-based Extension educators and the consequences of “…unmet citizen needs, disrupted educational programs, low morale among remaining Extension professionals, and wasted financial and material resources” (p. 1). Replacing educators is time consuming, disruptive to programming, and expensive. Chandler (2005) estimated it could cost Extension $7,200 to $30,000 to replace an educator who had an annual salary of $30,000.

The U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2010) reports that the average Millennial employee, ages 25-34 leaves his or her job every 3.1 years compared to late Baby Boomers, ages 45-54 every 7.8 years and early Baby Boomers, ages 55-64 every 10 years. Porfeli and Vondracek (2009) posit that serial careers are becoming the norm. Marston (2007) suggests that if an employee is kept on the job for four years, turnover numbers drop dramatically because they have become acclimated to the workplace and have likely bonded with a leader who is their mentor or coach. Cooper and Graham (2001) argue that the future success of the Cooperative Extension System will principally be determined by the ability of the System to retain highly qualified educators.

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) (2011) reports that 12 percent of campus-based faculty is Millennial Generation, while 19 percent of county-based Extension educators (faculty equivalent) are Millennials (T. Dezort-Lenters, personal communication, May 29, 2011, UNL Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources). Extension is on the forefront of recruiting, acclimating, training and leading Millennials into the world of informal higher education.
Now as the Millennial Generation of Extension professionals enter the workforce it is clear that Extension must look at who is on the bus (Collins, 2001), how they develop core competencies, and subsequent leadership implications. Knowledge and technical competence are necessary, but may not be sufficient to prepare Millennial educators for the transition to the work environment (Olson, 2009). Gallup (2009) suggests that “the best way to develop people—and net the greatest return on investment—is to identify the ways in which they most naturally think, feel and behave as unique individuals” (para. 1).

What is the competency development experience like for the newest generation of Extension educators? What does Extension need to know about leading Millennial Generation Extension educators through the competency development experience? What are the realities from the Millennials’ perspective?

Purpose of the Study

This purpose of this qualitative research study was to describe the experiences that contribute to the development of core competencies among Millennial Generation, county-based Extension educators in the UNL Extension Division. Phenomenological research inquiry was employed to understand the core competency development experiences of these early-career Extension professionals. While several studies have focused on Cooperative Extension competencies during the past decade none have viewed Extension competency development exclusively through the eyes of Millennial Generation educators.

Understanding Millennial Generation Extension educators’ core competency development experiences can help Extension faculty and administrators representing the
Baby Boomer and Generation X generations better understand the experiences of the Millennial Generation educators so they may design experiences leading to improved recruitment, retention, work performance and organizational success. “The future success of the Millennials will be dependent upon how they are groomed for future leadership today” (Sujansky & Ferri-Reed, 2009, p. 159).

Boltes, Lippke and Gregory (1995) reported that 70 percent of educator respondents in their employee satisfaction survey expressed “concerns about training, facilitation, and support for new faculty” (p. 4). Indeed, previous competency development research (Cooper & Graham, 2001) intentionally excluded Extension professionals with less than two years of work experience. Other studies have listened to predominantly experienced educators and administrators to determine which competencies were most important and how educators learned them (Maddy et al., 2002; Moore & Ruud, 2004; Shinn & Smith, 1999). Eighty-five percent of Lindner’s (2001) competency research participants had been employed for more than five years. Respondents to Ghimire (2010) competency identification study had a mean age of 48 years and a mean of 15 years tenure in Extension.

Recent research focused on identifying essential competencies for the 2015 entry-level Extension educator (Harder, Place & Scheer, 2010), but the experiences of Millennial Generation educators negotiating the development of these competencies had yet to be explored. This study invited Millennial Generation educators to share their lived competency development experience. Keif (1990) suggests that “Those who understand the uniqueness’s of each generation will have greater success in recruiting and retaining the best workers” (p. 90).
Significance

The Extension Committee on Organization and Policy Leadership Advisory Council (2010) recommended enhancing the quality and skills of Extension professionals as a strategy for transforming Extension. Gorman, Nelson and Glassman (2004) suggest that knowledge and human capital are increasingly important elements of an organization’s competitive advantage—new entry-level workers can be better leveraged to create such an advantage. ECOP (2007) noted “By understanding what attracts faculty and staff to the Extension mission, Extension can help them build or strengthen meaningful connections to these interests” (p. 1). This study empowered Millennial Generation Extension educators to immerse Extension colleagues, supervisors and administrators in the essence of their lived competency development journey.

Given the importance of preparing the next generation of Extension educators for success, the Millennial Extension educator’s own voice has the potential to contribute significantly to recruitment, retention, work performance and organizational success. It is essential that the meaning of the Millennial educators’ initial years of employment be understood to help guide future organizational policy and practice. Study findings will be of interest and benefit to colleagues, supervisors, human resource personnel and administrators.

Learning to effectively lead Millennials is paramount to organizational success. Leaders who understand the values and behaviors of Millennials will have more opportunity to optimize the potential of their workforce. Successfully leading Millennials will warrant that supervisors focus on the qualities, needs, and competency development of this emerging cohort of Extension educators.
Albion and Gutke (2010) report that, “Understanding and responding to the characteristics of the rising generation…” (p. 1) will lead to successful leadership succession. An organization’s succession plan is about “developing leadership by sharing leadership and by creating opportunities for development by aspiring leaders, existing leaders and transitional leaders” (p. 5). Many Millennials are indeed aspiring leaders. Extension’s workforce will determine if the organization will succeed tomorrow (Horney & Koonce, 1995).

Because there were no studies exclusively exploring Millennial Generation Extension educator competency development experiences and ensuing leadership issues in the literature, a qualitative phenomenological study devoted to understanding educators’ lived experiences best lent itself to examining this question. What are the experiences and context that lead to the Millennial Generation Extension educators’ development of core competencies?

**Research Questions**

The central phenomenon of this study was: Millennial Generation Extension educator development of core competencies. Creswell (2007) recommends that researchers develop the central research question by asking the broadest question possible regarding the research problem.

The central question for this study was:

- How do Millennial Generation, county-based Extension educators describe their core competency development experience in the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension Division?
The sub questions were:

- How do Millennial Generation Extension educators describe core competencies?
- How do they learn core competencies?
- How do they view the core competency development experience?
- What is important to their core competency development?
- How do core competencies affect their professional experience?
- What leadership approaches are best suited for their competency development?

**Assumptions**

The underlying assumption of this study was that the Extension competency development experience of Millennial Generation could be described. The desire of subjects to participate was assumed to indicate that they were open to sharing their experiences as Millennial Generation Extension educators. It was assumed that subjects would reflect on their Extension professional experiences with honesty and clarity.

**Delimitations**

Delimitations narrow the scope of the study (Bryant, 2004; Creswell, 2007). In this study participants were narrowed to Millennial Generation, county-based Extension educators who were employed in the UNL Extension Division. Pinnegar and Daynes (2006) emphasize that the intent of qualitative research is not to generalize information, but to explore and illuminate particular points.
Limitations

This study had the following limitations. First, this study employed phenomenological qualitative research methodology. The researcher’s biases, prejudices and attitudes may potentially impact the interpretation and approach of the study (Creswell, 2007). “Limitations are those restrictions created by the methodology” Bryant, 2004, p. 58). Secondly, the qualitative research tradition used and the sample size of 14 extension educators impedes the ability to generalize across a population. The data collected from this study reflected the experiences of Millennial Generation, county-based Extension educators in UNL Extension Division. Therefore these findings may not generalize to other Extension educator populations or similar populations in other geographic regions. Creswell (2007) suggests that the use of thick, rich descriptions may enable readers to apply relevant findings to other situations or contexts, but care must be exercised in doing so. Thick, rich descriptions embody the people, places, and conversations between the researcher and study participants. These descriptions enable the reader to determine whether the situations described in this study apply to their respective situation. Subjects of this study had various backgrounds, career tracks, gender, support systems and geographic locale which led to rich, yet diverse views. A diversity of life experiences among participants may affect consistency of competencies development. Thirdly, the sample was not representative of gender affiliation. Since only three males participated in this study I contemplated removing the male participants from this study, however, the majority of their experiences were perceived to not be different from the experiences shared by the female participants so I chose to retain the data. Fourthly, because the researcher was a colleague of the participants and conducted
the study, findings may be limited by the forthrightness and knowledge of the participants. The researcher attempted to reduce bias by (a) assuring participants of confidentiality and assigning pseudonyms to obscure their identities, (b) encouraging participants to be forthright in their responses to ensure an accurate portrayal of their experiences, and (c) ensuring that participants were mindful of the significant role they played in describing their respective competency development experiences that could enhance Millennial Generation Extension educator professional development success and help build organizational commitment, trust and success (Stone, 1997).

**Definition of Terms**

Several key terms are used extensively throughout this study. These terms are defined as:

- The Cooperative Extension System is a predominantly publicly funded, informal education system that links the educational and research resources and activities of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) National Institute of Food Agriculture (NIFA), seventy-four 1862 and 1890 land-grant universities and colleges, thirty 1994 institutions, and approximately 3,150 local and county administrative units. The unique partnership of land-grant universities and colleges with federal, state and local governments facilitates identification and delivery of priority educational programs at the grass-roots level (Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities [APLU], 2011).

- Extension Core Competencies – “The basic knowledge, attitudes, skills and behaviors that contribute to excellence in Extension education programs” (Maddy et al., 2002, p. 1).
• Extension Educator (Agent) - An Extension professional employed by a land-grant educational institution who is an independent teacher, counselor, advisor, and leader who markets his or her individual programs to supervisors, volunteers, colleagues and the public. Extension educators serving in local offices serve as the frontline professionals at the front door of the nation’s 104 land-grant universities, disseminating higher education resources that address local and regional issues. Educators work and sometimes live in their communities where they become immersed in the culture and address local educational needs while developing a focused expertise and statewide program presence (APLU, 2011; Ensle, 2005).

• Generation - A generation is shaped by events or circumstances according to which phase of life its members occupy at the time (Howe & Strauss, 2007).

• Land-grant University – “An institution that has been designated by its state legislature or Congress to receive the benefits of the Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890. The original mission of these institutions, as set forth in the first Morrill Act, was to teach agriculture, military tactics, and the mechanic arts as well as classical studies so that members of the working classes could obtain a liberal, practical education” (NASULGC, 2008).

• Millennial Generation - Individuals born 1977 to 1997. Also called the Net Generation or Generation Y (Tapscott, 2009).

Summary

This chapter introduced the issue of core competency development among Extension educators and provided supporting background for the study of Millennial Generation Extension educator development of core competencies in the UNL Extension
Division. While several studies have focused on Cooperative Extension competencies
during the past decade, none have viewed Extension competencies development
exclusively through the eyes of Millennial Generation educators. Understanding the
competency development experience among these novice educators may help Extension
recruit, retain, motivate and lead this new generational cohort of Extension educators.
The purpose statement, research questions, significance, definition of terms, assumptions,
delimitations and limitations are summarized in this chapter.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

The following literature review encapsulates the history of Cooperative Extension and the role of the organization’s frontline professionals (Extension educators). As the organization celebrates nearly a century of success, Millennial Generation Extension educators prepare to chart organizational direction for the next century. The uniqueness of this generational cohort is compared and contrasted with previous generations. Organizational core competencies are explored. Selected leadership approaches are discussed that have implications for guiding this emerging generation of Extension educators? The aggregated literature examination sets the stage for the importance of this study.

Cooperative Extension—Yesterday and Today

Cooperative Extension is commonly referred to as the outreach arm of the Land-grant System which features research, teaching and outreach (Extension). The passage of the Morrill Act in 1862 set the stage for Cooperative Extension. The intent was to establish a land-grant college in every State with the intention of making higher education more accessible to the citizenry. In 1887, Congress passed the Hatch Act to provide funding for agricultural research at land-grant colleges and universities. Cooperative Extension was established with the advent of the Smith-Lever Act by Congress in 1914. This Act established an education partnership among the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Land-grant Universities and local county governments to establish educational outreach with local communities. Extension’s primary role was to disseminate agricultural research via the network of county Extension offices and local
Extension educators to farmers (Brunner, 1962; Kelsey & Hearne, 1963; McDowell, 2001; Rasmussen, 1989; West, Drake, & Londo, 2009).

The Cooperative Extension System is a predominantly publicly funded, informal education system that links the educational and research resources and activities of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA), seventy-four 1862 and 1890 land-grant universities, thirty 1994 institutions, and approximately 3,150 local and county administrative units. The partnership of land-grant universities with federal, state and local governments facilitates delivery of priority educational programs at the local level. Extension educators serving in local offices serve as the front door to the nation’s 104 land-grant universities, disseminating higher education resources that address local and regional issues. The Cooperative Extension System’s mission is to plan, implement and evaluate learning experiences that empower people to improve their lives and communities through partnerships that put knowledge to work (APLU, 2011; Muske, Shepelwich, & Woods, 2007).

Cooper and Graham (2001) state “The Cooperative Extension Service has been an agency for change and problem solving, and a catalyst for individual and social action for almost 100 years” (p. 1). Many would agree that as the world’s largest non-formal adult education organization, Cooperative Extension has an impressive track record when one considers that it is not a mandated system, but rather an organization that survives and thrives based upon its ability to enhance peoples’ lives by helping individuals, families, businesses and communities put research-based knowledge to work. Extension outreach that once focused on agriculture, home economics and youth now encompasses new issues that include renewable energy, obesity prevention, water issues, agriculture
literacy, and attention to underserved audiences. Extension’s model of using objective, research-based information to extend the resources of universities to the people is more important than ever before (Bull et al., 2004; ECOP, 2003; West et al., 2009).

“Integral to the land-grant mission is the concept of outreach and engagement with communities” (West et al., 2009, p. 1). The mission of Extension is to teach citizens to have confidence, understanding and skill to make better decisions about their businesses, communities, families and personal lives. Extension education focuses on issues, challenges and opportunities identified by clientele—empowering youth, strengthening families, advancing agriculture, managing natural resources, and building successful businesses and communities. Extensions helps citizens turn knowledge into action to make their quality of life better (Bull et al., 2004; UNL Extension, 2010).

**Roles of the County-based Extension Educator**

Extension educator roles vary widely. Educators live and work in their communities where they become immersed in the culture and address local educational needs while developing a focused expertise and statewide program presence. Ensle (2005) described the general expectations of an Extension educator as “an independent teacher, counselor, advisor, and leader who must market his or her individual programs to supervisors, volunteers, colleagues and the public” (p. 4).

Kelsey and Hearne (1963) described the roles of county-based Extension professionals as: (a) representing land-grant institutions by developing and delivering research-based programs that help people improve their quality of life, (b) conducting needs assessments to identify issues, (c) collaborating with organizations that share common community and clientele interests, (d) serving as a liaison between county, state,
and federal government, (e) facilitating public access to Extension resources, (f) staying abreast of community issues, (g) developing agricultural leadership, (h) participating in professional development opportunities, (i) evaluating programs and developing program impact reports, and (j) assisting with development of local 4-H Clubs and their leaders.

University of Wisconsin Extension (2004) divides twenty-one Extension professionals’ roles into four categories including (a) education, (b) organization, (c) interpersonal, and (d) technology.

Shinn and Smith (1999) identified roles of agriculture and natural resource program Extension educators for the year 2010 as: “(a) serving as educator, facilitator and community leader; (b) providing unbiased information and technical assistance to clientele; (c) acting as an advocate for early adoption of innovation and technology; (e) being an active member of the community; (e) adopting to changing community needs; and (f) demonstrating and evaluating technologies for local adaptation” (p. 396).

Well-trained Extension educators have been identified as the basis for a successful Extension system. Sufficient number of such professionals is paramount to Extension’s ability to deliver research-based, non-formal education programs to local communities (Chizari et al., 1998).

Modern day educators must be change-masters to carry the Extension organization forward. Kanter (1983) defines a change-master as an individual that has:

…the willingness to move beyond received wisdom, to combine ideas from unconnected sources, to embrace as an opportunity to test limits, To see problems integratively, to see them as wholes, related to larger wholes, and thus challenging established practices-rather than walling off a piece of experience and preventing it from being touched or affected by any new experiences...(p. 28)
Change-master educators must have a supportive and adaptable organizational culture (Patton, 1987). The land-grant university Extension system must market the organization as a change-oriented environment that encourages diversity and innovation.

**Professional Extension Competencies**

Frederick Taylor, proposed that the components (competencies) of “management” could be separated in the 1920’s (Raelin & Cooledge, 1996). Subsequently John Flanagan identified important traits and skills (competencies) required for successful workplace performance (Flanagan, 1954). However, David C. McClelland is widely recognized as the inventor of modern day professional competencies (Lucia & Lepsinger, 1999).

McClelland (1973) explored the behavior of top performers, identifying individual experiences and perceptions of events that led to superior performance. He hypothesized that job selection and performance should be based on desired, observable behaviors (competencies). Today the use of competency models is widespread (Lucia & Lepsinger, 1999; Spencer & Spencer, 1993; Stone & Bieber, 1997).

Extension core competencies are defined as the “…basic knowledge, attitudes, skills and behaviors that make the organization a success and help the organization adapt to a changing environment” (Maddy et al., 2002, p. 1). Competencies are used to guide and improve employee performance.

The importance and development of Extension core competencies is well documented in several state Cooperative Extension Systems. Beeman, Cheek, McGhee, and Grygotis (1979) asked county educators and state staff in Florida about their perceived importance of core competencies needed by Extension educators. Gonzalez

The number of competencies identified for Extension professionals has increased as the roles of Extension professionals have evolved (Beeman et al., 1979; Betts et al., 1996; Cooper & Graham, 2001; ECOP, 2002; North Carolina Cooperative Extension, 1999; Owen, 2004; Maddy et al., 2002; Paxson, Howell, Michael, & Wong, 1993; Stone, 1997; UNL Extension, 2005). To be relevant the competencies must relate to the organizational goals, objectives and strategies. Several researchers have identified priority competencies for Extension educators in specific roles such as 4-H, supervisors and administration (Cooper & Graham, 2001; Gibson & Hillison, 1994; Haynes, 2000; Lindner, 2001; Owen, 2004; Paxson et al., 1993; Stone, 1997). Several in the literature have championed orientating personal and professional development around a framework of core competencies (Cooper & Graham, 2001; Liles & Mustian, 2004; Ritter, 2000; Stone & Bieber, 1997).

In Fall, 2002 the ECOP Personnel and Organizational Development Committee (PODC) introduced and encouraged Cooperative Extension Systems nationwide to utilize core competencies for professional development of Extension professionals.
Competencies included: (a) community and social action processes, (b) diversity/pluralism/multiculturalism, (c) educational programming, (d) engagement, (e) information and education delivery, (f) interpersonal relations, (g) knowledge of organization, (h) leadership, (i) organizational management, (j) professionalism, and (k) subject matter. Maddy et al. (2002) stated “Extension employees should possess the necessary competencies to anticipate and deliver quality educational programs of relevance and importance to our publics” (p. 1).

Several State Extension organizations have adapted ECOP’s (2002) competency recommendations and have incorporated them into their staff development model. Progress has been made in using academic courses, mentors, support groups, professional development programs, self-assessment tools, staff orientation and performance feedback to encourage Extension professional adoption and development of core competencies (Cooper & Graham, 2001; Ladewig & Rohs, 2000; Stone, 1997; Stone & Coppenoll, 2004).

Some states have further defined competencies into levels. Texas University (Texas University Extension, 2003) defines three levels of each competency as (a) core-learner, (b) intermediate-producer, and (c) advanced-innovator/mentor. UNL Extension (2005) identifies two levels of competencies, core competencies and transformational skills. Core competencies are skills either present at hiring or that the new Extension professional have the capacity to develop soon after hiring. Transformational skills are competencies that could be developed by individuals who wish to enhance their effectiveness in teaching or organizational roles.
The UNL Extension Division adopted the Competencies for 21st Century Extension Professionals which outline the expectations for county-based Extension educators. These competencies are summarized in Table 1 (UNL Extension, 2005).

Table 1

*UNL Extension Educator Competencies for the 21st Century*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competency</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Successful Teacher</td>
<td>Plans, designs, implements and evaluates Extension educational programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject Matter Competent</td>
<td>Mastery of discipline, understands research base, considered technically proficient and current</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skilled Communicator</td>
<td>Excellent written and verbal skills and knowledge of supporting technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusiveness</td>
<td>Aware of and committed to serving all members of a community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entrepreneurial</td>
<td>Inclusive of all members of the community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborator/Team Player</td>
<td>Generates grants, fees, contracts to enhance programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>Ability to engage a wide range of individuals and facilitate progress on projects or programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balance</td>
<td>Optimizes work efficiency to balance professional/personal time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change Manager</td>
<td>Accepts change and is willing to deal with ambiguity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professionalism</td>
<td>Personal presentation and behavior appropriate to our role and responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizenship</td>
<td>Contributes to the well-being of the organization</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Additional competency criteria are available in Appendix A. UNL Extension Division competencies address the spirit of the competencies identified for entry-level Extension educators for 2015 (Harder et al., 2010).

Stone and Bieber (1997) suggested that Cooperative Extension use competencies as a catalyst to facilitate organizational change and enhance performance by (a) linking faculty performance with strategic direction; (b) empowering faculty to evolve knowledge, skills and behaviors (competencies) based upon strategic direction; and (c) facilitating future human resource decisions regarding “employee selection, training, professional development, performance appraisal and succession planning” (p. 2).

Identifying strategic competencies and determining training priorities will position Extension educators to delivery relevant, effective and high impact programs to clientele and their communities. Competency-based tools and applications can bridge today’s Cooperative Extension System to future constituent needs (Stone & Bieber, 1997).

Extension must enhance its aptitude to meet increasing expectations among clientele, organizations, and communities. Program priorities must demonstrate private and public value. Human resources are arguably the most valuable assets of the Extension System. To enhance Extension employee effectiveness and to increase Extension’s public value faculty development should focus on areas relating to core competencies (Maddy et al., 2002).

**Generational Theory**

Generational theory attempts to explain how attitudes and values are shaped in both individuals and groups (Espinoza et al., 2010). A generation is shaped by events or
circumstances that members experience at the time (Howe & Strauss, 2007). Espinoza suggests that family, education, morality, peers, spirituality and culture influence each generation as they mature.

Marston (2007) notes that “younger generations view their predecessors’ experience as a warning, not a road map” (p. 4). Each generation has its own perspective regarding time, technology, and loyalty. The Baby Boomers are thinking about retirement while the Generation Xers and Millennials are rapidly becoming the future of Extension and the clientele served.

Today’s workforce generations of interest are predominantly Baby Boomers, born 1946-1964; Generation Xers, born 1965-1976; and Millennials, born 1977-1997 (Tapscott, 2009). The latter generational cohort has also been referred to as the Net Generation (Tapscott, 2009), Geeks (Bennis & Thomas, 2002), and Nexters (Zemke, Raines and Filipczak, 2000). Howe and Strauss (2000) reported that in a 1997 ABC News online poll, the members of this generation chose Millennials as their nickname.

