

An Assessment of Clemson Cooperative Extension Agents' Perceptions of Work-Related Factors Leading to Burnout

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Abstract

Turnover and employee burnout are problems the Cooperative Extension system is facing nationwide, and the Clemson system is no exception. Research within Extension has identified factors contributing to turnover and burnout; however, both remain an issue. To further investigate factors contributing to burnout, this pilot study was conducted with Clemson Extension agents using a burnout assessment not previously used in Extension research to provide a new burnout assessment tool to Extension services. This study aimed to describe Extension agents' perceptions of six work constructs contributing to burnout to determine if there were any relationships between the constructs and Extension Agents' generational cohort affiliation. The work constructs studied were workload, control, community, reward, fairness, and values. Findings indicated agents had an overall positive perception of the constructs, and the constructs studied were not rated at a level associated with burnout. There was also no correlation found between burnout risk and demographic characteristics. This study established reliability coefficients for the survey instrument used and identified future implications for the use of the instrument. Since there was only one significant correlation in the data, it is recommended future research be conducted using other factors of work to identify which do contribute to burnout.

Introduction

Burnout is a condition resulting from prolonged, chronic exposure to stress on the job, leading the individual to feelings of exhaustion, cynicism, and lack of achievement (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). The first workplace burnout study was done by Herbert Freudenberger in 1974, with the first study on burnout in Cooperative Extension agents completed by Christopher Igodan in 1984 (Freudenberger, 1974; Igodan, 1984). Since then, there have been numerous studies done within the Cooperative Extension system to discover causes of burnout with hopes of reducing turnover (Chandler, 2005; Harder et al., 2014; Harder et al., 2015; Igodan & Newcomb, 1986;

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Strong & Harder, 2009). Retaining long-term, high-quality employees is the goal for most organizations; however, in Cooperative Extension's case, retention is essential for financial and educational programming purposes (Harder et al., 2015).

In a 2005 study by G. D. Chandler, it was estimated the cost of replacing an Extension agent ranges between \$7,185 and \$30,000 per agent, making the cost of turnover extremely high for the Cooperative Extension system. The cost of retaining Extension agents extends beyond financial implications. Losing Extension agents