Researchers vary in their definition of the Millennial Generation commencement, ranging from 1977 (Tapscott, 2009) to 1982 (Zemke et al. 2000). Tapscott’s generational guidelines were adopted as the perspective having the most knowledge of recent generations. Table 2 shows alternative generational time periods as described by generation researchers.

Table 3 shows the Boomer generation currently has 60 million people in the United States’ workforce, representing 38 percent of the total workforce. Boomers are late career, experienced employees who have been with their respective organizations for 20-40 years. Xers are generally mid-career employees representing the smallest
Table 2

*Generation Time Periods*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Veterans</th>
<th>Baby Boomers</th>
<th>Xers</th>
<th>Millennials</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

modern day generation, having 51 million individuals or 32 percent of the workforce. Millennials are the largest generation and currently have 40 million employees in the workforce representing 25 percent of the total workforce (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010).

In 2010, 49 percent of all faculty members at UNL were Boomers, 26 percent were Xers, and 12 percent were Millennials (UNL, 2010). According to (T. Dezort-Lenters, personal communication, May 29, 2011) 64 percent of UNL Extension educators were Boomers, 14 percent were Xers, and 19 percent were Millennials (Table 4).
Table 3

*Generation Populations and Workforce*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generation</th>
<th>Population (millions)</th>
<th>Population (percent)</th>
<th>Workforce (millions)</th>
<th>Workforce (percent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Veterans</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baby Boomers</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xers</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Millennials</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 4

*UNL Faculty Census*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generation</th>
<th>UNL Faculty (percent)</th>
<th>UNL Extension Educators (percent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Veterans</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baby Boomers</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xers</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Millennials</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**Generational Similarities and Differences**

The Boomers’ legacy is that of lessening bureaucracy and flattening hierarchies (Zemke, et al. 2000). They have “strived to ‘change the system’ from the Veterans’ (generation) George S. Patton leadership style to a more humane, altruistic, concerned leader in tune with the needs of the troops” (Zemke, et al. 2000, p. 249). Boomers are known as the “live to work” generation. They expect hard work to be recognized and
rarely complain about job dissatisfaction. Organizations usually experience generational conflict when older generation supervisors are challenged by younger employees who see the world differently (Kaye, Scheef, & Thiefoldt, 2003).

Generation Xers do not agree with the Boomers’ “live to work” sentiment. This cohort places a high priority on flexible work schedules and does not care to be micromanaged. They are independent, resilient, adaptable, and expect immediate feedback (Marston, 2007).

Xers strive to make the workplace more efficient and accommodating. “Twenty-four-hour home offices, home/work stations, cyber-meetings, and other innovations that will develop through improved technology will be common” (Marston, 2007, p. 171).

Although not particularly loyal to their organizations, they are dedicated to their work, teams, and supervisors. Their lattice-like career tracks facilitate vertical and horizontal career paths. Xers shape their resume by developing skills in each step of their career (Marston, 2007).

Millennials are a team-oriented cohort that works in groups. They are multi-taskers and the most technically literate generation. Millennials see themselves as a unique enterprise (Kaye et al., 2003). Contrary to Xers this generation expects structure in the workplace. Some researchers liken the Millennials to the Veterans generation that preceded the Baby Boomers (Gage, 2005; Zemke et al., 2000). Millennials and Veterans are both loyal, proud and have respect for authority. Zemke et al. (2000) state, “The view that says generations cycle and recycle back on themselves may be confirmed with this latest cohort of confident, achievement-oriented young people” (p. 25).
This generation has amazing personal and professional social networks that many times overlap. Marston (2007) refers to Millennials as the “Nobody gets left behind” generation—they are committed to moving everyone forward into the future together. The Millennials enter the workplace exemplifying and preferring teamwork.

Millennials will likely see more change in their lifetime than any of the earlier generations alive today have witnessed (Marston, 2007). This generation has been influenced by the internet, Operation Desert Storm, Oklahoma City bombing, Death of Princess Diana, Clinton scandals, Columbine massacre, Columbia space tragedy, September 11, 2001, hurricane Katrina and the first African-American elected to be President of the U.S.

**Embracing Generational Diversity**

Currently Boomers dominate management and leadership roles in organizations. Boomers have the opportunity to recruit emerging leaders that emulate their management and leadership philosophies or introduce a fresh generational perspective to the workplace. If they choose to maintain the status quo then the organization risks the possibility of losing a generation of innovation (Marston, 2007). The challenge is to maintain a balance of early-, mid- and late-career Extension professionals that offer clientele a balanced dose of experience, knowledge, style and innovation.

The future of Extension depends upon the Boomer and Xer generations embedding Millennials into the organization sooner rather than later. Integrating a new generation into the workplace warrants significant time, energy, and patience, however, new ideas, technological skills, and physical energy must be infused into the workplace to remain competitive (Kaye et al., 2003; Marston, 2007). Extension professionals live
and work with their clientele so it is not only the responsibility of the organization, but also the clientele to better understand, appreciate and support new generational perspectives.

Millennial Generation employees are more interested in their organizational role versus a job description. The job description details tasks while the role description defines responsibilities. The role is the employee’s motivation to work for the company. Millennials “want to know how they fit into the bigger picture because they don’t want to be insignificant cogs in a large impersonal organization” (Marston, 2007, p. 137). Raines (2003) six principles of Millennial management include “(a) you be the leader, (b) challenge me, (c) let me work with friends, (d) let’s have fun, (e) respect me, and (f) be flexible” (p. 178).

Kaye et al. (2003) describe aggressive communication and difference deployment as necessary to creating a successful intergenerational workforce. Aggressive communication serves to surface generational conflicts. Excellent communication helps co-workers learn to understand each other’s views on issues such as work load, schedules, policies, and environment. Difference deployment strives to diversify the workplace generationally. It is the deliberate hiring of employees with diverse backgrounds, experiences, skills, and views to strengthen teams, customer rapport, and organizations.

Zemke et al. (2000) suggest that organizations should “spend time learning how to become the employer of choice in their industry and region, and then continually ‘sell the benefits’ to retain the best and brightest of their employees” (p. 159). Organizations that are successful in the future will follow operating principles that (a) accommodate
employee differences, (b) create workplace choices, (c) operate from a sophisticated management style, (d) respect competence and initiative, and (e) nourish retention (Zemke et al., 2000).

The Boomers, Xers, and Millennials will need to come to terms with the wishes of one another in the years to come. On one side of the generation spectrum leaders strive to capture the expertise and experience of the Boomers while on the other end of the spectrum they seek to retain talented and innovative Millennial workers. Boomer administrators and faculty must embrace and learn from new generations of workers while simultaneously striving to coach them to be future educators and leaders (Tapscott, 2009).

Overcoming the gap in understanding and behaviors among generations is critical to the success of future leaders. Our individual, team and organization success resides with our ability to work together and capitalize upon the many ideas and talents of those who surround us. The challenge with this approach is convincing Boomer generation clientele and decision-makers that it is in the best interest of clientele to allow next generation educators to use all of the tools, networks and flexibility possible to meet the future educational and leadership needs. Simultaneously, emerging generations should recognize the value of working with previous generation colleagues who have a wealth of experience and knowledge to share for consideration. Helping each other better understand and appreciate one another’s values, ambitions, views, mind-sets, and demographics are essential to mitigating generational conflict.
**Millennial Leadership Strategies**

Rennekamp and Nall (1994) built upon the work of Dalton, Thompson, and Price (1977) and modified a career stage model for use in the Cooperative Extension Service. The model identifies four distinct stages in Extension careers. The four stages are (a) entry, (b) colleague, (c) counselor, and (d) advisor. Each stage includes a set of motivators that offer professional development guidance. The entry stage is the time in one's career where the individual first enters the profession. Principal motivators for professional development include attaining the skills (competencies) required to do the job and comprehending the organization's structure, function, and culture.

Rennekamp and Nall (1994) describe motivators for professional development at the entry stage as: “(a) understanding the organization's structure, function, and culture; (b) attaining base level technical skills; (c) giving relevancy to previous training; (d) exercising directed creativity and initiative; (e) moving from dependency to independence; (f) exploring personal/professional dynamics; and (g) building relationships with professional peers” (p. 2). It is essential that all professionals move out of this stage to attain career satisfaction. Kutilek, Gunderson and Conklin (2002b) emphasize the importance of a systems approach using this model that involves an intergenerational approach that nurtures educator success. Arnold and Place (2010b) identified entry-level educators’ personal traits, motivators and support systems as positive influences on career decisions while negative influences included lack of direction, personal work management issues, job pressures, and mandated work requirements.
Bloomberg BusinessWeek.com and the Hay Group (2009) conducted the Best Companies for Leadership study. This study focused on the top 20 companies that excelled in leadership development among their employees. John Larrere, co-leader of this study, stated:

For organizations to succeed, they will need to understand what key leadership elements are paramount in driving their organization toward growth. It’s more than just getting people to produce the right outcomes. It’s about getting them to be passionate about their work and grooming them to handle the challenges ahead (Bloomberg BusinessWeek.com and the Hay Group, 2009).

Companies are now focusing resources on positioning for the future. Ninety-four percent of the top companies (in this study) provided leadership development programs that enable employees to deliver on goals and strategies. Ultimately a company’s goal is “…improved and sustained individual and organizational performance” according to Bloomberg BusinessWeek.com and the Hay Group (2009).

Espinoza et al. (2010) studied managers who were “effective” and managers who were “challenged” with leading Millennials. Mind-set was identified as critical to leading Millennials. “Challenged managers struggled with turnover, complaints, absenteeism, communication, and low productivity” (p. 29). The study is summarized in Table 5. Managers who understand the values and behaviors of the Millennials will have more opportunity to optimize the potential of their workforce.

Greer and Plunkett (2007) define leadership as “the ability to get work done with and through others while winning their respect, confidence, loyalty and willing cooperation” (p. 261). The former part of this definition serves as a definition of a manager, while the latter completes the role of a leader. Greer and Plunkett depict important differences between the role of managers and leaders in an organization.
although successful supervisors practice both excellent manager and leader skills and behaviors. Management is concerned with efficiency of operations and implementation, while leadership focuses on organizational change and future direction.

Leaders enable change by (a) articulating and communicating a compelling vision that shows the direction in which the unit or organization needs to move in the future, (b) aligning the organization’s personnel with the roles and performance needed to move in the desired direction, and (c) serving in an inspirational and motivational role in which he or she obtains the support of others in order to make the desired changes (Greer & Plunkett, 2007, pp. 258-259).

Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perspective</th>
<th>Effective Managers</th>
<th>Challenged Managers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adaptability</td>
<td>Talked about their own need to change to manage in “today’s world”</td>
<td>Talked about how others needed to change to make it in the “real world”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>Believed there was something they could do about the situation</td>
<td>Believe that there was little they could do about the situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence</td>
<td>Allowed their subordinates to challenge them</td>
<td>Sanctioned or punished their subordinates for challenging them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power</td>
<td>Used the power of relationship versus the power of their position</td>
<td>Felt the only power they had was their positional authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energy</td>
<td>Working with twentysomethings made them feel younger</td>
<td>Working with twentysomethings made them feel older</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Success</td>
<td>Saw themselves as key to the twentysomethings’ success</td>
<td>Saw the twentysomethings as an impediment to their own success</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Kouses and Posner (1995) identified the following five leadership practices that portray excellent leadership as “(a) willingness to seek out better ways of doing things, departing from the status quo and taking risks, (b) sharing a vision of a desired future state that engages the aspirations of others, (c) sharing power through delegation and trust, (d) leading by example or walking the talk, and (d) providing encouragement and recognition” (p. 263). These practices share common ground with the management success of managers described in Espinoza et al. (2010).

Leadership is a process that is centered on the interactions between leaders and followers. Leadership and motivational approaches are based on different assumptions and theories. When we facilitate motivation we are developing those incentives or conditions that will help move a person to a desired behavior. Leaders must learn to recognize the needs of their followers and lead accordingly to optimize the development of both the individual and the organization. The leadership style that individuals use will be based on a combination of their beliefs, values and preferences, as well as the organizational culture and norms which will encourage some approaches and discourage others. “When a leader communicates trust and respect for followers’ abilities to perform and achieve, the internal motivation of the followers takes over and drives them to succeed” (Strebel, 1996).

Gage (2005) described Millennials’ belief systems, interaction and leadership insights as being true to servant leadership. Servant leadership has its beginnings in the work of Lao-Tzu (1985). Lao-Tzu suggested the leader leads in a nourishing manner without credit. In modern leadership theory Greenleaf (1977) is the father of servant leadership. A servant leader devotes his or her efforts towards serving the needs of
organizational members. This is an altruistic calling to fulfill organizational stewardship. Servant leadership encourages collaboration, empathy, awareness, stewardship, trust, foresight, listening, and the ethical use of power and empowerment. These leaders ensure follower’s highest priority needs are being met. The servant leader wants to help the follower develop the capacity to create their own vision. Servant leaders are viewed as organizational elders who have the experience and wisdom to motivate and persuade followers. Followers are cultivated, developed and many times blossom into leaders themselves. Spears (1995) suggest that “servant-leadership emphasizes increased service to others, a holistic approach to work, a sense of community, and shared decision-making power” (pp. 3-4). The true measure of servant leadership would be to develop the capacity of the follower to be a leader. These leaders parallel transformational leadership.

Green (2008) postulates that twenty-first century organizations and emerging generational leadership may be best served by transformational leadership that speaks to the higher needs of employees. Transformational leadership theory focuses on leaders’ abilities to “motivate followers to work for transcendental goals and for aroused higher-level needs for self-actualizing rather than for immediate self-interests” (Bass, 1985, p. 11). Followers are intrinsically motivated. This theory suggests that followers adopt or share their leader’s vision thus contributing to a more effective organization. Transformational leaders “motivate others to do more than they originally intended, more than they thought possible, and to move beyond self-interest and focus on the larger goals of the group or organization” (Brown, Birnstihl & Wheeler, 1996, p. 2). It’s a process concerned with emotions, values, ethics, standards and long-term goals that involves
assessing followers’ motives, satisfying their needs and treating them as full human beings.

Bass (1990) introduced the idea of full-range leadership—it includes both transactional and transformational behaviors. Transactional leadership behaviors including laissez-faire, management-by-exception, and contingent rewards are generally ineffective leadership. Transformational behaviors include individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, and idealized. The emphasis of full range leadership is on organizational vision and goals and finding ways to have individuals fit into it influence.

Albion and Gutke (2010) propose a shared leadership approach where “educational leaders must provide clear direction and exercise influence rather than lead with more traditional, autocratic approaches” (p. 4). This approach encourages collaborative leadership responsibility among a community of individuals. Respecting and valuing team members’ talents and achievements is an important component of shared leadership. Organizations’ succession plans are principally “about developing leadership by sharing leadership, by creating opportunities for development by aspiring leaders, existing leaders and transitional leaders” (p. 5). Many Millennials are indeed aspiring leaders. Shared leadership supports the collaborative and inclusive hallmarks of the Millennial Generation.

Successfully leading Millennials will warrant that supervisors focus on the qualities and needs of this emerging cohort of Extension educators. This generation expects employee-centered and fun work environments. Attracting and retaining new generations of Extension employees will demand attention to job enrichment that makes
faculty positions more appealing and stimulating. Daft (1997) indicated “job enrichment consists of more acknowledgement, opportunities for professional development, education, and success.” Eastman and Williams (1993) reported that professors who experienced higher levels of mentoring were more satisfied with their present positions and career progress. Overwhelming workloads and a shortage of opportunities with family and friends have caused states to lose Extension faculty (Ensle, 2005). These and other job enrichment factors must be addressed to attract and retain talented Extension professionals.

Kaye et al. (2003) submit that leaders should focus on (a) career development, (b) workplace climate, and (c) communication—the three C’s of engagement. Career development encompasses leaders serving as career coaches, sharing their own experiences, and offering employees feedback regarding strengths and opportunities. Employees should be invited to cultivate their own workplace climate. Leaders must be open to ideas and innovations and subsequently act upon this input or otherwise communicate why they cannot. They must communicate often using multiple modes including e-mail, voicemail, texting, newsletters, staff meetings and management-by-walking-around.

Extension leaders must focus on maximizing engagement with the Millennials. Engagement optimizes the contributions of every person in the workplace. Employees view engagement as motivation, fulfillment and commitment to one’s work. Cross-generational mentoring is a powerful component of engagement. Extension leaders must understand what motivates the Millennial Generation and leverage this knowledge to benefit the employee and the organization (Kaye et al., 2003).
Summary

Cooperative Extension has a long, remarkable tradition of educating clientele. County agents, Extension agents and today, Extension educators have earned and exemplified the title of change-master among their numerous roles in local communities and regional issues. As Extension roles and responsibilities become more complex the Extension System has identified core competencies that will help Extension professionals adapt and excel in ever changing environs. Simultaneously, Extension welcomes a new generational cohort of professionals to the organization—the Millennials. Millennial Generation professionals will chart the course of the workforce for the next 40-60 years. Like previous generations, Millennials values and views are hinged upon their childhood and adolescent experiences. They may think and act differently than other generations, but their contribution to Extension’s mission and their likeness to the organization’s future clientele are critical to continued success. Listening to Millennials describe their core competency development journeys may hold the key to recruiting, motivating, retaining, and leading Extension’s future leaders. Mastering competency development and employing effective leadership and motivation approaches will contribute to the Cooperative Extension System’s continued success. Extension leadership must be prepared to channel Millennial motivation into a 21st Century Extension System.
Chapter Three: Methodology

Introduction

This chapter describes the qualitative research approach of this study. The intent was to describe the lived experiences of Millennial Generation, county-based Extension educators in the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension Division. Creswell (2009) refers to research design as “the intersection of philosophy, strategies of inquiry and specific methods” (p. 5). A discussion of the research framework relative to this study ensues.

Creswell (2007) describes the following procedural steps in the phenomenological research process: (a) determine if a phenomenological tradition is the best approach, (b) identify the phenomenon, (c) acknowledge and specify the philosophical assumptions of phenomenology, (d) data collection, and (e) data analysis. Data analysis involves describing what participants’ experienced (textural descriptions) and the context of the experiences (structural descriptions). These descriptions are then synthesized into the “essence” of the phenomenon. Table 6 outlines my research procedures which are discussed in this chapter.

Role of Researcher

I understand that my experiences, both personal and professional, may influence my interpretation of the data. As a researcher, I must position myself to acknowledge how my data interpretation stems from personal, cultural and historical perspectives. Ultimately, my role as a researcher is to interpret meanings others have about the world, more specifically the phenomenon focus of this study (Creswell, 2009).
Table 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phenomenological Research Procedures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Determine if a phenomenological tradition is the best approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify the phenomenon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledge and specify the philosophical assumptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describe participants’ experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composite description of the phenomenon</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The researcher began his career as an Extension educator in 1989 and is now a generation removed from today’s Millennial Educators. A growing number of my colleagues now represent the Millennial Generation. I walked in their shoes as a novice Extension educator—learning about program development, leadership, teamwork, technology, and other competencies of importance in the late 1980s and early 1990s. As I experienced the spectrum of progressing from a novice to an experienced educator a new generation of educators was born—the Millennials.

Over the course of the next two decades this generation experienced and was influenced by sociological context at a similar age and subsequently developed a mindset that guided them through life significant events in their childhood—events that shaped their attitudes, aspirations, relationships and careers (Espinoza et al., 2010; Zemke et al., 2000). As a colleague I have witnessed Millennial Extension educators who are challenged, isolated, frustrated, overwhelmed, and seemingly misunderstood. I believe at least two Millennial Extension educator departures from UNL Extension in recent years are related to competency development.

Creswell (2009) acknowledged that every researcher approaches their research with certain bias based upon personal experiences. Several qualitative researchers have written about the importance of epoche (Creswell, 2007; Hatch, 2002; Moustakas, 1994). Here the researcher sets aside his or her own experiences to better understand those of the study’s participants. Moustakas (1994) defines epoche as the focused intent to eliminate “everything that represents a pre-judgment, setting aside presuppositions, and reaching a transcendental state of freshness and openness, a readiness to see in an unfettered way” (p. 41).
My experience living and working as an Extension educator (1989 – 2011) has led to potential bias and the need for me to bracket my viewpoint. I commenced this phenomenological research experience as a researcher who sought to listen and learn. I presumed Millennial Extension educators would have different experiences based upon their career track, office location, proximity to colleagues, mentor relationships, resources and professional experiences.

**Tradition of Inquiry**

The three strategies of research inquiry include qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods. Within each category of inquiry there are various models that guide research design. Creswell (2009) emphasizes the importance of considering the full range of possibilities of data collection and prioritize these methods based upon (a) pre-determined nature, (b) use of close-ended versus open-ended questioning, and (c) the focus on numeric versus non-numeric data analysis.

Understanding the experiences of individuals is difficult to capture using quantitative research methods. Klenke (2008) asserts that quantitative research methods “are poorly suited to help us understand the meanings leaders and followers ascribe to significant events in their lives and the success or failure of their organization” (p. 4).

Qualitative research is designed to learn about human or social research problems through the experiences of individuals and groups. This approach is employed when a problem or issue needs to be explored and a complex, detailed understanding of the issue is desired. The purpose is to discover “why” or “how.” Qualitative inquiry empowers research participants to share their stories and minimize the power relationships that may exist between researchers and study participants. Discovering insights that reveal the
world of reality among Millennial Generation Extension educators warrants qualitative inquiry. Creswell (2007) describes five qualitative strategies: (a) case study, (b) ethnography, (c) grounded theory, (d) narrative, and (e) phenomenology in Table 7.

Table 7

*Common Qualitative Research Traditions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Case Study</td>
<td>Developing an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded case or multiple cases.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnography</td>
<td>Describing and interpreting the shared patterns of a culture-sharing group or individuals representative of a group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grounded Theory</td>
<td>Developing a theory grounded in data from the field from participants who have participated in a common process or phenomenon.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrative</td>
<td>Exploring the life of a distinctive individual.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phenomenology</td>
<td>Understanding the meaning and essence of the lived experiences of multiple individuals.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Phenomenological qualitative research methodology explores the essence of human experiences about a phenomenon as described by participants. Creswell (2007) recommends phenomenological research when it is “important to understand common experiences in order to develop practices, policies or to develop a deeper understanding about the features of the phenomenon” (p. 60). Research questions are answered by eliciting the stories of those who have lived the phenomenon. The researcher strives to identify common ground among participants and what constitutes the nature of this lived experience. Phenomenology focuses on the process rather than outcomes, on context
rather than variables, and in discovery rather than confirmation. Reality is determined through individual and collective definitions of the situation (Creswell, 2007; Creswell, 2009).

Phenomenological inquiry is the best research tradition for this study. First, while limited data exist to identify and measure core competency attainment, the literature lacks research that describes participants’ core competency development experience. Phenomenology will allow participants to describe this experience through their eyes and help the readers walk in their shoes. Secondly, review of the literature revealed minimal engagement of Millennial Extension educators in competency development research—a generation that seeks significant inclusiveness, communication and feedback (Kaye et al., 2003). Millennials have been perceived as an insignificant cohort in previous studies focused on competency development—intentionally excluded in some instances. This research approach gives participants their own voice, describing the phenomena of developing core competencies. Thirdly, participants have shared similar experiences in their quest to develop Extension core competencies—a common phenomenon that lends itself to the phenomenological research approach. Phenomenological qualitative research is uniquely suited to “understanding several individuals’ common or shared experience of a phenomenon” (Creswell, 2007, p. 60). Fourthly, quantitative analysis cannot describe the essence of the participants’ core competency development experiences. Qualitative research traditions are uniquely designed to explore and understand the meaning that individuals or groups attribute to a social or human issue (Creswell, 2009).
The role of the phenomenological researcher is to describe “what” research participants experienced and “how” they experienced it (Moustakas, 1994). Two approaches to phenomenology are commonly employed by researchers: hermeneutic and transcendental. Hermeneutic relies on researcher interpretation while transcendental focuses more on describing participants’ experiences. The nature of this study aligns with the transcendental approach where the researcher sets aside his experiences, to the extent possible, and examines the phenomenon with a fresh perspective (Moustakas, 1994). Research questions are answered by eliciting stories from those who have lived the phenomenon.

The Phenomenon

The phenomenon of this study is Millennial Generation Extension educators’ development of core competencies. Developing these core competencies is an abiding concern (Van Manen, 1990) among Extension colleagues, supervisors and administrators (Maddy et al., 2002).

Philosophical Foundations

Philosophical ideas influence qualitative research and thus need to be identified and shared. The worldview of the researcher serves to inform readers about his or her “general orientation about the world and the nature of research that a researcher holds” (Creswell, 2009, p. 6). This orientation guides the research process.

The author’s constructivist worldview approach suggests that there are multiple, equally valid social realities. In this worldview, individuals seek to understand the world in which they live and work, leading the researcher to look for more complex observations rather than narrower meanings. The goal of the research is to rely on the
participants’ view of the circumstances being studied. The constructivist worldview lends itself to a phenomenological study, where participants describe their experiences (Moustakas, 1994).

These subjective meanings are formed through interaction with others through historical and cultural experiences. The researcher’s interests focus on the contexts in which participants live and work along with their subsequent processes of interaction. The meanings that individuals give to their experiences are the objects of study; therefore they are co-constructors and interpreters of their descriptions. The story and the context become the data that inform the research study. This study will explore the contexts of participants’ workplace and related experiences (Creswell, 2007; Creswell, 2009; Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 1990). How do Millennial Generation, county-based Extension educators describe their core competency development experience in the UNL Extension Division?

Data Collection

The population for the study was Millennial Generation, county-based Extension educators in the UNL Extension Division. Participants included male and female Extension educators who practice in urban and/or rural environs, focusing on 4-H, agriculture and horticulture programming. All Extension educators were at least 19 years of age, born between January 1, 1977 and December 31, 1997. Each of these individuals had experienced the research phenomenon.

Random purposeful sampling was used to select research participants who had experienced the phenomenon. This sampling approach is used when participants are selected for a study “…because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the
research problem and central phenomenon in the study” (Creswell, 2007). The unique criteria in this study include Millennial Generation, county-based Extension educators.

Phenomenological study sample size may vary from 1 to 325 participants (Creswell, 2007). Dukes (1984) recommended interviewing 3 to 10 participants. Polkinghorne (1989) suggests researchers interview 5 to 25 individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon. Patton (2001) emphasizes the importance of validity, meaningfulness and insights over the sample size.

In this study, I interviewed participants until data saturation was attained. Fourteen participant interviews were conducted. Collecting in-depth, rich, thick descriptions of participants’ experiences was paramount to success. Interview questions (Appendix B) were broad, general and open-ended to invite participants to share rich, thick descriptions of their lived experiences. The interview protocol is found in Appendix C.

Ethical issues were addressed at each phase of the study. Individuals participating in this study were treated in compliance with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review Board (IRB) (Appendix D). The study did not have any known risks. Anonymity and confidentiality were important considerations. Participants were assigned pseudonyms to protect their identities. They were provided informed consent and were free to withdraw from the research at any time without penalty. Participants were informed that while summary data will be disseminated to the professional community, responses will not be traceable to them. Dr. Elbert Dickey, Dean and Director, UNL Extension Division granted permission for this study to be conducted (Appendix E).
Research participants were initially contacted by e-mail (Appendix F) with a follow-up telephone call (Appendix G) to request their participation in this study and to arrange a date, time and location (Appendix H) to conduct a one-on-one interview. Face-to-face, semi-structured interviews were conducted with all participants. The interviews averaged 61 minutes and were audio recorded with the participants’ permission. I also recorded detailed notes during each interview. Each participant completed a background information form that augmented data collection (Appendix I).

Participants were asked the following open-ended questions in a semi-structured interview format. Interview questions used to elicit answers to the research questions included the following:

1. Please tell me about your background and career leading up to your current position.
2. What is being an Extension educator like for you?
3. Tell me about your personal and professional goals.
4. Describe yourself at work and away from work.
5. What do you know about Extension core competencies?
6. What have you experienced in terms of Extension educator core competency development?
7. What contexts or situations (environments, people, resources, situations, life experiences, etc.) have typically influenced or affected your core competency development experiences?
8. What would have been helpful to you in the competency development process?
9. What is the one thing we (colleagues, supervisors and administrators) should know to help you and the Extension System be successful?
10. Briefly describe your competency development experience journey, beginning with your first day of employment as an Extension educator and continuing to the present.
11. What additional information regarding your competency development experience would you like to share?

**Data Analysis**

Data analysis involves making sense out of text and associated data. This process involved collecting data generated by open-ended questions from information offered by participants. Reflective interpretation of the text was used to achieve a complete, more meaningful understanding. This interpretation included not only a description of the experience as it appeared, but also an analysis and interpretation of the underlying conditions that accounted for the experience. Creswell (2007) summarizes phenomenological research analysis as (a) analyzing significant statements, (b) generating meaningful units (themes), and (c) developing an essence of description. I used MAXQDA (2010) to assist with data preparation and analysis. MAXQDA is a qualitative data analysis software tool that enabled efficient identification and organization of significant statements and themes within transcripts.

I commenced data analysis by listening to the audio recording of each interview and then reading the transcription of each recording. Creswell (2009) recommends “exploring the data to obtain a general sense of the data” (p. 185). Interview transcripts were imported into MAXQDA software for further analysis. I again reviewed each transcript and identified significant participant statements which I listed (horizontalization of the data) using MAXQDA. Each statement was viewed as having equal worth. I refined this list of statements into a list of nonrepetitive, nonoverlapping statements (Creswell, 2007). Subsequently, I sorted these statements into “meaning units” or themes and subthemes. A summary of data analysis procedures presented in
Table 8

**Data Analysis Procedures**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organize and prepare data for analysis</td>
<td>Interviews were transcribed verbatim by a professional transcriptionist. The transcriptionist signed a letter of confidentiality (Appendix K). Data were stored electronically as audio and word processing files. A transcription excerpt is found in Appendix L. Transcripts were stored in a locked cabinet in the researcher’s office. Only the principal and secondary researcher had access to the recordings and documents. Audio recordings and transcripts were destroyed once the study was completed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review data</td>
<td>I read through all the data to gain a general sense of the information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Begin detailed analysis with a horizontalization process</td>
<td>I identified significant statements, sentences or quotes that describe how the participants’ experienced the phenomenon, listed these statements, assuming equal worth (horizontalization of the data), and developed a list of non-repetitive, non-overlapping statements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop descriptions of themes and sub-themes</td>
<td>I grouped the significant statements into larger units of information, referred to as “clusters of meaning” or themes. I generated descriptions of themes and sub-themes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Determine how themes and descriptions will be presented</td>
<td>I used narrative descriptions to convey the findings of the analysis. A discussion of themes and subthemes was used to describe the phenomenon.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpret meaning of the data</td>
<td>I wrote textural descriptions of <em>what</em> the participants in the study experienced with the phenomenon which includes verbatim examples and structural descriptions of <em>how</em> the experience happened that considered the setting and context in which the phenomenon was experienced. I then synthesized the data and wrote a composite description of the phenomenon incorporating both the textural and structural descriptions which is the essence of the experience and represents the culminating aspect of the phenomenological study.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8 is based on specific data analysis steps recommended by Creswell (2007) and Moustakas (1994). Three themes and 14 sub-themes emerged from Extension educators’ competency development journeys. Table 9 summarizes themes and sub-themes.

**Verification Strategies**

Qualitative researchers are responsible for incorporating reliability procedures and validity strategies into their study which ultimately lead to more realistic and credible results. To establish credibility Creswell (2009) recommends using at least two validation strategies. This study used (a) member checking, (b) clarification, and (c) thick, rich descriptions. First, member checking is the process whereby research participants are asked to verify accuracy of transcriptions (Appendix J), significant statements, themes and descriptions. Individual transcripts and excerpts of study findings were emailed to participants for review and their comments were incorporated into this document. Secondly, I discussed my bias relative to the study in the Role of the Research section found earlier in this chapter. Thirdly, thick and rich descriptions of participants’ environment and experiences convey findings that provide readers with an opportunity for transferability (Creswell, 2007). Readers decide whether the findings are relevant to their situations or context. Participants are quoted extensively to provide rich illustrations of emerged themes.
Chapter Four: Findings

Introduction

This study focused on understanding and describing the core competency development experience among Millennial Generation Extension educators in the UNL Extension Division. Participants described their core competency development journey during their first few months and years in the Extension educator role. The central question was:

- How do Millennial Generation, county-based Extension educators describe their core competency development experience in the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension Division?

Sub-questions that guided the study were:

- How do Millennial Generation Extension educators describe core competencies?
- How do they learn core competencies
- How do they view the core competency development experience
- What is important to their core competency development
- How do core competencies affect their professional experience?
- What leadership approaches are best suited for their competency development?

Interviewed participants shared their personal Extension educator development experiences beginning with day one on the job and continuing through the present. Each Millennial educator experienced unique circumstances that shaped their development as a novice Extension educator, however, throughout the conversations several common themes and sub-themes emerged among the interviewees.
Table 9

Themes and Sub-themes

Blindfolded and Scared
  What should I do?
  Overwhelmed!
  Knowing that people have your back

Learning the big skills—A daunting task
  What competencies?
  Learning the big skills
  Learning by doing
  If I fail it’s public
  Mentors always
  Networking and Jelling
  Team Millennials

Doing something meaningful—It’s important to me
  Meaningful work
  Millennial optimism
  Challenging competencies
  Personal importance

Participants

Study participants were Millennial Generation, county-based Extension educators.

Thirty-two of Nebraska’s approximately 171 Extension educators represent the Millennial Generation—individuals born after January 1, 1977. Participants were randomly, purposefully selected among Millennial Generation educators who had, county-based workstations and serving in a traditional Extension educator role. Eighteen of the 32 Millennial educators met these criteria. Educators with specific program assignments or campus-based workstations were excluded from this study in attempt to focus on a more homogeneous research population. Participants represented each of Nebraska’s Extension Districts in a stratified manner, although this was not an objective
for participant sampling. The tenure of participants in the Extension educator role was two months to seven years. All participants’ professional Extension experiences were limited to the UNL Extension Division. The educators’ ages ranged from 25 to 33 years old with a mean of 29 years old. All participants had earned master degrees or higher levels of education. Several educators were pursuing doctoral degrees. Eleven female and three male educators participated in this study. I considered segregating male educators’ data, but I observed general consensus among participants and their experiences. Uniqueness’s among gender experiences are discussed. The educators were identified as Caucasian. Participant biographies are not included due to the limited number Millennial Generation Educators who participated in this study. Sharing such background information would risk revealing participant identities. Using pseudonyms for the purpose of anonymity, a summary of information describing the 14 participants is presented in Table 10.

**Introduction of Emergent Themes**

Three primary themes emerged from this study: (a) Blindfolded and Scared; (b) Learning the Big Skills—A Daunting Task; and (c) Doing Something Meaningful—It’s Important to Me. Fourteen sub-themes were also identified. Each theme and corresponding sub-themes are discussed in the ensuring sections.

**Blindfolded and scared.** The first emergent theme, *Blindfolded and Scared*, describes educator’s first months and years in their respective roles. Initial reaction to their new work environment was one of apprehension, bewilderment and insecurity. Educators share a sense of isolation and loneliness, questioning whether this professional role was a good fit for them. Figure 1 depicts theme one and associated sub-themes.
Table 10

*Millennial Extension Educator Participant Demographics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assigned Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Years as an Extension Educator</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amanda</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>5-7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephanie</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>2-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christopher</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>2-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emily</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>0-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brittany</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>5-7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kayla</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>0-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>2-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelsey</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>0-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matthew</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>5-7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samantha</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>5-7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>0-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courtney</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>2-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashley</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>5-7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Megan</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>2-3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Average: 29  Average: 3.2*

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**Figure 1. A visual display of theme one and sub-themes.**

Theme One: Blindfolded and Scared

- **Sub-theme One:** What Should I Do?
- **Sub-theme Two:** Overwhelmed!
- **Sub-theme Three:** Knowing That People Have Your Back
What should I do?  Exactly what does an Extension educator do?  That was the question that nearly all Millennial Generation educators asked introspectively during their first few weeks, months and sometimes years on the job.  Rachel described her initial Extension experience as “…very scary at first. I was terrified!”  Matt shared, “I didn’t have a clue what I was really supposed to be doing.”  Samantha asked a colleague, “What am I supposed to do?”  Amanda admitted, “I didn’t know what I was supposed to do, so that was frustrating.”  Chris noted, “I was really unsure of what the job entailed.  I had an idea of what they [educators] do, but really, what was I supposed to be doing day-to-day?”  Brittany commented that “A lot of times when I’ve talked to new educators, we talk about sitting at our desks and wondering, what are we supposed to be doing?  What are we doing here?”

Almost unanimously educators described a shaky beginning to their Extension educator careers.  These early experiences were etched in their minds as they did not hesitate to offer detailed accounts of their thoughts and experiences during these rocky times.  Kayla reflected, 

The first couple months were really rocky.  What am I supposed to be doing?  I really did not have a grasp on what I was supposed to be doing.  I didn’t find that nice little sheet about week one, week two. No, it was like, here’s this big notebook. At one point early in her career she asked herself, “Should I have taken this job?” and followed up saying, “I’m still kind of lost” after one year in the position.

Several educators referred to showing up for work the first day to find a desk, a computer and in some situations only a support staff member to help guide them.  They described the anxiety of waiting for clientele to call or visit the office to offer them some sense of direction, a sense of what their role would be.  Michael was one of them.
At first I didn’t really know what things I could be involved in. I’d sit in my office, and this was kind of the battle of the first year and a half….ok. I know I should be getting involved in something. What can I get involved in? Or can I start something that someone else isn’t doing. Every time I’d come up with an idea, all of a sudden there’d be an announcement coming across the e-mail chain for that exact same thing. I’m going, oh…already being done!

Kelsey exclaimed, “Oh, my God! What have I just gotten into? It’s nothing like I thought it would be, It’s completely different!” She paraphrased a quote from the book, The Blue Sword that she could identify with, “Everybody in the room can see, but I am blindfolded.” “I can identify with it because I’m in the room, you know, and I’m part of the system, but I still feel like I don’t know nearly as much as what’s going on, per se, but also, what’s expected of me?” Kelsey referred to a previous employment position where expectations were crystal clear, but there was much less autonomy for employees. The ambiguity of the educator role was unexpected and a shock to most study participants.

Emily remembered participating in her first Nebraska Cooperative Extension Association (NCEA) conference with several of her generational cohorts and thinking, “Wow, What should we be doing?” Several Millennials referred to assembling in packs or groups at large professional gatherings such as conferences and professional development events. Gathering seemed to offer them self-assurance. Emily remarked, “What I don’t like is sometimes you don’t always have a lot of advice or guidance to get there, so a lot of it’s trial and error type situations.”

Samantha and others indicated that becoming established in Extension was a difficult task. Amanda, just about a year into her career struggled with where she should concentrate her efforts.
It’s been kind of slow and I know things aren’t supposed to happen overnight, but in those first couple months to keep hearing, “You should be doing school enrichment.” It makes it really uncomfortable. Am I doing what I’m supposed to be doing?

Ashley recalled interviewing for her educator position. She had excellent education training and teaching credentials, but expressed to the interviewing committee that she really didn’t know what Extension educators in her discipline did or how they did it. The interviewers’ response to this question was, “Oh don’t worry. We know you’ll learn it.” Disappointingly, Ashley said “Nobody ever actually taught it to me.” She has since observed several excellent educator delivered programs, yet several years later she still feels like she “doesn’t know enough to know what to ask them” regarding program development.

Arnold and Place (2010a) noted that new employees need more detailed information about the responsibilities of being an Extension educator. “The lack of clearly stated job expectations was frustrating to entry-level agents” (p. 3). Educators need more realistic expectations going into the job.

Purdue Cooperative Extension developed a basic program information and survival skills curriculum to assist new 4-H educators with issues that were paramount for them to understand immediately (Ritchie, 1996). UNL Extension implemented a comparable orientation program in 2009. Although this training is described as useful by Millennial educators, they seem to desire a more comprehensive approach to learning their roles.

**Overwhelmed.** A sense of overwhelming expectations permeates Millennial educators as they begin to review the core competencies and watch more seasoned colleagues perform their duties. Place and Bailey (2010) agreed that, “Extension
Table 11

**Significant Statement Samples: What should I do?**

- …very scary at first. I was terrified!
- I didn’t have a clue what I was really supposed to be doing, so at first you rely a lot on your strengths
- What am I supposed to do?”
- I was really unsure of what the job entailed. I had an idea of what they (educators) do, but really, what was I supposed to be doing day-to-day?
- A lot of times when I’ve talked to new educators, we talk about sitting at our desks and wondering, what are we supposed to be doing? What are we doing here?
- I didn’t find that nice little sheet about week one, week two. No, it was like, here’s this big notebook.
- I really did not have a grasp on what I was supposed to be doing.
- Should I have taken this job?”
- I’m still kind of lost.”
- I’d sit in my office, and this was kind of the battle of the first year and a half….ok. I know I should be getting involved in something. What can I get involved in? Or can I start something that someone else isn’t doing.
- Oh, my God! What have I just gotten into? It’s nothing like I thought it would be. It’s completely different!
- Everybody in the room can see, but I am blindfolded.
- Am I doing what I’m supposed to be doing?

Educators may feel overwhelmed with all of the information regarding the organization, job duties, and operational policies and procedures” (p. 1).

I noticed the anxiety and amazement in the eyes of educators as they shared candid feelings about expectations of their educator roles. Michael called it, “…quite a unique experience. Anybody that’s been in this position knows, you can have about anything walk through that door on a given day and you don’t know what you’re going to have to deal with.” Kelsey shared, “Here I don’t know, I feel like I don’t know what’s expected of me entirely. It’s a little more complicated than I thought it would be.”

Laughing, Matt noted, “A lot of things [in the educator role] come under ‘as needed’ or
‘as assigned’.” Place and Bailey (2010) stated, “Extension needs new employees to develop skills quickly to the level at which they can perform their work efficiently and effectively” (p. 1).

Stephanie, recalled her unit leader coming into her office the first day and saying, “You’re in charge of your own schedule” and walking out. Amanda was also perplexed by similar advice, “Oh, you make your own schedule. What does that mean?” These statements didn’t make a lot of sense at the time but did more so as their careers progressed and they learned more about the autonomy and complexity of their professional roles. It wasn’t long before all educators understood the meaning of “scheduling” and the increasing demands on their time.

Educators were challenged with weighing the advantages and disadvantages of investing time developing local community connections versus focusing on development of their subject matter and related competencies. Ashley struggled with the demands and expectations of local clientele versus direction suggested by UNL Extension administration.

Educators with multiple county responsibilities expressed frustration over the time required for day-to-day program management. An educator who manages several volunteer led programs alluded to the fact that the word “management” was frowned upon by Extension administration, yet “that is totally what it is!” She estimated spending about half of her time in management versus teaching. Ashley said, “I feel like I’m getting run over sometimes because I don’t serve as many people as a bigger office does, but the expectations are still there [from several counties].” It was obvious that Ashley
was a gifted teacher and that in fact was her professional passion, yet she felt like management responsibilities were holding her back.

Dated expectations and in some instances, examples, of traditional “county agent” roles sent mixed messages to Millennial educators. In the midst of a generational transition and Extension educators mutation from generalists to subject matter focused educators, young educators observed traditional generalist educators and pondered how they would ever have the broad-based wisdom of these professionals. The Extension System was changing, yet traditional clientele expectations and experienced educators’ actions were conveying yesteryear visions of what their roles should be. Chris referred in awe to the “old county agents who were kind of know-everything people. It’s hard for me to imagine knowing everything or having to deal with everything from animal science to agronomy.” Brittany also talked about her goal to have the broad knowledge base that she observes in more veteran educators. She wondered, “Will I ever get to that point? We [her and other educators] want to be as good someday.” This self-inflicted pressure seemed to cause novice educators to drift into a variety of subject matter disciplines during their first couple years as an educator. In their quest to be everything to all people they sometimes sacrificed opportunities to hone their knowledge and skills in their respective area of subject matter specialization. Several educators expressed the sentiment that earlier in their careers they questioned if they were “good enough” for their respective positions.

More than a year into her educator role, Emily said, “Right now, I’m just getting my feet wet.” She recalled a recent experience where new faculty were introduced thinking, “Man, I remember when I was that new person! [laugh] “Oh my gosh!” The
challenge is figuring out who everyone is, what they do, and how the system fits together. Emily reflected [half joking, half serious], “After the new employee trainings are over, then I guess you’re considered a regular educator.” But, realistically she hinted that she hoped for additional guidance in regard to electronic Annual Report of Faculty Accomplishments (ARFA) reporting, professional development, and “just how to get through some of these things you should be doing your first five years or whatever.”

Courtney, like several other educators, described her Extension career as “definitely having some ups and downs, and some big learning curves.” Ashley said during her first year on the job, “I’m doing this stuff and I don’t even really know what to ask. I know I should be doing this, but I don’t even know how to get there.” This sense of a semi-guided, orientation and training tour was echoed by other educators. In a “chance” scenario educators may or may not obtain the guidance, connections, training or resources to address issues that were upon them.

Educators characterized their role as challenging and overwhelming at times. Brittany described her Extension educator career as a great experience where she’s learned a lot, but also has been burned out at times.

Usually, when I get to that point I’m not smiling anymore. It’s a huge indicator when I realize I’m not smiling and I’m not happy. And then I realize I need to do something about it. I pray about it and I have to find something, some way to balance. I need to either get rid of something or I need to take some time off.

Amanda credited her spouse for supporting her in her early Extension career. She said, “Um, you know, there’s been, wow, there’s been a lot of times when [choking up] you know, I didn’t think I could get through it.” On several occasions participants became emotional about their Extension educator journeys. Clearly, a sense of isolation
and immense responsibility and expectations weighed on novice educators. Each 
described unique approaches of dealing with the dark side of their professional roles.

Millennial educators have left UNL Extension in recent years. Lack of direction 
and organization support caused some current educators to consider leaving their position 
to pursue other interest. Amanda said, “I could see why maybe some other educators had 
left. When I started I kind of wanted to go back to [my old job], mostly because of the 
lack of training.” Courtney described her experience as “exciting, nerve-wracking at 
different points…at one point, wanting to quit.” Changes in the educators’ support 
network ultimately convinced them to continue as Extension educators. Examples of 
changes in support networks included (a) rewarding team programming experiences, 
(b) excellent mentoring, (c) additional support staff, and (d) recognition for program 
accomplishments.

Matt commented that when he started his career, “I think Extension had kind of 
forgotten about professional development or training new educators.” Three supervisors 
over the course of about four years and lack of a solid mentoring relationship made his 
journey challenging. Some educators seemed to “fall between the cracks.”

Zimmer and Smith (1992) discuss the importance of nurturing new employees 
who are destined to be the “new life and energy” (p. 1) of the organization. This 
enthusiasm can quickly fade as educators fall victim to organizational, administrative and 
clientele expectations in addition to personal, family and career obligations.

**Knowing that people have your back.** Novice educators reflected on critical, 
sometimes pivotal points in their brief Extension careers. Among the most striking
experiences were examples of experienced educators, Extension supporters, and supervisors stepping up to defend young educators that were being maligned by clientele.

Brittany reminisced about presenting to a group of Extension clientele and being rudely interrupted, challenged and smeared by a participant who did not value a young female educator’s advice. The participant eventually began to call her names, attempting to discredit her and started to make his way to the front of the room. At that point an experienced Extension educator stood up and defended her credentials and knowledge of the subject matter. “Those things were critical for me at really establishing respect and a reputation for knowing [my subject matter].”

Amanda recounted a time during county fair when she was in tears over a situation that she knew required immediate attention. She found solitude between a couple buildings on the fairgrounds and called her mentor for advice who talked her through the situation. Another time an angry client arrived at her Extension office that was very critical of the University, blaming the institution for his crop failure misfortune—he wasn’t going to leave until he had some answers. Amanda panicked and picked up the phone to call a colleague while the client was still in her office. The colleague talked the client through the situation and he left the office. Amanda immediately called the colleague back to thank him. Amanda said, “I think it’s just kind of knowing that people have your back.” Smith and Beckley (1985) focused on mentor behaviors that included teaching, guiding, advising, counseling, sponsoring, role modeling, validating, motivating, protecting and communicating.

Courtney recounted an instance where a family was discounting her abilities and authority. As an individual who wore her emotions on her sleeve she routinely found it
difficult to deal with such encounters. Immediately following one such incident an Extension supporter came up to her and said, “Don’t let that family get to you. Remember, you know your job. You know what you’re doing. We need you in this county.”

Another time Courtney was at State Fair when a family yelled at her in front of her colleagues. When colleagues inquired about the problem she said, “I can’t talk about it now because I’ll cry.” An experienced educator heard about the incident through the grapevine and later approached the family who had confronted the young educator and said, “That’s not how you treat your educator. We know that’s not what you would have done to me.” Courtney’s response, “The Extension family is amazing.” This type of support seemed central to Courtney’s continuation as an Extension educator.

**Theme One Summary**

It was eye-opening to learn about the challenges that met Millennial educators at the doorstep as they embarked on a “rocky road” to their Extension educator careers. Millennials described frustrating experiences as they reminisced about sitting at their desks asking themselves “What am I supposed to be doing?” The ambiguity of the educator role troubled Millennial educators. Overwhelming expectations, immense responsibility, and attempting to survive in multiple and ambiguous roles challenged Millennials during their first four to five years on the job. Clearly, having a support system in place during the early years is critical to retaining Millennial educators.
Developing the Big Skills—A Daunting Task

The second emergent theme addresses development of core competencies or “big skills needed for success.” The process of learning these skills proved to be a complex and sometimes daunting task for new educators. Educators initially share uncertainty about the nature of the competencies, but quickly recount the people, places and connections that enabled developing core competencies. Figure 2 depicts theme two and associated sub-themes.

![Figure 2](image-url)

*Figure 2.* A visual display of theme two and sub-themes.

**What competencies?** Without hesitation all educators interviewed admitted being out of touch with the competency development process. Ashley summarized her cohorts’ sentiments, “Oh, my goodness. You know, it’s been awhile since I’ve really looked at them.” Samantha said, “It’s been something I haven’t really necessarily consciously
thought about.” Most remembered being introduced to the core competencies during new employee orientation, at a NCEA conference, or via their respective district director. In almost all instances, educators recognized the competencies list, but few had the list of competencies readily available for review.

Megan viewed the competencies as, “the big skills that you need to be successful.” Courtney agreed, “It [competencies list] really does put what we’re supposed to do in writing.” She remembered seeing them at new employee training and thinking, “I didn’t have a clue what they were.” Now she appreciates the career guidance that the competencies offer. She recalled discussing the competencies, having so much thrown at her, and hearing repeatedly, “In a little bit it will make sense to you.” The problem is “sometimes you don’t get that little reminder [verification] that says it does make sense.”

Chris shared an honest reflection.

Well, I’ll tell you, this [interview] has actually been a good deal because when you said core competencies, honestly I couldn’t right off the top of my mind remember or exactly picture them. It’s probably been a couple years since I reviewed them. So it was actually good to come back and read through and review what they involved. It also reminded me of some things that I need to work on and maybe become better at.

Rennekamp and Nall (1994) suggest that central motivators for entry stage educators’ professional development are the (competencies) “…required to do the job and understanding the organization's structure, function, and culture at that point in the organization's history” (p. 2).

**Learning the big skills.** Learning the core competences “Seemed kind of daunting.” according to Michael. He wasn’t alone. Kelsey remembered thinking, “Oh, my gosh! This is what they expect you to know? They’re so complex! I don’t really
know how to go about learning it [competencies] or making sure I know it.” Stephanie remarked, “Holy cow! I’ve got to know how to do everything on this list and do it proficiently?” Ashley [in a panic] questioned how her colleagues had learned the core competencies, “Ok, how did you learn this? What did you do? Was there specific professional development you did? Was it all on your own?”

Kelsey admitted that at first glance, she couldn’t imagine spending several days during new employee orientation learning about core competencies. Initially she thought, “What’s there to talk about? But then it’s like no! [laugh] We need like a whole day on what core competency means and how we’re going to learn it [a competency] and then develop it and then put it to use.” Her perception of competencies on paper compared to on-the-job implementation changed immensely in the course of just a few weeks.

Kelsey described her impression of the new employee orientation competency training as superficial. She referred to the training including a lot of the “what” but not the “how.”

One of the competencies is “leads applied/adaptive research projects.” Great! That sounds really complicated, but kind of interesting. And under it, it says assist specialists in the conduct of applied adaptive research. Well, who? Who are these specialists that are doing research? And, do I just call them up and say, hey, I hear you’re doing research [laugh]. I’m expected to participate and apply to adaptive research projects. Can I help you?

Also,

I am regularly supposed to report impact of educational programs to administration and decision makers. Who are the decision makers? You know, I don’t know. How am I supposed to report it? When do they want it reported? There’s no how. There’s a lot of what.

Educators in some cases blamed themselves for not being more aggressive in learning the competencies. Chris noted, “I take the blame for the first six to eight months
of my career for not maybe being as proactive as I should have been. I should have made more time I guess.” Amanda was also critical of herself for wandering, in search of competency development opportunities. These educators and others stressed about taking time out for competency development when they felt like they should be doing other things like serving clientele.

Kelsey explained that, “it’s hard to accept that people [educators and supervisors] mean it when they say take the time to go to this class. Each time a professional development opportunity avails itself she feels torn about whether to attend or not. I mean, it’s not the end of the world [if I attend] but at the same time I feel like my job is here [at the office]. It’s kind of the same thing with shadowing. Would it make me a better educator? Probably, but can I take the time away from here? I know I would feel bad!

A mystery among all Millennial Educators is the timeline associated with competency development. The core competency document (UNL Extension, 2005) notes that “These skills are either present at the time of hiring or has the capacity to develop soon after hiring.” To Kelsey, soon after hiring “is about a month.” Kelsey suggested, “The time allotment needs to be spelled out a little bit more. Like, we expect you to have this down by the end of the first year.”

Most educators spoke of the competency development experience requiring several years to develop. Almost three years into her Extension career, Courtney said, “I learned so much about myself in the first year, yet I feel like I’m incredibly new to this system.” Michael remarked, “You’re only in this system for two years. I mean, you’re barely getting to know the place.” Kayla was impatient with the duration of the process, “I feel like I’m not learning as quickly as I should be. I don’t feel like my learning curve is steep enough right now.”
Michael remarked, “There are a lot of them! And it’s not something you’re going to develop overnight.” Most of the educators interviewed commented that either mentors or program team members suggested that competency development would take place over several years—five or more. Other mentors offered new educators words of wisdom regarding the competency development timeline. Michael heard, “Ok, this is not something they’re [Extension administration] expecting overnight. You’re going to see this develop over ten, fifteen years.” He was relieved knowing that, “OK they’re not expecting, by the time I hit first promotion in five years, that I have mastered these [competencies].” Megan agreed that it took several of her mentors and program team members to say the following before she understood the competency development timeline, “You know, this isn’t going to happen overnight. It’s not going to happen even in a year or two years or probably in some cases five years.”

Samantha said that competency development was happening the first two to three years but the rate of development definitely picked up at that point. “It was slow to start out, but then once I developed that network, it really took off.”

Several of the older Millennial educators recalled the moment when their role as an educator became clearer—it “clicked.” Brittany was an active educator yet she longed for the moment when she felt she had arrived and understood her role. She reminisced about fielding calls regarding a particular agronomic issue for some time and then one day, several months into her Extension career it happened.

Finally, it clicked! I can do an on-farm project. I can collaborate with industry. I can collaborate with farmers. We can figure out the answer to this problem. I honestly feel like that point is what launched my career. So that’s when the light bulb went on and I got it.
Up to that point in time, she recognized the importance of offering research-based information and being unbiased, but “I didn’t know how to do it or how I could do it.”

Amanda recollected that, “Two or three years ago [three to four years into her Career] is probably when I finally started to feel like I’m getting there. I guess everything has kind of all come together. I mean it just all kind of clicked.”

Megan reflected on her development of competencies and recognized that the process was on-going, “It’s not a one-time development or a ‘check’ I got that one. It’s constant. You never stop learning.” She recommended “keeping it [competencies] in front of us [new educators] more, so that it is a more active process the first two to three years.

All participants reported making competency development progress, subconsciously in many cases. At first glance, educators viewed the competencies as complicated and overwhelming, yet as time went on they realized, as Stephanie noted, “I can do that. I do those things.” Courtney concurred that she was “happy to say, I do a lot of them. I do them without thinking about doing them.”

Marston (2007) suggests that if an employee is kept on the job for four years, turnover numbers drop dramatically because they have become acclimated to the workplace and have likely bonded with a leader who is their mentor or coach.

**Learning by doing.** Millennial educators left little doubt regarding their competencies learning style preferences—hands-on, learning-by-doing was highly desired by all educators. Face-to-face observational and active experiences were overwhelmingly preferred to on-line or lecture-based training. Kayla said, “I think you need them [competencies] modeled somehow. I mean, you need to be able to see it.”
Samantha recommended involving new educators in specific projects very early in their tenure to give them immediate opportunity to meet and work with colleagues, rather than, “OK figure out your program by yourself.” Kelsey did immediately immerse herself in an education program. She described it as all encompassing—making community connections, raising funds and managing volunteers. “I can’t imagine not having some sort of program my whole first year, like that would have been really boring and I would have lost interest in my job! I learn by doing.” Stephanie also preferred learning competencies via program development and delivery, “I learn best by doing.” Matt concurred by saying he needed to apply them [competencies], “Learning them is good, but you still have to make a point to do them.”

Chris appreciated being invited to seasoned educators’ programs to observe their teaching styles and learn how they advertise programs. He described himself as, “a real visual and action learner. I would say the hands-on, learning by doing, being involved with other educators that do well in a certain competency area.”

Kayla too championed the idea of spending time with other educators, face-to-face before, during and following programs. She referred to simple small-talk questions that she could comfortably ask in this environment like, “Hey! What are you up to right now?” Or, “I have this problem. How do you think I should handle it?” These conversations were particularly rich with, “someone [educator colleague] that does something similar to what you do. And, I think it’s been easier done when you’re actually physically standing next to them.” Mincemoyer and Thomson (1998) reported that connecting mentors and mentees with similar programmatic responsibilities
contributed to successful relationships. Such relationships offered both parties more opportunity to meet, interact and share common programming interests.

Kelsey suggested an active approach to teaching competencies in a workshop format. She suggested developing workshops targeting specific competency areas where the instruction would be generic to subject matter interest, but each educator would have opportunity for hands-on competency development and assessment projects in their respective subject matter areas. This would particularly effective if Millennials partnered with seasoned educators to complete their projects.

**If I fail it’s public.**

Millennials were very conscious of their workplace credibility. Kayla commented that, “Both of my support staff members could be my mom. But I feel like there’s even more to prove at work because I am so much younger. Whereas in my personal life, I can be twenty-five and still make mistakes.” Kelsey shared her fear that, “If I do fail, it’s very public [to both colleagues and clientele].”

Brittany stressed the importance of being accepted among her colleagues and clientele. She attributed her early success to that of area educators who invited her to speak at their respective programs and introduced her to clientele. “That was huge!”

Amanda appreciated teaming up with experienced educators in her area to learn more about her respective subject matter. She particularly valued teaming up with her colleagues to meet with clientele in her early years as an educator. “If the client asked a question, surely one of us [laugh] would know the answer.” Eventually she gained the confidence to meet clientele solo, “Just knowing that you know more than the client was enough confidence to get out there.” In retrospect she said, “And so, I think it’s been a
long journey, but I kind of finally feel like I’m you know, where I need to be and feel happy now!” Arnold and Place (2010a) reported that educators with hands-on experience were better able to offer clientele advice.

Brittany commented that several male educators have approached her in recent years saying, “You know, all we’re hiring is female agriculture educators.” They were close to being on target. The gender University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension educators is evolving to a female dominated role. Today, only 6 out of 32 Millennial Generation Extension educators are male.

Female Millennial Educators often commented about the value of having female colleagues to consult regarding a variety of issues. Brittany, as one of the first Millennial Generation female hires had more experience that many of her female colleagues. She began receiving inquiries from these educators like, “How do you get your guys [farmer clientele] to listen to you?” Brittany’s first thought was, “These gals have to succeed!”

Brittany’s approach to solving the situation was to congregate her female colleagues and spend time talking about the issues that were challenging them. She tried to help them enhance interaction with clientele and better understand some of the science in their respective subject matter areas. Her assistance in learning competencies was noted by several younger Millennial Generation females.

Amanda also discussed her role of working with decision makers and her feeling of self-doubt when visiting with them. Amanda remembered one of her Leadership Education/Action Development LEAD sessions that focused on difference, dynamics and genders. During this session the speaker suggested that women sometimes don’t assert themselves, but rather ask permission or questions. So Amanda adopted a more
proactive, authoritative approach when making subsequent presentations and requests at County Supervisor meetings. She seemed almost amazed at the demeanor change of the Board when she took such an approach. Her confident approach has worked to the benefit of the local Extension program.

**Mentors always.** Place and Bailey (2010) described a mentor as, “an influential senior organizational member with advanced experience and knowledge who is dedicated to providing mobility and support to a mentee’s professional career” (p. 1). Success of mentorship among Millennial educators varied greatly, at least among assigned mentors, but most educators eventually found one or more mentors that they credited with helping them develop core competencies. There were exceptions.

Kayla’s administrator advised her that she should pick a mentor, but it never happened and “Still [a year later] I don’t really see myself as having a mentor.” Zimmer and Smith (1992) advised that mentoring relationships be established early in the protégé’s employment noting that such relationships were less beneficial as time went on.

Ashley credited her first mentor with helping her survive early in her career, “Oh my gosh, she got me through my first couple years in Extension.” She helped Ashley learn about Extension and understand what the expectations were. There were other mentors along the way. One of which Ashley said, “Made sure we all knew who to talk to. We know people. He/she made sure we knew people.” Zimmer and Smith (1992) noted the importance of mentors supporting, challenging and providing vision to their protégés.

Rachel also praised her mentor saying, “She’s easy to get a hold of and she always answers my questions in a timely fashion.” Rachel confided in her mentor that she
didn’t know the answers to many clientele inquiries. Her mentor responded, “For about
the first year I kept saying, that’s a good question, let me get back to you on that.” So the
mentor related to Rachel’s situation and made her feel more comfortable.

Stephanie too spoke highly of her mentors. In fact she said, “[subject matter
mentor’s name]’s my mentor and she’s always going to be my mentor.” She also spoke
highly of her unit leader mentor and her millennial colleague Brittany, “she’s a great role
model.”

Morgan (2006) asserted that Millennials realize the importance of multiple
mentors in the workplace. Emily experimented with a mentoring committee versus a
single mentor. Her mentoring committee is made up of educators and specialists that she
was initially assigned to visit with about Extension competencies. She routinely e-mails
her mentor group for input and advice regarding a broad spectrum of questions. She
remarked that sometimes the entire mentor committee responded to her inquiries for
assistance and other times nobody responded. She commented that, “sometimes you
don’t always have a lot of advice or guidance on how to get there, so a lot of it’s trial and
error type of situations.” Other times, she receives multiple perspectives on an issue.

Kayla also described broadcasting e-mail inquiries to colleague asking for assistance with
clientele inquiries and receiving good response. She commented, “We can be very
thankful that people do work together at UNL.” Richardson (2008) discussed on-line
collaborative solutions like e-mentoring as desirable to Millennials.

Courtney shared one of the more successful mentor experiences. Because she had
no prior Extension exposure, her first month as an Extension educator was spent
shadowing her mentor at the mentor’s Extension office. She spent time watching her
mentor teach, manage a volunteer body that made program decisions, and visiting about how things work in Extension. “I think about these competencies and I can hear comments or I can think of people [educators or others that she has learned from].”

Courtney proudly described her mentor as, “She’s always there. If I have a question or anything. I can call her anytime. I absolutely love it because we built a friendship at work and personally.” Zimmer and Smith (1992) concur that the mentoring relationship relies heavily upon the mentor’s availability to the mentee when in need. Once Courtney arrived at the location of her new job assignment a neighboring educator took her under her wing. This mentor also offered great guidance. Courtney noticed that this mentor focused on balancing her personal and professional life. Her mentor soon learned to read Courtney’s demeanor. Courtney said, “She’s not afraid to question me or to tell me…” Sometimes she simply looks at Courtney and [sensing Courtney is stressed] says, “Courtney, you need to take tomorrow off.”

Emily also commended one of her mentors, Amanda, a Millennial colleague, who took her under her wing to teach and encourage her in the professional development competency. She praised this mentor for explaining Extension’s numerous acronyms, spending time with her at her first Annual Extension Conference, and guiding her through the registration process for her first National Association of County Agricultural Agents (NACAA) Conference. Amanda sent an e-mail to several new educators that read, “Ok, I know you “guys” are all going to NACAA Conference for the first time this year. If you need help registering or have any questions let me know because I’ve been through it a couple times.” Megan, like other older Millennial educators felt a strong sense of responsibility to new novice Millennial educators.
I always felt like people were good at including me to start, so I want to be the same way to newer people. Because how else do they feel like they’re a part of something and learn and feel welcome?

Connecting with specialists as mentors was mentioned by several educators. Michael was impressed by how much some Extension specialists’ knew about Extension educator roles, “it’s amazing how much the specialists know, as far as you operating in your educator role.” Samantha pinpointed the leader of one of her program committee as an innovator and a primary source of inspiration for her career development. Michael noticed great value in spending time with educators and specialists working in his particular subject matter field.

You really get a feel for where they’re at, what they are experiencing, and then they get a feel for what you are experiencing. It really allows for a free flow of information with those individuals. You can come out with something that’s useful for you and for someone that’s been at it a little longer [experienced educators] they’ve helped someone find their way.

He also commented on two noteworthy Extension office visits where he spent a day with one or more educators at their respective offices visiting and shadowing them. He observed that the body language of these educators was telling during his shadowing experiences. It wasn’t necessarily “what” they said during the experience, but rather “how.”

There were also encounters with experienced educators and specialists that were less encouraging. Emily expressed frustration in several attempts to engage specialists in programming, mentorship, professional development training, and writing publications. She described one specialist in her mentor group as, “too busy I guess to lend much advice. I don’t think he/she responded to one of them [inquiries for advice].” Stephanie referred to a specialist who was not very accommodating when she reached out to he/she
to learn more about core competencies. “He/she didn’t understand the importance of it, I guess” said Stephanie. Several educators referred to this sentiment as, “It’s just attitudes.” Clearly, there were Extension professionals who were not well suited or motivated for mentorship, but unfortunately they had a memorable impact on new educators’ development of competencies.

Mincemoyer and Thomson (1998) noted that “poor mentor attitudes about Extension were perceived by the protégés as an inhibiting factor in their mentoring relationship” (p. 3). They recommended mentors be selected with the following characteristics: (a) Extension organization knowledge, (b) empathy towards new staff, (c) program knowledge in their respective fields, and (d) friendly personality and a positive attitude.

Chris talked about being new enough to Extension that he really didn’t know what questions to ask his mentors and likewise, “they [his mentors] kind of fumbled around, not knowing necessarily what to spend a day discussing with me.” In retrospect he thought scheduling a day when your mentor was presenting a program might be ideal. The new educator could meet with the mentor prior to the program and discuss preparations such as needs assessment, lesson plan development, and marketing that had led up to this effort. Then he could shadow the program and have the opportunity to watch his mentor’s teaching style and modes of interacting with class participants. Finally, he and his mentor could debrief each other about the program delivery experience, discuss program evaluations and consider next steps. This would give more purpose and substance to the mentoring experience. Matt also desired more shadowing
opportunities so he could observe first-hand what successful educators do and what makes them successful.

Kayla relied on her unit leader a lot in her first few months as an educator. In most Extension offices, the unit leader became a default or secondary mentor due to proximity and convenience to Millennial educators. Later she referred to an administrator mentor. She said, “I love being in meetings with [administrator’s name] just because of the way he/she handles different situations.” Several Millennials referred to carefully watching colleagues and supervisors teach and interact with clientele. “You watch how your district director teaches. Because you know he/she has to be pretty good at it. There’s so much to learn.”

A couple educators reminisced about Extension internship experiences. Although their internship experiences were useful, they revealed that the experience only offered a glimpse of a sliver of the Extension organization. Amanda commented, “I did the internship, but I didn’t really understand the whole scheme of things—the breadth of the [Extension] system.”

Educators who had opportunities to shadow established Extension educators early in their careers expressed how valuable these experiences were to their initial success. The chance to observe experienced educators teaching, leading volunteers, and managing fairs left a lasting impression. Having time to learn Extension core competencies prior to or soon after commencing Extension educator position duties was time well spent according to all educators who had experienced it. Kayla, like her Millennial colleagues had heard through the grapevine how educators a couple decades ago spent two to three months shadowing an experienced educator in their respective office prior to being
assigned to their own county office. She said, “That was really valuable because you really learned what goes on in an Extension office and how they handle their programs.”

Place and Bailey (2010) noted that mentees learned “(a) how to find and build relationships with important clientele in the community, (b) how to manage volunteers, (c) knowledge of how the Extension services work, (d) technical information about their program area, (e) how to develop an advisory committee, and (f) how to develop and report impact accomplishments.”

Networking and jelling. Networking happens in a plethora of ways for new Extension educators. Ashley mentioned that, “I think I’m more aware of my communities now than when I started. And I think that’s huge step forward. I think especially for somebody that’s not from the area originally.” Ashley equated local community acceptance with success, “That’s how we know [laugh]! It’s really nice; it’s so nice because it’s actually an intimidating thing to come into Extension as a young educator.”

Almost all educators referred to their respective subject matter (or spire) focus. It was obvious that they had been coached to move in this direction. Some were in the process of identifying their respective expertise niche and others were actively developing and delivering programs in their focus area. All were very cognizant of the Extension educator teaching expectations. The more experienced Millennial educators expressed concern that perhaps younger educators were taking the charge to focus too literally and perhaps compromising local responsibilities or opportunities to better connect with local clientele. Emily noted, “Well, the problem is, it doesn’t fit into the spires, so I have to be careful about too much programming outside of my spire area.”
particular, experienced educators emphasized the importance of novice educators following up with clientele inquiries regardless of the nature of the question or the respective educator’s expertise. Michael recognized the push to “focus and have your own area of expertise, but just because you have expertise doesn’t mean you are not going to have odd ball samples come through the door.” According to one experienced Millennial educator, lack of responsiveness to clientele inquiries is the number one issue with novice educators. In their quest to be specialized in 4-H, horticulture or agronomy Brittany surmised that, “It seems that some educators lost opportunities to get acquainted with their colleagues and really begin to understand what some of the teams do in the system.”

While former generation mentors sometimes advised Millennial educators to refrain from committee assignments and responsibilities during their first year in service, older Millennials disagreed by citing the advantages of beginning to network immediately. Newly hired educators who spent time at county fairs and state fairs soon after being hired, found this experience propelled their professional networking. Kayla agreed, she argued that when asked to be involved in projects and teams,

…you have to say “yes” and you have to get involved or people won’t ask you to do things and then you’re struggling with what to do…to be involved in projects. So you see if you don’t say “yes” you won’t be asked again. Or you’re seen as a non-player.

Courtney recalled beginning her Extension career about State Fair time. Her colleagues thought, “Oh my gosh! That is at terrible time!” But, it turned out to be great, because she met so many people early in her career and subsequently when she needed to contact them later, she had already met them.

Emily described her early networking experience as follows,
You rely heavily on your office staff and district director and mentoring committee to get you through the first steps. And then, once you start to meet more of your colleagues and branch out and meet more people you go from knowing this many people to pretty soon, I guess the networking web across the state.

Amanda referenced one of her vocational agriculture teaching block instructors offering the advice, “You want to make sure everybody knows that you are in town, that you need resources, and that you can be a resource.” Megan remembered asking her unit leaders for names of clientele in her respective program area. She proceeded to visit each of them at their home or business. She reaped excellent educational ideas from her visits and recruited new clientele too. Stephanie’s unit leader suggested that she do the same. She was reluctant at first, but pursued this advice later, finding it very fruitful.

Brittany described her first day on the job. A couple neighboring educators had invited her to join them on a field visit. She arrived in a car and they commented, “Oh, she drives a car.” Then they cautioned her about the muddy field conditions. But, she said, “Oh, that’s fine!” So she pulled out her overshoes and one of them said, “Oh, my word, she has boots!” As they embarked on their tasks in the field, they realized that they needed a hammer. Brittany promptly retrieved a hammer from her car. The experienced educators said, “This is good!” “So it was just funny how that first day really jelled us as a team so well,” said Brittany. She was a proponent of having new educators meet mentors and colleagues somewhere other than the office so they would be able to “relax and talk about things.” This notion of spending time away from the office, in one-on-one or small group settings with colleagues was mentioned by several Millennials. Kutilek and Earnest (2001) reported that mentors and protégés preferred interacting in a calm, relaxed atmosphere.
Brittany’s first day experience mentioned earlier was a significant in her Extension career development.

That was a huge thing for me. Having your colleagues meet you and do something together that first day would I think help more of my colleagues be successful. Forming a team of core people right away that I could count on and talk to made a big difference for me. If I would have just come into the office and sat there that first day, I would have twiddled my thumbs asking, what do I do?

An important component of becoming respected and adopted by colleagues is the process of connecting or teaming up with a couple colleagues early to help yourself grow, understand the Extension system, and build credibility faster. Brittany emphasized the need to bond with colleagues first, “because I feel like if your colleagues are behind you, they will go to bat for you.”

Megan’s memorable networking experience was a multi-day program shadowing experience that was led by her mentor and recommended by her district director. She eventually co-led a team effort that developed a similar educational program in another part of the state. The collegial network that Megan developed early in this process remains today and is valuable in her program planning process. Her office colleagues also assumed important mentor roles for day-to-day issues where she sought out “seasoned perspectives.”

Stephanie yearned for more connecting time with colleagues statewide, stating as others in her cohort had, that Extension educators and specialist tend to gather as a system only about once a year at the Annual Extension Conference and the NCEA conference. Matt too mentioned that there were few times when educators made time “to really just get to know that person.” He suggested that the most valuable part of the Annual Extension Conference was the time allocated to interact with co-workers.
Kayla described a sense of isolation, where the lack of like age colleagues in both her geographic and program area made being an educator and simply being happy in her community difficult. She talked about her travels to Lincoln and how these trips are one reason she is still an Extension educator. She said, “It’s interesting because after I go to Lincoln for a meeting, I always come back with a little bit better feeling because I feel more connected again with Lincoln. The only reason I’m still here [an Extension educator] is that I had some of those contacts at UNL.” She suggested that “…relationships are extremely important” to help new educators orientate to the Extension organization and to develop core competencies. She was one of several educators who suggested adding campus tours to the staff orientation agenda—an opportunity to locate buildings and meeting department heads and faculty.

Multiple county responsibilities and commuting to work challenged educators’ connections to local communities. Megan felt like she would be more engaged with her community if she lived there. About half of the study participants did not live in the community where their offices were located. Michael suggested that perhaps community citizenship was more important and practical to yesteryear’s county agents (Extension educators), when there were approximately two agents resident in each county. He questioned the reality of addressing such a competency by asking, “Well, if I start getting involved in all of this [citizenship], how am I supposed to chase down my competency and my subject matter?”

**Team millennials.** Millennial educators vented frustration on multiple occasions about not feeling a part of the Extension team. Emily spoke of attending her first Annual Extension Conference and not knowing exactly what to do or what sessions to attend.
Michael and Matt both commented about how their generational cohort tended to form groups in unfamiliar territory. Michael said, “We like individuality, yet we travel in packs.”

Emily shared a sense of not feeling welcomed at one of her program teams. When this situation failed to improve, she and other Millennial educators decided to form their own team—“Everybody got on the wrong page and so we kind of started our own page.” Samantha referred to this same circumstance.

It’s really helped me enjoy my job much more to have a core group of people that I do a lot of programming with. We’re all about the same age. We just all happen to be female. We do a lot of programming together and I think that’s really helped. It was slow to start out, but then once I developed that network, it really took off.

Chris and Samantha referred to favorable team experiences, specifically their membership in the Husker Ag Strengthen your Management Abilities, increase your Responsiveness to business challenges, and help you build your business Technical Skills (SMARTS) business management program team. The team leader was described as innovative and “pushing to think outside the box in terms of teaching theses skills in a new way that would really help people actually apply them and understand them.” Chris appreciated being given leadership roles on this team that taught him to organize group meetings. He also assumed a teaching role that offered him a wide spectrum of clientele engagement that he was grateful to have experienced.

Samantha also shared another team experience that was helpful. This team leader made a point of including everyone in area programs, giving everybody their own part and subsequently credit for what they did. Samantha said the biggest take home message is “…just for us to feel included right away.”
Almost universally, educators credited team or program committee networking as a critical experience that helped launch their competency development. Michael was a proponent of small, two to three member teams, that he felt were very effective, versus larger teams that seemed to have difficulty meshing and “getting anything particularly meaningful done.”

Earlier in this discussion, Brittany shared her strategy to help novice Millennial educators succeed in the Extension system. Her approach was to bring several female educators together to offer advice and hands-on field training. This effort was not part of Extension’s formal employee orientation process, but rather an entrepreneurial effort of one Millennial attempting to network and mentor her colleagues.

Millennials spoke of an undercurrent of communication among their cohort via text messaging, phone calls, Microsoft Messenger and Facebook. It was clear that this generation would not be denied collegiality—if not with colleagues of other generations, certainly among their own cohort.

**Theme Two Summary**

Millennials articulated their daunting task of developing core competencies or “big skills needed for success” in numerous ways. Not recalling or recognizing the core competencies foreshadowed a delicate and sometimes misguided journey. Upon learning “what” needed to be learned, the Millennials soon turned to “who” could assist them and “how” they could master each competency. The competencies served as a tool and a set of expectations to help novice educators develop as professionals, but the Millennials desired a more structured, enduring and personal approach to learning these important “big skills.” Novice educators highly preferred hands-on, learning-by-doing competency
development experiences. They also sought out mentors, teams and various personal and professional networks to help them attain competencies. It was clear that this generational cohort sought confidence in their competence. Ultimately, when in need, Millennials teamed up with their cohorts to find solutions.

**Doing Something Meaningful—It’s Important To Me!**

The third emergent theme focuses on the millennial mindset. This generation is passionate about their Extension educator role and could use some recognition—not for the trophy case, but to reassure them that they are on track and performing well. The optimism that this generational cohort has for Extension’s future is bright, but colleagues sometimes stifled opportunities. Finding balance will be key to retaining this generation. Millennials have the final word. Figure 3 depicts theme three and associated sub-themes.

**Meaningful work.** Educators illuminated this notion that Millennials seek recognition, but not necessarily for the same reasons that one might think. It’s not about “everyone gets a trophy” (Tulgan, 2009). Rather the point is to reassure these young
professionals that they are on the path to a successful and meaningful career. Millennials
have experienced less childhood rejection than recent previous generations so they
sometimes lack self-confidence (Marston, 2007). Assuring a supportive work
environment, reasonable workload and recognition was the second most important
workplace issue “…for attracting, retaining and motivating Extension educators over the
next 5 to 7 years” (Kroth & Peutz, 2011, p. 7).

Ashley asserted, “My goal is to come in and feel like I’m doing something
meaningful.” Lencioni (2007) noted signs of a miserable job as, not being understood or
appreciated by someone in authority, not knowing if your work matters to anyone, and no
tangible means for assessing if you are successful or failing in your work.

Brittany spoke of the importance of recognition for early career educators. “I got
an award and that’s key for us [Millennials]. We need to be able to know that we’re
successful, that we’re on the right path. I’ve seen that as a downfall for a few of my
colleagues.” She explained that although she needed this recognition early in her career,
but not anymore, that as of late it has become problematic because other Millennial
educator are not receiving comparable recognition.

It almost becomes a competition thing. It’s holding some of my colleagues back
because they don’t feel like they’re as good because they haven’t gotten an award.
We’ve got to find a way to recognize them [Millennials] early in their career and
let them know that they’re doing a good job, that they’re on track. That will
motivate them to go forward.

Brittany suggested that simple verbal or token recognition would go a long ways
towards guiding and reassuring her Millennial cohort. Chris said, “I’ve been reassured
by seasoned educators and the district director that you know that for no more longer than
you’ve been in you’re doing exceptionally well. I would say it’s been a pretty rewarding
experience. It’s good.” Amanda welcomed comments from colleagues such as, “Hey, you know, you’re doing good.” A survey of 10,000 Fortune 1000 organizational employees found that 40 percent identified “lack of recognition” as a primary reason for leaving their job (Gibson, 2008).

One of the most often mentioned professional goals was promotion. Almost every educator interviewed referred to the Extension educator promotion process either as a goal or a perceived outcome of the competency development process. Courtney associated the core competency development process with academic promotion.

Huh! Is this [list of competencies] what determines if you get promoted or not [laugh]? …maybe the building blocks. Oh, so am I supposed to be in the transformational skills area to get promoted?” And so then it’s like, oh, am I doing enough?

Brittany recognized that many experienced educators who had been in the Extension system for many years were out of touch with the current faculty promotion process. She said, “They do not understand it” and recommended that new educators consult with their district director regarding these expectations. Recognition and promotion are important milestones in a Millennial Educator’s career, so mentors and administrators should be prepared to address this issue and offer useful guidance.

Amanda expressed frustration over recognition within teams, “You’re working as a team, but you still kind of are competing when it comes to promotions. I’ve kind of learned not to give ideas out. You see someone else run with it [your idea] and you’re like, oh, that was my idea!” Emily expressed similar annoyance over experienced educators and specialists listening to new educators’ ideas, saying, “You know, that’s a good idea! We should do that.” Then another person would get credit for it. “I think
that’s probably why a group of us newbies have taken up with each other because everybody is on the wrong page and so we kind of started our own page [a new team].”

**Optimism.** I think it’s important to note that all Millennial educators interviewed exuded enthusiasm. But simultaneously they made reference to some experienced Extension professionals who complained about change. Courtney said, “There are some educators that are able to think about the future and that is really nice, then there are others where the word ‘change’ is terrible.” She had a few colleagues that she was scared of and stayed away from because they were “cold,” “negative,” and “think they are the best.”

Several female educators referred to becoming discouraged at times based upon the actions of experienced educators and administration. Brittany noted,

> The only thing that discouraged me is so many times I hear, oh, we’ve tried that or there’s no point in even doing that. I mean there’s always an excuse. A lot of us [Millennial educators] are gung-ho. We have ideas and then so often ideas are squelched. Like, you can’t do that. And me! That doesn’t really get me down because I’m going to find a way to do it. But, I’ve seen so many other educators in tears telling me, “We were told we can’t do this.”

Brittany mentors her younger Millennial counterparts by asking questions such as; “What are the things that are limiting you?” and “What are the things that could make this happen?”

Michael noted:

> Some of them [experienced educators] really have a hard time with the changes that are currently moving through our system. And, they are constantly worried about what is going to happen? What am I going to do now?” He laughed as he recalled some veteran educators saying, “I’m doing the same thing. I’ll just change how I report it.

Technology was not a common discussion point among Millennials. I ascertain that in some respects that is because it is so widely accepted and implemented by this
generation that in a way it is not an issue to them. Stephanie was excited about employing social media technologies to augment her programs, but found a contradiction among what her supervisors said and indeed what they supported.

I feel that some people say we need to change and keep up with technologies, but then on the other hand you get reprimanded for using new technologies [i.e. Facebook and Twitter]. I’ve answered two or three questions on Facebook because the younger generation, like us, that’s how we communicate. But the [Extension] office says no Facebook at work. Well how are we supposed to manage our office Facebook account, because I’m not going to do it on my own time at home, because then I’m cutting into my time.

Qualman (2009) stated that more than 96% of Millennials have already joined at least one social network. “Let there be no doubt that this is where the vast majority of Extension’s future clientele are already located—and they should not be ignored.”

Accenture (2010) found that companies that “fail to embrace Millennial behavior are at risk of failing to attract and retain new hires, while also seeing their competitive edge erode from lack of innovation in information technology.” Globally, Millennials use their own technology devices in the workplace. More than half of this generational cohort indicated that an organization’s state-of-the-art equipment is a determining factor in their employment choice.

Extension educators often speak of the need to stay connected to traditional audiences which does not allow time to learn and implement new technologies. And while Extension professionals feel traditional clientele are resistant to new technologies, current trends indicate the contrary. Traditional, high-maintenance audiences are being served while sacrificing opportunity to reach new clientele. Extension administration and organizational bureaucracy have also been slow to progress (Seger, 2011).
Kayla felt older educators and the Extension System in general were struggling with basic needs like hope and positive outlook.

We frequently hear, “We don’t have enough time. We don’t have enough money. We’re too far away from each other. We don’t have enough people. Which are all four things that really aren’t going to change. I think we need to get back to the attitude of doing the best with what we have instead of, it’s like the sky is falling!

Kayla repeatedly commented on the importance of positive attitude within the Extension organization. She sensed that older generations feared for Extension’s future and losing their jobs. “If you’re scared about having a job, then how productive are you? Her outlook was centered on optimism and a “we’ll work through it mentality.” If for some reason her Extension position was lost she said, “I could probably bounce back and be just fine. Not probably, I know I could.” Kayla exhibited optimism for Extension’s future, but often heard this from older educators, “You haven’t been in it [Extension] long enough.” Her response:

It’s like, well if I’m going to become like you then I’m probably not going to be staying in this job.” She continued by saying, “I don’t remember a time in my life when there was enough money. Budgets have always been tight. I don’t remember a time when things didn’t drastically change. That’s just kind of what happens! You know, we’ll figure it out.

She suggested that attitude needed to be a core competency and that having the proper mindset was important to future success.

Balance. “Oh my gosh Balance!” exclaimed Ashley. Balancing personal and professional roles was an issue that each educator touched upon during the course of our conversation. Regardless of Millennials preference to “work to live” or “live to work,” balance emerged as a challenge. Several educators found their personal and professional lives intertwined because of the number of evening and weekend hours worked and
inseparable personal connections in the community. One educator recalled a district
director say, “You will always be on the job.” Meaning, that clientele may approach you
for assistance almost anywhere and at any time and Educators should be careful about
letting down their professional guard. Kayla agreed, “I have a good career here, but I
don’t have a life.” Kroth and Peutz (2011) reported work-life balance as one of three
priority issue issues influencing the ability of Extension to attract, motivate and retain
Extension educators.

Several educators commented that it was difficult separating their personal and
professional lives, especially in small communities. Amanda said, “It’s a little nerve
racking balancing family and work.” And, Ashley shared, “Finding time between family
and work and actually making that, you know, my family is my priority.”

Samantha summarized the Millennial balance sentiment.

I think it needs to be understood that we [Millennials] work differently. I think a
lot of times the older generations are like, oh, they [Millennials] must not care
about their job. They’re not putting in so many hours a week. I mean, we care! We
like our jobs, we’re passionate about it, but it’s not our only thing. Once I’m
done with a job, I’m done with it. I’ve accomplished it. I don’t feel like I need to
drag it home with me every night and work at home every night. I think most of
my generation works very hard. I just think the older generation might not think
we’re working hard because we’re not working all of the time. I think balance is
a lot more important. Like I can pick out educators in my area that definitely there
job is it, then other ones, they just go to work, enjoy their job, do a great job, but
that’s not everything. I define myself somewhat by what my job accomplishes,
not necessarily my job, if that makes any sense.

New generation employees are more interested in their role and the unique skills
that they bring to the organization versus a job description. A person’s role is the reason
an employee works for the company. The job description details tasks while the role
description defines responsibilities. Millennials “want to know how they fit into the
bigger picture because they don’t want to be insignificant cogs in a large impersonal organization” (Marston, 2007, p. 137).

Courtney added:

I want to say that we’re not lazy [laugh]. Because I think sometimes there’s this image that our generation wants to be with our family more than work, but that doesn’t mean that we’re lazy. I feel like I’m not working hard enough when I’m getting e-mails from people that are working Saturday and Sunday or ten o’clock at night. It’s like I don’t want to do that. You know, am I a bad educator? I can’t function that way. So does that make me look like I’m lazy in my county [laugh] when the neighboring educator [laugh] is always going?

Brittany also noted that, “the balance of family time is going to be huge. It’s going to be family over work and in the future what does that look like for Extension? I’ve thought about that, what does our future office look like?” Matt said, “We [Millennials] are probably more devoted to our personal time. Do they [older educators] have a life outside of work? It really doesn’t reinforce to the rest of us that we’re doing the right thing.”

Kutilek et al. (2002a) encouraged Extension systems to address work/life issues to encourage retainment of employees facing increasing demands on personal, family and professional time.

**Personal importance.** Now it’s time for a few parting thoughts and suggestions from the up-and-coming Millennials.

Several educators commented on their relationships with their supervising district directors. Most expressed open communication and appreciation for time spent with district directors although in some cases this interaction did not help Millennials in their core competency development experience. Millennials seemed to be seeking more interaction and direction from their supervisors. Brittany shared that she was:
motivated by challenge, risk and how I interact with my supervisors. If I wouldn’t have been able to talk to [supervisor] about this [an issue] or brainstorm with [supervisor] about this [an issue], if we wouldn’t have that relationship, I probably wouldn’t be here. That’s so important to me, my relationship with my supervisor. I’ve been blessed I have administrators that recognize I need a challenge and I need risk. They’ve allowed me these opportunities to grow. If I didn’t have those two things I don’t feel like I would be able to move forward with Extension or be as happy as what I am.

Ensle (2005) challenges Extension administrators to understand how individual values of young Extension professionals are affecting the Extension system and vice versa.

Michael emphasized:

We are not the previous generations. We want people to be upfront with us. Often times previous generations tend not to be as upfront, will beat around the bush a lot more, they’ll drop more hints rather than just the direct, this is what we want. Just up and tell us!

Millennials yearn to be accepted and actively engaged in the Extension family.

Samantha said that early on in her career there “weren’t many other people like me [female Millennial educator]. I think the influx of newer people who weren’t so set in their ways kind of felt unwelcome.” Existing educators were, “kind of like this is our territory.”

Other Millennial educators were disappointed in their initial team dynamics.

Emily and Samantha both referred to the “good old boys club” as they shared frustrations. Samantha said the older educators “…weren’t as open to teaming up on things.” It was like, “Oh, we have our project, and we’re working on it. We don’t need any help type of thing.” Emily agreed.

I don’t even know how to describe it. It’s not like, hey you’re new. Here’s how I would guide you to get going type. It’s nothing like that. It’s kind of here’s where we’re at. Good luck catching up type of thing. I think we’re all [new educators] in the same boat. They especially want us to get the meetings planned and then show up and swoop in and save the day, if you will. The big knowledge “havers.”
Mincemoyer and Thomson (1998) found that protégés identified “friendly, empathetic relationships” (p. 3) as important to effective mentoring relationships. Morgan (2006) suggested that loyalty and job satisfaction among Millennials “can be encouraged involving them in decision making and showing value and respect for their opinions” (p. 7).

Samantha shared, “I’ve enjoyed my job a lot more now that there’s a lot more educators more my age that kind of view things very similarly to me. I think that’s helped a lot.” Other, more recently hired educators shared the same sentiment.

In the midst of venting her frustrations, Emily also had suggestions for teams to consider. She recommended that teams take time out to socialize and get to know each other beyond their professional lives and “break down some of those barriers.” “We always see each other in super professional settings. When our group gets together it’s like let’s get to business. Here’s the agenda. Not time for play. It’s all work right?” “The Millennial wants entertainment and play in their work, education and social life” (Tapsott, 2009, p. 35).

Kelsey noted, “As long as my job is challenging and interesting and pushes me I stay interested. Once I lose interest or feel that I’ve maxed out or stop growing, then I start looking for something else [other employment].”

**Theme Three Summary**

Passion for their professional roles was obvious among the Millennials, but it was clear that being recognized for their respective contributions was an important motivating factor. A pat on the back, words of encouragement or a token certificate or plaque appeared to be all that this generational cohort needed to ensure they were on the path to
success. A positive outlook prevailed among Millennials amidst occasional discouragement brought about by some experienced educators. Balance was the competency universally raised among this cohort—an issue today and perhaps more of an issue in the future. Visiting with this generation, I could not help, but smile with admiration about their passion, positive outlook and aspirations to balance their personal and professional lives. And finally, the Extension educators of tomorrow offered insightful advice regarding the importance of interaction and acceptance among colleagues, supervisors and team members. Extension doesn’t have to be work—it can be fun!

**Researcher’s Reflexivity**

Reflexivity is “the process of personally and academically reflecting on lived experiences in ways that reveal deep connections between the writer and his or her subject” (Goodall, 2000, p. 137). I believe that I am in a unique position, as a veteran Extension educator of 22 years and the researcher, to reflect on the findings of this study. As I summarized the findings, there were several occasions when I paused to reflect on how my life experience as an educator paralleled that of the Millennials.

The first theme, *Scared and Blindfolded*, encapsulated Millennial educators’ first few months, sometimes years on the job. The first sub-theme relived the initial weeks and months. I remember this feeling as a novice educator, sitting at my desk, fully aware of the hustle and bustle that surrounded me as my colleagues went about their daily business. *What should I be doing?* I had the very same feeling that Millennial educators’ expressed. At the time it seemed that I had taken care of business and my “to do” list was complete, but I sensed there was more to this role that I had yet to learn and experience.
Fortunately, I was blessed to commence my Extension career in a large urban office where I was surrounded by seven educators, four or five Extension assistants, several veteran support staff and multiple mentors at my beckoning call. Unlike, many of the Millennial educators in this study, I did not wander for long. In only a matter of a few months county fair time was upon us and like the Millennials, I found myself immersed in this annual celebration of achievement for youth and adults. An opportunity to interact, teach and learn among clientele and my colleagues. My community network rapidly expanded.

I recall an incident at one of my first fairs, that reminded me of the heartburn experienced and shared by several female Millennials. The setting is all too common on the county fair scene. A parent disgruntled with his son’s ribbon placing identified me as the lightning rod to dissipate his frustrations. I stood there and absorbed his fiery. Later that day my unit leader inquired about the incident. He of course had already heard about the incident. He listened to the account of my experience with the client and simply said, “You will go far is this profession.” This was a bit of mentoring that I have savored for more than 20 years. He had my back.

My network of constituents greatly expanded at fair time and my understanding of Extension culture blossomed. Literally overnight, I transitioned from wondering what I should be doing to being completely overwhelmed with committee meetings and program development tasks. The experience was invigorating, exciting and fun, but there was so much more to learn, do and experience. I soon learned to prioritize and began to focus my time and energy.
The second theme, *Developing the Big Skills—A Daunting Task*, resonates with me too. In my inaugural years as an Extension educator, I don’t recall a set of guiding principles comparable to today’s core competencies. In fact the development and study of Extension competencies was in its infancy at the time. So in effect, I guess I too would ask *what competencies?* Perhaps they existed, but if so, I was not aware of them. Millennials offer similar sentiments, leaning more towards having been introduced to competencies, but characterizing the “introduction” as more of a glimpse rather than a study of them.

Because I was not formally introduced to competencies, *learning the big skills*, rapidly leap-frogged from the “what” to the “how” stage. As I mentioned earlier, I was fortunate to be surrounded by a plethora of experienced professionals and guidance during my rookie year as an educator. It seems as though I was unknowingly spoon-fed the competencies by my colleagues. I didn’t notice the complexity mentioned by today’s educators, but perhaps it was because I had the opportunity to digest competencies one at a time, small portions, rather than having a laundry list of expectations put before me with the caveat, that they should be mastered, “soon after hiring.”

A unique aspect of my early years in Extension was the opportunity to co-manage a working conservation tillage farm that a local Extension supporter pledged to fund. This was a phenomenal opportunity to conduct on-farm research and demonstration, with the luxury of working alongside a veteran Extension educator, one of my mentors. It was the epitome of *learning by doing*. We had opportunity to take risks, fail, succeed and it was all done under the watch, guidance and interaction of local clientele. One of our program goals was to model or exemplify the benefits of conservation tillage farming in a
working farm simulation. That experience had a lasting impression on my teaching approach. Throughout my Extension career I aspired to incorporate hands-on and learning-by-doing teaching techniques into as many programs as possible.

I find it more difficult to relate the if *I fail it's public* sub-theme. I attribute this good fortune to being blessed with a tremendous support system of administrators, supervisors, colleagues and client in my early Extension years. I believe that this support system and the fact that I was a male educator in what at the time was a male dominated Extension culture and a male dominated clientele culture leaned in my favor.

Over the years I have looked up to many individuals in the Extension system as mentors, but it seems that much of the advice that has stood the test of time was tapped from my early mentors—individuals like my college advisors, unit leader and educator colleagues who shaped my educator mold at the onset of my career. Today, even though some of these folks are now retired, I still find myself operating within the counsel of their wisdom—*mentors always*. I have the same sense of mentorship reciprocity responsibility that the early Millennials expressed and demonstrated to younger Millennials. I valued my early guidance so much that I feel obligated to share what I can with future generations of educators.

It’s easy to imagine new educators becoming confused or literally wrapped up in the web of networks found with the Extension system. The secret to surviving and thriving seems to be exploring and identifying the *networks where you can jell*. I have been involved in numerous personal and professionals networks throughout my career—some offered great rewards and others were less fruitful. Key networks that I established early in my career included common program interest relationships with specialists and
educators where we partnered for a common cause. Educators in this study also spoke of community acceptance where they lived and worked. I found much satisfaction in knowing that local clientele and decision makers respected my work and accepted me into their community. Some educators challenged the validity of the community citizenship competency, hinting that it was obsolete today where many educators serve multiple counties and do not live where they work. I am a living example of an educator who has not lived in the community (or county for that matter) where my office was located for over two decades. I encourage new educators to stay in touch with their citizenry and communities. Offer to speak to area civic groups, join local agricultural commodity organizations, get involved with the chamber of commerce, and volunteer to help with community celebrations. It will keep you grounded in clientele needs and establish important networks.

The closeness of the Millennial Generation and the natural occurrence of teamwork that abounds within this cohort is something that I have not witnessed in other generations. I’ve observed it at a variety of venues—conferences, professional development activities, weddings, funerals, Facebook, and in spontaneous trips to the campus dairy store. It’s ironic that Extension has spent a couple decades preaching about the importance of teamwork to previous generations then team Millennials arrive on the scene and make it look so easy!

The final theme, Doing Something Meaningful-It's Important to Me, is naturally somewhat foreign to me, but I am a Generation Xer, so I can relate to some of what has been shared by the Millennials.
I suppose my career’s guiding light has been the approval of my program work and accomplishments by my unit leader, district directors and the academic promotion process. My circumstance of working in a well-staffed, urban Extension office offered much encouragement and approval of my early Extension work. I’m not sure that all of my work warranted such acclamation, but nevertheless my colleagues made me feel good about my work and encouraged me every step of the journey until I decided to spread my wings, leave the nest and transfer to another Extension office. So I can fully appreciate the importance of Millennials needing reassurances that their career paths are on proper trajectory and pace. Not only “doing the right things,” but also “doing things right.” I challenge myself and my colleagues to make a point of encouraging our novice educators to solidify in their minds that they are doing meaningful work.

I will never forget the Millennial optimism that I encountered during the course of this research study. The energy, enthusiasm, and optimism exuded by these emerging professionals were amazing. What shocked me was the amount of negativity conveyed to this cohort from older generations. Resistance to change, discouraging new ideas, and poor attitudes weighed on the minds of the Millennials. While most spoke of their fortitude to carry on with their ideas, dreams and aspirations I still worry that too much discouraging sentiment by experienced educators will cause the future life blood of our organization to desert us.

I can certainly relate to Millennials challenge of Balancing work and family obligations. Extension is a very demanding profession with unlimited opportunities and thus unlimited time commitment. I have wrestled with the issue of balance for much of my career. Not that I don’t see the need or value; I want balance. It seems that
expectations of Extension continue to escalate, or perhaps we just can’t let ago of the past and move on to new audiences and challenges. This pressure of balance is somewhat self-inflicted by most educators. Carrying on the tradition, the servitude to the previous generation’s standard is what perpetuates this search for balance. As a Gen Xer I’m somewhat guilty of this notion, but also feel like I have made progress of setting a better example for future generations of educators and coaching them to do the same. I’m not sure that balance is negotiable with the Millennials. Sure everyone has their own sense of what balance means to them, I still sense that overwhelming expectations and time commitment will be a deal breaker for Millennials. As Kayla noted, “I have a career, but I don’t have a life.”

The final sub-theme offers the Millennials one final opportunity to voice what’s personally important to them. Here Millennials offer insights about their professional relationships and how they wish to be accepted by the System. There is nothing magical about these petitions by the newest generation of Extension educators. Rather, what strikes me is their forthrightness in expressing their challenges and needs. This should make leading Millennials easy!

Summary

This chapter reveals the emergent findings of individual conversations with 14 Millennial Generation Extension educators. Three primary themes emerged: (a) Blindfolded and Scared; (b) Developing the Big Skills—A Daunting Task; and (c) Doing Something Meaningful—it’s Important to Me. The process of gathering and processing qualitative data was outlined, emergent themes findings were discussed, and researcher reflexivity shared.
Chapter Five: Conclusions, Essence, and Recommendations

Introduction

Researchers have studied Cooperative Extension core competencies and their relevance among various Extension professional sectors—educators, specialists, supervisors and administrators. The framework behind this phenomenological study enabled the discovery and understanding of Millennial Generation Extension educators’ core competency development experiences—their journey. Gallup (2009) suggests that “the best way to develop people—and net the greatest return on investment—is to identify the ways in which they most naturally think, feel and behave as unique individuals” (para. 2). This chapter addresses the study research questions, discusses the essence of the themes that emerged in this study, and offers suggestions for further research opportunities.

Conclusions

Conclusions are presented using the six research sub-questions posed at the onset of this research study. Each was designed to help answer the central question: How do Millennial Generation, county-based Extension educators describe their core competency development experience in the UNL Extension Division? Answers to these research questions emerged through one-on-one interviews with 14 study participants.

How do Millennial Generation Extension educators describe Extension core competencies? Most educators recalled being introduced to Extension core competencies early in their careers, but soon thereafter losing track of them. The day that I arrived to conduct the interviews, I witnessed educators literally reading through the list of competencies for the first time or in some cases the first time since new employee
orientation. Some educators admitted that when I contacted them about participating in this study that they initially did not remember what the competencies were. In other instances educators recognized the competencies, but admitted having simply put them on the backburner. Educators described the competencies as “the big skills that you need to be successful” and “It [competencies list] really does put what we’re supposed to do in writing.” Several educators thanked me for bringing the competencies to their attention since they were beginning to see the connection between the competencies and career advancement through their ARFA and academic promotion. Perhaps, the most intriguing and prevalent descriptions of competencies included the terms “daunting,” “complex” and “overwhelming.” It was obvious as our conversations commenced that Extension core competency development was viewed as a routine task by many experienced professionals, but to the Millennials it was a complex process and challenge.

Most educators agreed that the roles and expectations of Extension educators are not well understood by those who have not experienced the profession. Millennial descriptions of the core competencies infer that the breadth and depth of the Extension educator role was perhaps not fully disclosed subsequent to hiring. Safrit and Owen (2010) advocate for recruiting authentically—a model whereby recruiters reveal realistic, day-to-day demands and expectations of Extension educators.

Extension supervisors must accurately, truthfully, and completely describe the work content, internal organizational context, and internal/external environments of the specific position so that an applicant may objectively assess whether the position is a good potential match for his/her current skills and abilities, and future aspirations (Safrit & Owen, 2010, p. 3).

**How do they learn core competencies?** Two formal means of learning core competencies were common among most Extension educators. The first was an
assignment from their respective district director to visit with experienced educators regarding each competency area. This process was administered in a similar, but not exact fashion among districts. Secondly, educators had opportunity to learn some aspects of competencies during new employee orientation during their first year of employment. Millennials noted that most of the formal competency development experiences focused on “what” the expectations were but consistently lacked the “how.”

Unanimously, educators emphasized the need for hands-on, learning-by-doing competency training experiences. Spending time with educators who excelled in certain competency areas was highly desired. They sought opportunities to shadow experienced educators in teaching, volunteer management, program planning roles, and in some cases to simply talk about a variety of general issues on their mind. Mentoring, coaching, and team relationships with colleagues were important to rapid competency development. Kutilek and Earnest (2001) posited that “mentoring and coaching have become a part of the everyday workplace contributing to increased job satisfaction, personal productivity, and employment stability within an organization” (p. 1).

**How do they view the core competency development experience?** Earlier, I described the Millennials competency development experience as complex. There are several factors that influence the development process.

The timeline and scope of the competency development process was difficult for most Millennial educators to comprehend in their early years as Extension professionals. The competency guidelines referred to learning competencies “soon after hiring” however, seasoned educators advised Millennials that it would take five years or more to master all competencies. Several educators regretted not more aggressively pursuing
competency development during their first years on the job. The breadth and depth of competency development seemed somewhat mysterious to all educators. At first glance Educators thought competencies were straight-forward and clear-cut, but the more they learned about them the more complex they seemed.

Millennials who had been in the system for several years shared the moments when they initially felt like they had arrived as Extension educators. A couple educators said that at a particular point in time “it just clicked.” This referred to a feeling of satisfaction that they now understood and had established confidence in their role as Extension educators. The competency development process happens over time. Educators realized that it is an on-going process.

**What is important to their core competency development?** A conscious effort to develop competencies served educators well. While some wandered their first few years in Extension, others capitalized on opportunities to jumpstart their careers.

Early program involvement with colleagues and clientele was paramount to educator success. As one educator stated, “…relationships are extremely important.” Spending time with mentors, especially colleagues in the same subject matter expertise proved to be invaluable experience. While some of this time focused on program development and delivery, together time offered new educators opportunity to ask seasoned educators about general non-program related issues. Those who shied away from becoming involved early found themselves feeling lost, isolated and somewhat lost in Extension. Initiating mentoring relationships soon in the mentees career is important to success (Zimmer & Smith, 1992; Mincemoyer & Thomson, 1998).
Belonging to a supportive program team was another mainstay experience that helped Millennials learn core competencies. Educators cited specific team members that they learned from by observation and team experiences where they learned-by-doing. Supportive teams welcomed Millennial educators as active team members, embraced their ideas, mentored and coached them. Safrit and Owen (2010) reported that educators “who feel a sense of belonging and who have a strong social network of colleagues at work are more engaged and less likely to leave the organization” (p. 5).

Zimmer and Smith (1992) noted, “New personnel are interested in building mentoring relationships that will benefit them personally and professionally, while gaining knowledge about the Extension organization” (p. 1). Excellent mentoring was among the most important contributors to competency development. Byington (2010) suggested the mentor’s role is “to guide, to give advice, and to support the mentee” (p. 1). She champions mentoring as “an effective method of helping inexperienced individuals develop and progress in their profession” (p. 4). Place and Bailey (2010) describe mentoring as “helping new educators better understand their roles and responsibilities” (p. 1). Some educators focused on one mentor while others interacted with mentor teams. Millennials valued mentors perspectives on day-to-day issues where they offered “seasoned perspectives.” Excellent mentorship was also obvious as these educators revered their mentors with such acclamations as “She’s always there. If I have a question or anything I can call her anytime. I absolutely love it because we built a friendship both in work and personal.”

Franz and Weeks (2008) suggest coaching may be key to helping new employees navigate Extension’s complex environment. Whereas supervisors and mentors may have
a role in acclimating new employees to the organization, “Coaching focuses on the individual and his or her context…” (p. 1). Whereas study participants did not specifically mention coaching in our dialogue, I suspect that much of our discussion about mentors simultaneously implied coaching too.

Several educators surfaced the notion that the “county agent” training of yesteryear where new educators spent three months shadowing and training in another county had merit. Those who had spent time away from their workplace training, shadowing and learning from experienced educators, particularly before arriving at their assigned office, seemed much more content than others. Educators who had spent limited time as Extension interns found the experience to be somewhat superficial and narrow in scope compared to the “big picture.”

How do core competencies affect their professional experience?

Rennekamp and Nall (1994) described motivators for professional development at early-career development entry stage earlier in the literature review chapter. It is suggested that educators must move out of this stage to attain career satisfaction.

Becoming respected and adopted by colleagues was an important key to success. Older Millennials advised new educators to connect or team up with at least a couple colleagues early to help them experience the Extension system, understand the role of an educator, and establish credibility. Kutilek et al. (2002b) emphasized the importance of inter-relationships among educators at each career stage—an intergenerational approach that nurtures educator success.

All educators in this study were acutely aware of the expectation that they needed to develop focused subject matter expertise. Subject matter expertise proved to be a
competency critical to early success. Having such expertise seemed to accelerate acceptance and appreciation by colleagues and clientele. Educators with recognized expertise were invited to speak at various program venues and were sought out sooner in their careers than colleagues who did not have similar levels of knowledge in their respective subject matter areas.

Several female educators described disturbing experiences early in their careers where having connections and collegial respect served them well. In each incident, young female educators had their professional competence fiercely challenged or criticized in public settings. In each example, a colleague stepped in to defend and assist the Millennial. Demonstrating expertise early appeared to be more important for female educators than males.

Female educators also described disheartening experiences while trying to join certain program teams. The ideas they shared were sometimes developed, but without recognition or appreciation. At times it seemed as though experienced educators and specialists had a closed agenda without room for additional ideas or team members to contribute. New educators had difficulties learning the Extension system without the welcoming and assistance of experienced Extension professions. Kayla shared,

I really feel in the out-group…which I know what that means. But, I mean having never really been in that situation, I’m really bothered by it. Because it’s hard to get into the in-group once you’re in the out-group. You know certain people get asked to be on certain projects which would be the nature of any group. But how do we make the new people feel included and willing to be involved?

Change and challenges seemed to be more readily accepted by Millennial educators than by some older generation colleagues. Several new generation educators recounted experiences with colleagues and teams where a sense of pessimism existed. To
their credit, the Millennials spoke of their fortitude to carry on with their ideas and aspirations. Millennials were clear—they would seek other professional options if Extension squelched optimism.

Balancing personal and professional goals was a sharp challenge for Millennials, both married and single. One educator characterized it as, “I have a great job, but I don’t have a life.” Several educators envisioned balancing family with work as an escalating challenge in the years to come—perhaps changing where and how future educators work.

Mentorship proved to be critical to successful development of most Millennial educators and they have not forgotten that fact. The early Millennial educators offered exemplary mentorship and leadership to novice Millennials as they joined the Extension family. This often proved among the earliest and most fruitful early-career guidance offered.

Recommendations to Millennials regarding citizenship responsibilities varied widely. While older generation educators cautioned new educators about becoming too involved in committee assignments and activities such as State Fair early in their first year, senior Millennial educators advised the contrary. Experienced Millennials spoke of great value in immersing themselves in various Extension activities and programs almost immediately to begin developing their professional network.

Millennials desired frequent dialogue and close professional relationships with their supervisors. This is an inquisitive generation that seeks constant feedback. Supervisors may tire of the perpetual inquiries from this generation, but it is clear that open communication is paramount to retaining their loyalty.
What leadership approaches are best suited for their competency development? Today’s organizations must embrace the uniqueness of each generation as they prepare to lead. Leadership is a process that is centered on the interactions between leaders and followers. When we motivate someone we are developing those incentives or conditions that we believe will help move a person to a desired behavior.

Branham (2005) identified several reasons why employees decide to leave a job, including:

…the job or workplace was not as expected; the mismatch between job and person; too little coaching and feedback; too few growth and advancement opportunities; feeling devalued and unrecognized; stress from overwork and work-life imbalance; and loss of trust and confidence in senior leaders. (p. 20)

The Millennials are accustomed to structure and supervision—they are particularly interested in leaders with fairness, integrity and concern for employees. This is evident in their quest for meaningful mentoring and coaching. They want their ideas to be heard, expect to be taken seriously and are not advocates of hierarchical organizations. Millennials are well networked and are excellent team players. Their professional world is employee-centered and fun. Based on dialogue with Millennial educators the researcher deemed full range leadership, servant leadership and shared leadership as leadership approaches relevant to helping Millennials develop core competencies. These leadership approaches will be defined in subsequent discussion.

Full range leadership is comprised of both transactional and transformational behaviors. New educators are generally introduced to the Extension organization via a brief encounter with transactional leadership. Burns (1978) describes this leadership style as exchanging one thing for another. It is the nature of becoming established in many workplaces. New employees are bombarded with organizational guidelines, rules
and expectations. Understanding policies and procedures, organizational structure, performance appraisals, and general expectations were mentioned by Millennials as important to becoming successfully established. Beyond this routine guidance the Millennials also raised another specific contingent reward. They were not shy about seeking recognition for their respective accomplishments as a means of reinforcing their professional development trajectory. Pats on the back, awards, and academic promotions were desired by these individuals. One could also argue that this recognition was sought more as a source of inspiration versus an immediate self-interest reward.

Beyond the limited contingent rewards aforementioned, Millennials exemplified the epitome of transformational leadership followers. Transformational leadership focuses on leaders’ abilities to “…motivate others to do more than they originally thought possible” (Bass & Riggio, 2006, p. 4). A study of Extension professionals (Elizer, 2011) showed that transformational leaders are more likely than transactional leaders to have employees with high job satisfaction. Safrit and Owen (2010) “encourage Extension supervisors and administrators to use appropriate intrinsic and/or extrinsic rewards to effectively communicate appreciation to each Extension county program professional for workplace excellence” (p. 5). Green (2008) posited that “given the innovative nature of the emergent workforce (Millennials) they will be better able to build knowledge creation with transformational leadership style” (p. 20).

How are Millennials motivated by the transformational leader? The Barbuto and Scholl (1998) theory of follower motivation identifies five areas of motivation including (a) intrinsic process motivation, (b) instrumental motivation, (c) external self-concept-based motivation, (d) internal self-concept-based motivation, and (e) goal internalization
motivation  This motivational model proposes that followers can be motivated in differing degrees by several different factors. Based upon the integrative taxonomy of motivational sources identified in Barbuto and Scholl, followers of transformational leaders are affected differently depending upon the level of each source of motivation.

Transformational leadership provides opportunity to reach individuals in different ways. The leader’s challenge is to understand what motivates the followers and subsequently match it with appropriate technique.

*Intrinsic process motivation* is when people are motivated by their work and they have fun in the process. Educators interviewed exhibited tremendous passion for their profession—some dreaming of this opportunity since childhood. Most had already identified a specific program niche that they were developing expertise to support and had visions of additional education program endeavors that they planned to pursue. Millennials were clear that they expected to make the team-oriented process of developing and delivering programs fun with enhanced social interaction among team members.

*Instrumental motivation* exists when a person is motivated by money, promotion, awards or other extrinsic tangible items. Almost universally, educators had aspirations of being fully promoted. One educator had planned her promotion event to the very year that it should occur. Senior Millennial educators emphasized the importance of rewarding new educators for early accomplishments—conveying to these young professionals know that they were appreciated and on track to be successful in their educator role. Some educators indicated that simple words of encouragement or praise
from colleagues or supervisors would be much appreciated. Millennial educators spoke of needing recognition early rather than later in their careers.

*External self-concept-based motivation* is where individuals seek acceptance and status gain in social groups. Millennials shared mixed experiences regarding program team acceptance. Female educators in particular spoke of some older colleagues (educators and specialists) that seemed disinterested in their ideas and their interest to join team efforts. Not only did they feel unwelcome, but also cited examples of their ideas being acted upon by the team without crediting and involving them. Other Millennials praised team involvement for introducing them to valuable mentorship, colleagues with similar subject matter expertise, and opportunities to develop their program planning, teaching and clientele interaction skills. Leaders of these groups were characterized as innovative, futuristic-thinking leaders, who shared program responsibilities and credit among team members.

*Internal self-concept-based motivation* focuses upon personal goals. This latest generation of educators didn’t necessarily have more personal goals than previous generations, but they did seem to be a focused cohort who knows what they want and place a high priority on achieving their interests. They all spoke of balance and the challenge of separating their personal and professional lives—some favored “working to live” while others “lived to work.” Balancing personal and professional time was perceived to be an escalating issue—particularly as Millennials begin to start families.

*Goal internalization motivation* is when individuals adopt attitudes and behaviors for the good of the organization, community or society. Millennials were a positive and optimistic group of educators and surprisingly critical of some of their elder Extension
professionals who spoke negatively about change and the future of Extension. They were 
clear that they would persevere with their ideas and optimism in lieu of some negativity 
among colleagues and strained organizational budgets. Becoming as knowledgeable as 
more experienced educators was a goal of many Millennials.

Servant leaders are viewed as organizational elders who have the experience and 
wisdom to motivate and persuade followers. These leaders parallel transformational 
leadership. Followers are cultivated, developed and many times blossom into leaders 
themselves.

How are Millennials motivated by the Servant leader? Servant leaders are good 
listeners, non-threatening, and build a sense of community. Characteristics of the servant 
leader – especially listening, empathy, healing, awareness, stewardship and trust, 
foreshadow that Millennials will have a leader, mentor, or coach who is interested in 
helping them develop their capacity to grow and improve (Spears, 1995). Barbuto and 
Wheeler (2006) identified five servant leadership factors that appear to be conceptually 
and empirically distinct—altruistic calling, emotional healing, wisdom, persuasive 
mapping and organizational leadership. Each of these factors emerged as important to 
Millennial educator development of core competencies.

A servant leader’s altruistic calling provides the foundation for committed, 
quality mentorship and coaching by experienced educators that meet Millennial 
educators’ needs. Emotional healing lends itself to “having the back” of novice 
educators—ensuring that unconditional support is offered during and following 
distressing experiences. Wisdom is an invaluable asset that offers leaders foresight to 
offer sound, visionary guidance to mentees. Persuasive mapping offers organizational
insight, vision and inspiration to younger generation educators. *Organizational stewardship* is depicted by leaders who “develop a community spirit in the workplace, one that is preparing to leave a positive legacy” (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006, p. 309). Millennials’ optimism and yearning for a meaningful role demonstrated their hunger for the latter leadership factor.

Extension professionals are commonly viewed as servant leaders. These individuals work in an autonomous work environment where they enjoy coming to work and helping people in a selfless manner. Relationships are developed with clientele and colleagues, sometimes over multiple generations. Millennials who associate with experienced servant leader Extension professionals will ultimately acquire essential knowledge and leadership skills. Greenleaf (1970) posits that “The best test is: Do those served grow as persons; do they, while beings served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants?” (p. 4). Mentoring, coaching, shadowing, team work and socializing all potentially generate and build the characteristics of servant leadership. The litmus test of successful servant leadership is developing Millennial Generation servant leaders where they say “We did it ourselves!” (Lao-Tzu, 1985). Surprisingly, I seemed to be hearing and observing some of this sentiment during my Millennials visits.

*Shared leadership* is yet another avenue for Millennials to learn competencies. Yukl (2006) defines this “as a shared process of enhancing the capability of people to accomplish collective work effectively.” How will this leadership serve Millennials needs?
Millennials enter the workplace viewing teamwork as the preferred mode of operation. They are committed to moving everyone forward into the future together (Marston, 2007; Tapscott, 2009). This study surfaced a sharp contrast of Millennial satisfaction among various work groups or teams. Millennials reported learning the most and having the best experiences when team members were offered shared program responsibilities. A strong hands-on, learning-by-doing competency development preference was also voiced by educators. They cherished opportunities to share time with experienced educators. Shared leadership offers members opportunity to share or rotate specific leadership functions. Yukl (2006) posits that “the collective leadership provided by the members of any individual leader are much less important that the collective leadership provided by the members of the organization” (p. 449).

Albion and Gutke (2010) encourages leaders to provide clear direction and exercise influence that encourages collaborative leadership responsibility among a community of individuals. “Respecting and valuing individual talents and achievements is an important part of shared leadership” (p. 4) and one that is evidently sorely missing among some Extension program teams. Shared leadership offers the “opportunity to develop aspiring leaders, existing leaders and transitional leaders” (p. 5). This leadership approach supports the collaborative and inclusive qualities of the Millennial Generation.

Previous generation administrators and faculty must embrace and learn from Millennial Generations of workers while simultaneously striving to coach them to be future educators and leaders (Tapscott, 2009). “Millennials value mentoring relationships and value leadership from those who guide and coach them” (Cruz, 2007). These positive relationships foster a sense of community and shared leadership (Albion & Gutke, 2010).
“When a leader communicates trust and respect for followers’ abilities to perform and achieve, the internal motivation of the followers take over and drives them to succeed” (Strebel, 1996).

**Essence**

The process of interviewing Millennial Generation Extension educators was a phenomenon itself. I was invited into the lives of 14 relatively new Millennial Generation educators who boasted two months to seven years of tenure as Extension educators. They were welcoming, open, and emotional as they relived their first few days, months and years as educators. Our conversation commenced with their childhood years, hometowns, education and ultimately a decision to explore the role of an Extension educator that was (and in some cases is still) foreign to them.

My initial inquiry about Extension core competencies garnered silence. A moment passed while each participant’s recollection of introduction to these silent virtues came into focus. Although everyone had some orientation to the competencies, it was clear that the road to mastering the competencies was foggy and in some cases obstructed. It seemed at times as though nobody was directing traffic on this lonely road. Many felt like they had been left in obscurity, relocated to a foreign community and left alone to make a name for themselves and the University that hired them. In the midst of learning to navigate their new roles and environs they unconsciously lost sight and touch with the core competencies, the road to success.

This new generational cohort blinded by steep expectations and unfamiliar surroundings longed to reach out and connect with those who could help them make sense of their new role. They reached out to mentors, program teams, their local
communities, and each other to begin this learning expedition. As the Extension System outfitted Millennials with orientation seminars, notebooks, and e-mails, the students longed for more resources and guidance. Learning this complex profession in a dynamic world would require mentors, teams and networks.

Millennials wanted mentors, experienced educators who they could shadow to learn critical program planning, volunteer management and general Extension professional savvy. Mentors need not apply unless they were genuinely interested in helping the novice educator, a positive role model, forthright, and readily available—by-the-way we can be friends too! Once a mentor, you are always a mentor in the eyes of the Millennials. Mentors always had their mentees’ backs.

Team spirit was experienced by some Millennials, but not by others. Engaging in program teams was a coup that contributed substantially to educators’ development of competencies. These fortunate educators were rapidly introduced to Extension professionals with like subject matter expertise, propelled their networking efforts throughout the organization, and were given opportunity to learn and perform roles leading to development of core competencies.

Another group of educators, exclusively females, painted a much different team orientation experience where previous generation educators made life difficult and discouraging for young educators. One particular team was characterized as “the good old boys club.” Elder educators and specialists conveyed multiple messages that expressed a sense of club hierarchy. New educators’ ideas were not welcome or in some case adopted and carried forward by senior team members without giving credit or including those that offered the suggestions. Some elder educators were characterized as
not facilitating an inviting environment for new educators to participate. Minuscule tasks were offered to Millennial educators while request from the same to help with more significant team and teaching roles were left on deaf ears. The subject matter focus of these female educators was predominantly agriculture, although hints of similar rejection were also mentioned by youth and horticulture educators.

Millennials who could not gain traction in competency development often turned to each other for assistance. One team, feeling shunned by their respective program team, instigated their own specific program development team, almost exclusively comprised of Millennial educators.

I was astounded by the extensive networking among female Millennials—the leaders were none-other than senior Millennials. Educators who had experienced similar challenges and obstacles earlier in their careers did not hesitate to help their younger counterparts. Verbal encouragement and hands-on training were just a couple examples of Millennials working in unison to better themselves and the Extension System. They spoke of an undercurrent of communication among their cohort that included text messaging, phone calls, instant messaging and Facebook.

Enthusiasm and optimism radiated from the Millennials, but I was reminded often that they sought recognition, not necessarily for accomplishments, but more so to signify that they were on the pathway to success. Academic promotion and other methods, even token methods, of appreciation were suggested to give this cohort confidence that they were indeed on the core competency path to success.

This generation of Extension educators differs from those that have come prior and likely those that will follow. They may work differently but they should not be
discounted for seeking a balanced lifestyle, something that many asserted is not commonly found in the Extension world, for striving to use the latest technologies to connect with clientele, something that is strictly prohibited in some Extension offices, for being excited and optimistic about the future of Extension, something that some of their elder colleagues have difficulty doing, or for simply being their unique generational selves, something that is sure to be the future Extension clientele.

The true essence of this phenomenon is that of relationships. In the midst of the hectic society that we live in today, we forget about the networks that are essential to success in business, organizations and faculty development. Arnold and Place (2010b) noted “Connections with agents and specialists, peers, mentors, clientele, administrators, and advisors were critical to career satisfaction and longevity” (p. 19). Educators need to be better prepared verbally and experientially to comprehend, endure and persevere in the complicated and demanding role of a 21st Century Extension educator. A family of colleagues, unit leader and district director mentors accompanied by organizational teams, communities, and campus-wide faculty is paramount to success. It takes a family of mentors and a community of networks to meet the needs and fully realize the potential of our next generation of Extension educators. The essence of Millennials’ Extension educators’ core competency development journey was about finding pathways to success in the Extension organization, among colleagues and within their communities—it’s about relationships.

Recommendations

The revelations of this study offer valuable insights to Millennial educators’ colleagues, supervisors, human resource personnel and administrators. Findings may
lead to enhanced development of core competencies for new educators. Perhaps more importantly, the Millennials had opportunity to voice their unique experiences and needs as developing educators.

Insights shared by Millennial educators lead the researcher to offer the following recommendations:

• The new educator professional development shadowing experience (apprenticeship) of yesteryear should be reinstated. Not necessarily for a three-month time period, but certainly for a time duration that allows for introductory, experiential learning of core competencies. This study revealed that there is no substitute for this in-depth training experience and relationship building.

• New employee orientation should be enhanced to ensure that in addition to teaching “what” core competencies are, the “how” to accomplish core competencies and “who” to network with is also emphasized. On-going awareness beyond educators’ inaugural year coupled with hands-on and learning-by-doing competency development experiences are essential. The addition of campus tours that include meeting faculty and administrators is warranted.

• One study participant recommended focused competency development workshops that offer in-depth, hands-on, experiential training for each respective competency. Although the core curriculum for such an experience could be generic, each educator could develop their own individual subject matter specific competency development project experience with guidance from instructors and colleagues.
A welcoming committee of potential educator and specialist mentors should plan to meet new educators the first week on the job to immediately offer mentoring opportunity and role orientation to new educators.

Mentoring training should be required of educators who are motivated to serve as mentors to new educators. An in-depth coaching training program is already in place. Perhaps mentoring could be integrated into this curriculum.

Extension administration and the Nebraska Cooperative Extension Association (NCEA) should consider developing a more robust early-career educator recognition strategy whereby new educators are reassured of their career trajectory and quality of work.

State action team leaders should be cognizant of the fact that new educators find some program teams difficult to interact with due to the “good old boys” being set in their ways and not wanting to welcome new educators and ideas to the team. Sensitivity training to this occurrence is important to developing dynamic, intergenerational teams.

Special attention to new generation female Extension educators’ is warranted. Episodes of aggressive clientele behavior in their presence are cause for concern. Training regarding how to deal with such issues should be available to novice and veteran, female and male educators.

A uniform, systematic approach to new educator orientation, training, coaching and mentoring should be adopted statewide. Currently each Extension district director has a unique approach. District directors should not discount the importance of communicating early and often with Millennial educators.
Implications for Future Research

The nature of qualitative research inquiry leads to rich discussions with participants regarding a variety of issues related to the phenomenon of study. Several issues that surfaced during the course of these interviews are worthy of further exploration. I offer the following research opportunities for consideration:

- A similar study of the Generation X cohort would help clarify the time frame required to master core competencies. It would also allow exploration of UNL Extension’s transformation level of core competency development.

- Further study of female educators’ Extension journeys as novices and early-career professionals would answer questions about unique circumstances and dynamics that may be gender-specific in the Extension educator profession.

- Exploring the priority, relevance and potential evolution of specific core competencies among each generation of Extension educators would lend itself to better understanding of intergenerational perceptions and dynamics among educators.

- A longitudinal study of Millennial Generation educators’ competency development throughout their careers that is correlated to faculty performance would answer questions about the relevance of each competency and perhaps the priority in which they should be mastered.

- Qualitative research inquiry of the core competency development process among the campus community including supervisor, specialists, human resource personnel, administrators, colleagues, and clientele would provide a more comprehensive perspective of this process.
• Comparing and contrasting the core competency development process among former and subsequent Extension educator generations may identify uniqueness and likeness among these cohorts.

• Studying personality type influence on core competency development may help refine Extension educator orientation and assimilation practices.

Summary

The six research questions posed at the commencement of this study were answered via the phenomenological qualitative research process. Conclusions regarding the six research questions posed for this study are discussed in context with the themes and sub-themes that emerged. Leadership styles that may help Millennials learn core competencies most effectively include transformational leadership, servant leadership, and shared leadership. Recommendations for action based upon the results of this study are shared along with further research opportunities. The meaning of this study as revealed by the participants was that it takes a collective effort among many people in the organization to help Millennial educators develop Extension core competencies. The essence of Millennials’ Extension educators’ core competency development journey was about finding pathways to success in the Extension organization, among colleagues and within their communities—it’s about relationships.
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Appendices
Appendix A

UNL Extension Educator Competencies for the 21st Century
### UNL Extension Educator Competencies for the 21st Century

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Core Competencies (skills) – These are skills either present that the new hire has the capacity to develop soon after hiring.</th>
<th>Transformational skills – These are skills that could be developed by individuals who wish to enhance their effectiveness in teaching or organizational roles. These skills would be negotiated between the unit administrator and the Extension professional.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conducts proactive needs assessments</strong></td>
<td><strong>Conducts formalized needs assessments</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Regularly uses informal needs assessment strategies such as verbal feedback from clientele, stakeholders, faculty and staff to identify educational opportunities</td>
<td>- Routinely uses focus groups, surveys and other strategies to conduct formalized needs assessments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Designs educational activities that meet the needs of local clientele</strong></td>
<td>- Establishes a customer/clientele network or group to provide regular feedback on program needs, direction and impact.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Designs educational events that address needs identified by clientele.</td>
<td><strong>Designs educational programs that address major issues</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Understands effective educational strategies</strong></td>
<td>- Designs transformational educational programs that address major issues identified by clientele.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Writes learner-based educational objectives and designs relevant and effective educational programs.</td>
<td><strong>Devises and implements innovative educational strategies</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Searches all available curricula resources for adaptable and relevant teaching material.</td>
<td>- Uses multiple resources (professional development, teams, clientele, input, consultants, etc.) to devise innovative methods to fully engage learners in the educational process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Markets educational programs</strong></td>
<td><strong>Develops and implements marketing plans</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Uses appropriate media to market educational programs to target audience.</td>
<td>- Develops marketing plans for larger audiences and/or a larger segment of an Action Plan. Uses a team to market a product. Uses unique marketing methods (television, mailed CDs, email listserves, etc.).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Manages the logistical requirements of educational programs</strong></td>
<td><strong>Organizes and delivers large-scale educational programs</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Provides appropriate logistical support to implement an effective educational environment (facility, audio-visual or other supportive educational resources, experiential learning resources, etc.) to facilitate effective educational programs.</td>
<td>- Organizes, develops and delivers large-scale educational programs such as conferences or workshops.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Uses effective teaching skills, especially for one-on-one or small groups</strong>.</td>
<td><strong>Uses Logic Model for program evaluation</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Employs a variety of teaching skills using one-on-one techniques, small group methods, experiential learning and larger group techniques.</td>
<td>- Conducts program evaluation focused on behavior, practice, social or environmental change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Tailors the educational program to accommodate learner needs and differing learning styles.</td>
<td>- Routinely uses Logic Model in planning, delivering and evaluating Extension education programs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Employs KASA-level evaluation skills</strong></td>
<td>- Devises strategies to enhance the value of Extension accomplishments for UNL administration and local decision-makers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Creates and uses evaluation tools that take advantage of a variety of techniques to measure knowledge gained, skills gained and behavior changed (KASA). Analyzes and interprets evaluation data and uses this information in program planning.</td>
<td>- Routinely uses EARS system and is introduced to eARFA, Aware of Logic Model.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Regularly reports impact of educational programs to administration and decision-makers.</td>
<td>- Regularly reports impact of educational programs to administration and decision-makers.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Subject Matter Competent – mastery of discipline, understands research base, considered technically proficient and current.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Functions as an expert in assigned focus area</th>
<th>Functions as an expert on a regional basis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Finds and interprets research/science-based information for use by clientele. Uses educational resources and networks to find answers to questions or issues.</td>
<td>- Compiles information and draws conclusions (discovery process). Devises or adapts technology for new uses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Develops and delivers educational programs in assigned focus area that are relevant to local clientele.</td>
<td>- Delivers programs in assigned focus area, outside of assigned region (define appropriate region, issue defines region/geography).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Selects and adapts appropriate educational curricula.</td>
<td>- Develops or modifies curriculum &amp; other educational materials.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Carefully and fairly evaluates science-based information and societal values prior to taking an advocacy role on controversial issues. Recognizes that competing viewpoints are valuable and responds to the educational needs of those who may not share our perspective.</td>
<td>- Serves as a regional expert on controversial/high stakes issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Prepares and delivers local media outputs (news columns, radio, etc.)</td>
<td>- Prepares and delivers outputs for regional, state or national outlets.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Develops an effective professional development plan tied to assigned focus area and educational programming opportunities.</td>
<td>- Views professional development as a long-term strategy to enhance educational effectiveness for clientele and to position program to adapt to change.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participates in applied/adaptive research projects
- Assists Specialists in the conduct of applied/adaptive research.

Contributes to publication of program or research results in academic media
- Assists Specialists in the writing and submission of program or research results.

Skilled Communicator - excellent written and verbal skills and knowledge of supporting technology

Communicates effectively (written & verbal)
- Practices effective verbal and written communication with co-workers, clientele, stakeholders, commissioners and board members.

Uses technology to enhance communication
- Uses a variety of tools (email, blackboard, satellite, web, polycom) to communicate with co-workers and clientele.
- Becomes familiar with the latest communication modes (chat, blogging, etc.) to stay relevant to modern audience.

Inclusiveness - aware of and committed to serving all members of community

Inclusive of all members of the community
- Uses all reasonable efforts to engage a diverse audience in educational programming and facilitation.

Responsive to needs of diverse groups
- Develops and delivers diverse programs to meet the educational needs of diverse groups.

Entrepreneurial – generates grants, fees, contracts to enhance programs

Acquires program enhancement resources
- Generates revenue through program fees, grants and contributions. Uses these funds to build a solid resource base for future programming.
- Secures in-kind resources (financial, expert, hands-on) to facilitate effective educational programs.

Acquires resources from competitive sources
- Routinely applies for competitive grants or other funds to generate revenue or resources for program development and delivery.
- Competes for regional and/or national grants to generate significant resources.

Collaborator/Team Player – creates partnerships and contributes to teams in response to significant issues

Functions as an expert in a program team environment
- Accepts responsibility for team roles and assignments and follows through.

Interacts effectively with clientele groups
- Understands networking and how to develop local partnerships.

Effective member of coalitions
- Participate in and contributes to local coalitions.

Works well with office staff and peers
- Develops professional relationships with office team and others. Contributes to Cooperative Extension teams.

Broadens team concept to enhance program impact
- Actively participates in multi-disciplinary teams to develop educational programs or curricula.
- Seeks participation in regional, national or international teams to develop educational programs or curricula.

Interacts effectively with state-wide or national groups
- Works effectively with state-wide or national groups appropriate for focus area.

Builds coalitions
- Builds coalitions by identifying important issues, gathering interested parties, developing a program agenda and facilitating program implementation.

Models effective teamwork
- Functions as a resource to enhance the effectiveness of office and peer teams.
**Leadership** – ability to engage a wide range of individuals and facilitate progress on projects or programs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practices effective leadership with clientele, boards and volunteers</th>
<th>Develops advanced leadership skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Takes appropriate leadership role with clientele. Can communicate the mission of the organization.</td>
<td>Provides leadership for Work Group, Action Team or team projects. Demonstrates ability to establish a shared vision for program direction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effectively manages volunteers</td>
<td>Demonstrates regional, national or international leadership.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifies helpful volunteers and delegates program responsibilities appropriately.</td>
<td>Utilizes advanced volunteer development strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embraces conflict as a growth process</td>
<td>- Identifies, recruits and develops volunteers to assume leadership roles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledges conflict and acts to help resolve</td>
<td>Uses conflict resolution skills and is certified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>- Resolves conflict in a variety of settings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>- Resolves conflict, as the resource person.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Develops Unit Leader skills – communication, marketing, staff interaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Accepts Unit Leader responsibilities and applies effective leadership skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Functions as a mentor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Mentors a newer employee or newly refocused employees.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Balance** – optimizes work efficiency to balance professional/personal time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Invokes effective work habits</th>
<th>Plans and works proactively</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Uses effective time management, is able to juggle multiple projects, is involved in the community and makes personal and family time a priority.</td>
<td>- Works in the present with the future in mind, i.e., addresses current relevant issues with an eye on evolving issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manages time committed to service roles</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Contributes appropriate time to fairs, service functions and organizational committees.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Change Manager** – accepts change and is willing to deal with ambiguity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Willing risk-taker</th>
<th>Adjusts assignment to benefit organization or clientele</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Assesses programmatic opportunities and takes calculated risks.</td>
<td>- Makes career change in program focus when an emerging issue aligns with organizational opportunities. Participates in appropriate professional development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Models change</td>
<td>Leads change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Accepts and adapts to change and is willing to deal with ambiguity. Functions as an effective change agent for clientele and our organization.</td>
<td>- Facilitates groups to implement visionary change to position themselves for the future.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Professionalism** – personal presentation and behavior appropriate to our role and responsibility

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behaves professionally</th>
<th>Serves in leadership capacities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Dresses appropriately for the situation (one level better than clientele/participants).</td>
<td>- Provides a leadership role on district or state-wide committees.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Uses identifies (pins, shirts, jackets, etc.) to acknowledge UNL Extension.</td>
<td>- Implements public relations plans.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Maintains composure under all circumstances.</td>
<td>Leads organizational strategic planning processes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Loyal to peers and organization.</td>
<td>- Leads planning committees, task forces and other strategic planning processes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Citizenship** – contributes to the well-being of the organization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Knows UNL personnel and areas of expertise</th>
<th>Serves as an organizational citizen</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Refers clients to expert resources when appropriate.</td>
<td>- Gets involved in some aspect of the organization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participates on local, district or state-wide/university committees.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serves as an organizational citizen</td>
<td>- Promotes the university/organization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Gets involved in some aspect of the organization.</td>
<td>- Promotes a positive office image.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participates on local, district or state-wide/university committees.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Leads organizational strategic planning processes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Leads planning committees, task forces and other strategic planning processes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Contributes to organizational strategic plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Helps identify key issues or strategies for the organization’s strategic plan. Considers the role of personal and work team contributions to the organization’s strategic plan.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

UNL Extension (2005)
Appendix B

Interview Questions
Interview Questions

1. Please tell me about your background, career and reason for interest in your current position.
   a. Probe: Where did you grow up, education, career?
   b. Probe: How did you become interested in becoming an Extension educator?
   c. Probe: What influenced you?

2. What is being an Extension educator like for you?
   a. Probe: What do you do?
   b. Probe: What roles do you see yourself in?
   c. Probe: What do you especially like or dislike about these roles?

3. Tell me about your personal and professional goals.
   a. Probe: How do you approach both?
   b. Probe: Are personal or professional goals more important? Please explain.

4. Describe yourself at work and away from work.
   a. Probe: How do others describe you?
   b. Probe: Do you “work to live” or “live to work”?

5. What do you know about Extension core competencies?
   a. Probe: What do core competencies mean to you?
   b. Probe: How do you feel about learning core competencies?

6. What have you experienced in terms of Extension educator core competency development?
   a. Probe: How are you developing core competencies?
   b. Probe: What is essential to core competency development?
   c. Probe: What influences your competency development? How?
   d. Probe: What was your most effective competency development experience? Why?
   e. Probe: How have you put competencies to work for you?

7. What contexts or situations (environments, people, resources, life experiences, etc.) have typically influenced or affected your core competency development experiences?
   a. Probe: What impacts competency development the most?
   b. Probe: Is there a competency that was particularly difficult for you to achieve? If so, how did you handle it? What would you do differently? Are there others?
   c. Probe: Is there a competency where you feel you excel? If so, how did you develop it? Are there others?
8. What would have been helpful to you in the competency development process?  
a. Probe: Describe an ideal competency development experience.

9. How do you prefer to learn competencies?  
a. Probe: What are your preferred learning styles?

10. Please take a few minutes and describe in detail your competency development experience journey beginning with your first day of employment as an Extension educator and continuing to the present.

11. What additional information regarding your competency development experience would you like to share?
Appendix C

Interview Protocol
Interview Protocol

Name: ________________________________  Date/Time: _______________________

Title or Position: ________________________ Location: ________________________

Pseudonym: ___________________________  Interviewer:  Dave Varner

☐  Interviewee has signed consent form

☐  Recording device turned on and tested

Introduction

Thank you for taking time to visit with me. I will be recording and transcribing verbatim what we say today. It is important that the transcription be verbatim so that I do not paraphrase something you've said with an incorrect interpretation. I will also be taking notes during our conversation. This interview is one of eight to fifteen that will be conducted with Millennial Generation, county-based Extension educators. Your identity and office location will remain confidential.

Millennial Generation Extension educators are rapidly entering the workforce. Researchers have focused predominantly on experienced Extension educators’ input to identify and evaluate core competencies via surveys and other quantitative research methods. This qualitative study focuses on county-based, Millennial Generation Extension educators.

The purpose of this study is to understand and describe Millennial Generation Extension educators’ development of Extension core competencies. You’ve had a chance to review the questions that I’m about to ask you and give them some thought. I really want to know and understand your perspective so please feel free to discuss your views openly. I may ask a few follow-up questions as we proceed to help me understand your responses. Are you ready to begin?

Interview

Thank you for spending time with me today. I will provide you with a copy of the transcript of this interview before we begin to analyze the data and ask that you review it for accuracy. I would ask that you do that review as quickly as possible after you receive it. Upon completion of the study, I will share a summary of the findings with you. It has been a pleasure visiting. Thanks again for your assistance and best wishes to you and your continued success!
Appendix D

UNL IRB Approved Informed Consent Form
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

A Phenomenological Study of Millennial Generation Cooperative Extension Educators’ Development of Core Competencies.

Purpose:

The purpose of this research study is to describe extension educators’ core competency development among millennial generation extension educators and subsequent supervisory leadership strategies.

Procedures:

You have been purposefully selected for this study because you are a county-based extension educator representing the millennial generation that was born between January 1, 1977 and December 31, 1997. Your unique ability to describe the lived experiences of this sector of extension educators is paramount to the success of this study.

Participation in this study will require approximately 90 minutes of your time for a face-to-face interview that will take place at your office. There will be ten questions during the interview that pertain to your thoughts and experiences regarding core competency development. There may be additional questions asked to clarify or expand upon some of your answers. There will also be a few demographic questions that address educational background, career track, etc. The limited demographic information will be collected for the purpose of defining or tracing any related patterns or themes that may emerge during the data analysis.

Participants will also be asked to draw a timeline of his or her extension core competency development experience journey. A think-aloud technique will be used to capture participant’s thoughts while generating his or her drawing.

The interviews will be audio recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim. Following the transcription of your interview, you will be provided with a copy of the transcription to review for accuracy. You will have an opportunity to make additions and subtractions.

Participant’s Initials and Date: ________________________________
Risks and/or Discomforts:

There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this study. In the event of problems resulting from your participation in the study, psychological treatment is available on a sliding fee scale from the University of Nebraska’s Psychological Consultation Center in Lincoln. The telephone number is (402) 472-2351.

Benefits:

You may find the interview experience enjoyable and reminiscent of your own core competencies’ development experience. The information gained from this study may help us better understand millennial generation extension educators’ development of extension core competencies and how that information can be used to enhance the professional experience of extension educators and extension systems in general. Results of the research will be shared with participants.

Confidentiality:

Any information obtained during this study that could identify you will be kept strictly confidential. The data will be stored in a locked cabinet in the researcher’s office and on a password protected computer. Only the researcher and his advisor will have access to the data. Audio recordings and transcripts will be deleted after the study is complete. The information obtained in this study may be published in academic journals or presented at academic meetings and/or conferences. Pseudonyms will be used to protect participants’ identities. The transcriptionist will sign a confidentiality agreement.

Opportunity to Ask Questions:

You may ask any questions concerning this study and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate in this study. Should you have questions once the study begins, you are welcome to ask those questions and to have those questions answered to your satisfaction. You may call the researcher at any time at the office, (402) 727-2775, or mobile phone (402) 720-2775, if you have questions or concerns. If you have questions concerning your rights as a research subject that have not been answered by the researcher or to report any concerns about the study, you may contact the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review Board. The telephone number is (402) 472-6965.

Participant’s Initials and Date: ________________________________
Freedom to Withdraw:

You are free to withdraw from participation in this study at any time without adversely affecting your relationship with the researcher or with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Consent, Right to Receive a Copy:

You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. Your signature certifies that you have decided to participate in this study and have read and understand the information contained within this "informed consent form." You will be provided with a copy of this consent form for your files and future reference.

☐ I agree to have this interview audio recorded.

Signature:

__________________________
Printed Name of Research Participant

__________________________
Signature of Research Participant

__________________________
Date

Names and Phone Numbers of Investigators:

David L. Varner, Researcher, Primary Investigator
Office: (402) 727-2775
Mobile: (402) 720-2275

James King, Ed.D., Advisor, Secondary Investigator
Office: (402) 472-3022
Appendix E

Dean of UNL Extension Study Permission Letter
April 1, 2011

University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Institutional Review Board
City Campus

To Whom It May Concern,

I support the dissertation research study proposed by Mr. Dave Varner. A Phenomenological Study of Millennial Generation Cooperative Extension Educators' Perception and Development of Extension Core Competencies—Leadership Implications. The results of this study may help Extension supervisors more effectively recruit, motivate, retain, and lead this emerging generational cohort of extension educators.

Mr. Varner is granted permission to conduct a phenomenological qualitative study of University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) millennial generation extension educators. Dave may work with my staff to obtain a list of these Extension Educators and their respective employment commencement dates.

I look forward to the results of this study.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Ellert Dickey
Dean and Director
University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension Division
Appendix F

Initial Participant Solicitation E-mail Letter
Initial Participant Solicitation E-mail Letter

“Potential Participant’s Name,”

Extension core competencies are the knowledge, attitudes, skills and behaviors that contribute to excellence in Extension education programs. In 2002 the Extension Committee on Organization and Policy (ECOP) Personnel and Organizational Development Committee (PODC) introduced and encouraged Cooperative Extension Systems nationwide to utilize core competencies for professional development of Extension professionals. University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension identified competencies deemed important to educator and organizational enhancement in 2005.

Review of the literature revealed that no research has been conducted to learn about the Millennial Generation Extension educator competencies development experience. UNL Extension educator core competencies include: (a) successful teacher, (b) subject matter competent, (c) skilled communicator, (d) inclusiveness, (e) entrepreneurial, (f) collaborator/team player, (g) leadership, (h) balance, (i) change manager, (j) professionalism, and (k) citizenship. Attached is a summary of University of Nebraska-Lincoln Core Competencies for 21st Century Educators.

The purpose of this study is to better understand Millennial Generation, county-based, Extension educators’ lived core competencies development experience. The study does not focus on attainment of competencies, but rather the competencies development journey—“what” did you experience and “how?” The results of this study may help your Extension colleagues, supervisors and administrators more effectively recruit, motivate, retain and lead this emerging generation of educators.

You have been randomly selected to participate in this study. The study will include (a) completing an informed consent form, (b) background information form, (c) participating in an interview, and (4) finish with you narrating a drawing of a timeline representing your competency development experience. Your participation is voluntary and you may withdraw your participation at any time.

I will call you within a week to confirm your interest to participate. If you agree, we will schedule an interview time at your office. The interview process will take less than 90 minutes. Your identity, geographic location and interview responses will remain confidential.

The results of this study will be used to prepare a Ph.D. dissertation. Your participation and cooperation in this study is very important and much appreciated.

Thank you for considering this opportunity.

Sincerely,

Dave Varner, Graduate Student - dvarner1@unl.edu, 402-720-2275
Dr. James King, Major Professor - jking1@unl.edu, 402-472-3022
Appendix G

Participant Telephone Call Follow-up Script
Participant Telephone Call Follow-up Script

Hi “potential participant’s name,” my name is Dave Varner. I am a graduate student at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. I am calling today regarding the Extension educator core competency study that I introduced to you in an e-mail a few days ago.

The purpose of this study is to better understand Millennial Generation Extension educators’ core competency development experience. The study focuses on the competency development journey—“what” did you experience and “how?”

You have been randomly selected to participate in this study. The study will include completing an informed consent form, background information form, participating in a 60-minute interview, and finish with you narrating a timeline drawing of your competency development experience. The process will take no longer than 90 minutes.

Please be assured that your responses and identity would be kept confidential. The information collected during the interview will be used to complete my Ph.D. dissertation. All research participants will receive a pseudonym to ensure the confidentiality of their participation. Your participation is voluntary and you may withdraw your participation at any time.

Your participation and cooperation in this study would be much appreciated. Do you have any questions regarding this study that I can answer for you now? Are you interested and able to participate in this study?

If participant does not agree to participate:

Thank you for considering this request. Have a nice day.

If participant does agree to participate:

Thank you. When would be a convenient time to meet at your office to conduct the interview?

I will send you an e-mail one week prior to the interview with the forms mentioned earlier attached along with a copy of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Core Competencies for 21st Century Educators and a list of interview questions that I will ask you.

I’m looking forward to our meeting. Please e-mail (dvarner1@unl.edu) or call (402-720-2275) if you have any questions or concerns.

Thank you!
Appendix H

Email Reminder Letter Prior to Interview
Email Reminder Letter Prior to Interview

Date

“Participant’s Name,”

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the Millennial Generation, Extension educator competency study. Let’s plan to meet at (time) at (location). We will (a) complete the informed consent form, (b) background information form and (c) conduct the interview.

The informed consent form and background information forms are attached to this e-mail. You may complete these forms prior to our scheduled interview time.

Also attached is a summary of University of Nebraska-Lincoln Core Competencies for 21st Century Educators. Please review the competencies prior to our meeting, reflecting on “what” you have experienced during the competency development journey. Also think about “how” you have experienced competency development—what contexts or situations have affected or influenced this process.

A list of interview questions that I will ask is attached. I may ask additional questions during the interview to help clarify your responses to each of these questions.

I’m looking forward to our meeting. Please e-mail (dvarner1@unl.edu) or call (402-720-2275) if you have any questions or concerns.

Dave Varner, Graduate Student
Appendix I

Background Information Form
Background Information Form

(Completed prior to interview)

A Phenomenological Study of Millennial Generation Cooperative Extension Educators’ Development of Core Competencies

Date: ______________ Location: __________________________ Time: ___________

Participant’s Name: ____________________________________________________

Pseudonym (First Name): ______________________________________________

Home Address: _________________________________________________________

Office Address: _________________________________________________________

Phone: Office _____________ Mobile _____________ Home _____________

Email: _________________________________________________________________

Birthdate: __________________________ Gender: ___________________________

Time in Current Position (years/months): _________________________________

Educational Program Focus: _____________________________________________

Previous Extension experience: __________________________________________

Marital Status: __________________________ Number of Children _____________

Ethnicity: (circle): Caucasian Hispanic Native American African American
Asian American International Other (list) __________________

Describe yourself in 1-2 paragraphs. You may print this description and submit it with
the above information the day of the interview or e-mail the description to
dvarner1@unl.edu
Appendix J

Interview Verification Form
Dear Research Participant,

Please review the enclosed transcript of our recent interview concerning Millennial Generation Extension educator core competencies development. Feel free to note any content errors that you find in order to make all information as accurate as possible. Also, please initial the appropriate statement below to indicate your level of approval. Thank you.

Please initial the appropriate statement below:

_____ I approve the interview transcript without reviewing it.

_____ I approve the interview transcript without changes.

_____ I approve the interview transcript with noted changes.

_____ I do not approve the interview transcript.

Signature:

_________________________________________  ____________________  
Printed Name of Research Participant       Date
Appendix K

Transcriptionist Confidentiality Agreement
Transcriptionist Confidentiality Agreement

I, __________________________, hereby agree that I will maintain confidentiality of all audio-recorded interviews that I have been contracted to transcribe for the following research project: **Millennial Generation Extension Educator Competencies Development**. This means that I will not discuss or share any audio-recorded or transcribed data with any individuals other than the researcher, Dave Varner or his supervisor, Dr. Jim King. When the transcriptions are complete, I will return all audio files to the researcher. Upon confirmation of receipt of these files by the researcher, I will destroy the originals.

____________________________________________    _________________
(Signature of transcriptionist)      (Date)
Appendix L

Example Excerpt of Interview Transcription
Example Excerpt of Interview Transcription

PI: Well, thank you for taking time to visit with me today. I will be recording and transcribing verbatim what we say today. It is important that the transcription be verbatim so that I do not paraphrase, something you’ve said with an incorrect interpretation. I will also be taking notes during our conversation. This interview is one of fourteen that will be conducted with Millennial Generation county-based Extension educators. Your identity and office location will remain confidential. The purpose of this study is to understand and describe Millennial Generation Extension educators’ development of Extension core competencies. You’ve had a chance to review the questions that I’m about to ask you and give them some thought. I really want to know and understand your perspectives, so please feel free to discuss your views openly. I may ask a few follow-up questions as we proceed to help me understand your responses. Are you ready to begin?

Interviewee: Yes!

PI: OK. Well, let’s just start by telling me a little bit about your background, career, and reason for interest in your Extension educator position.

Interviewee: I was raised, actually, in town so I don’t come from a farm which is kind of unusual, I think, for an ag Extension educator. I went to school, got a bachelor’s in Animal Science, and then kind of, last-minute decision, made a decision to get a master’s in Range Science. I started my Extension job a week after I defended my thesis. So, quick turnaround there. (laugh) Extension… it was something that appealed to me. I didn’t really have a goal of going into Extension when I was going to school. It was just an option, I guess, that appealed to me.

PI: How were you aware of Extension?

Interviewee: Through both my parents because they work for the University.

PI: Oh, OK!

Interviewee: And also I was in 4-H growing up.

PI: So you kind of knew what an Extension educator was.

Interviewee: Yeah, we had a family friend that’s an Extension educator

PI: So what’s it like being an Extension educator?
Interviewee: Umm…no day is the same as any other day. A lot of diversity in what you which I really like because I don’t think I could have a job where I had to go and do the same thing day after day after day.

Interviewee: When I first started, I was kind of like, “What am I supposed to do? I still haven’t figured it out.” And (a colleague) said, and he was an older educator, “They gave you just enough rope to hang yourself. Remember that!”

PI: (laugh)

Interviewee: (laugh) I’m like, “Thanks!”

PI: What roles do you see yourself in, as an educator?

Interviewee: I think it’s kind of changing since we moved to the Spires. Before the Spires, I think my role was a little less defined. I did do the adult programming and the 4-H programming in the county. But it tended to be more 4-H if I didn’t watch it, the 4-H stuff kind of took over. Now, I think, with the Spires I, have a little more focus in terms of what I’m supposed to do. And I think also the Spires has helped really develop teams, which has been very helpful in programming.

PI: What are some of the other roles that come along with being an educator--some of the other tasks or responsibilities?

Interviewee: Just a lot of the one-on-one client contacts on a day-to-day basis. My office isn’t bad in terms of like administrative type roles, but those come up in terms of dealing with the person I supervise and the county commissioners. A lot of the other organizations in the community contact me a lot to help them on things too. I’ve noticed I’m more and more kind of a go-to person.

PI: And you feel like you’re becoming more in that loop, so to speak? When people are aware of the resources you can bring to the community?

Interviewee: Yeah.

PI: Tell me about personal and professional goals.

Interviewee: Umm… (laugh) I’m still kind of figuring that out. I still don’t know what I want to be when I grow up type of thing. (laugh) I’m going to school. I went back to school and am working on another master’s degree.

PI: Good for you!
Interviewee: Hopefully it gives me some skills. I like Extension and I like the educational component of it. That sort of stuff, so I’d like to kind of stay in that field. I don’t know, really, in terms of personal and professionals. I’m kicking around the idea of maybe going back to school after I finish this degree but, I don’t know.

PI: What would that be for?

Interviewee: A doctorate, but I don’t know what in. (laugh)

PI: What’s your master’s degree, your second one in?

Interviewee: Public Administration.

Interviewee: Yeah. I’m particularly focusing on public policy and public management issues.

PI: So are those are your professional goals or personal goals or kind of a mix?

Interviewee: Kind of a mix. Um, personally…I guess I just accomplished one of my personal goals. It was to run a half marathon by the time turned thirty, and I did!

PI: Wow!

Interviewee: So I guess…the next one is to run a marathon by the time I turn forty, so I have about ten years to do that.

PI: Giving yourself plenty of time!

Interviewee: Yeah. I set a lot of just small, like personal goals like that. Just because I’m a type of person that has to have something to work towards or else I kind of feel lost.

PI: What do you especially like or dislike about being an Extension educator?

Interviewee: I like the flexibility and I like the independence of it, not having someone constantly looking over your shoulder. I enjoy that. Some of the things I don’t like is there’s no like set stop, start and stop times. I think that was, that was a hard transition for me, getting out of school. I’m like, “Oh, once May comes, you still have to work!” (laugh) That kind of thing. (laugh)

Interviewee: I think it’s difficult to get established in Extension. I think it’s gotten better, um…but I think just the initial getting started was hard for me.

PI: OK. Tell me more about that.
Interviewee: Now they have the new employee development stuff and when I started there wasn’t much of that.

PI: OK.

Interviewee: So it was kind of…I went to _____ County for one day and I went to…______ County for like half a day, learning about their offices. And then it was kind of like, you’re on your own. If you have questions, give us a call.

Interviewee: So dislikes: difficulty to get established, how could that be better?

Interviewee: I think it’s gotten better for some of the newer educators because there’s more of a team kind of focus among… I’ve enjoyed my job a lot more now that there’s a lot more educators more my age and kind of view things similarly to me, and we’ve been able to form teams and that sort of thing. I think that’s helped a lot. And I think the newer people that have come on since me have mentioned that to me, and they’re like, “Whoa!” I’m like, “Yeah, when I started it was kind of me and there weren’t very many other people (laugh) like me, and so now…”

PI: So what made it hard at that point? What was happening? What were the people around you like? Or what were the dynamics that made that very difficult?

Interviewee: They weren’t as open to like teaming up on things. And I think the people except some like, _____ in _____ County were not very open to it…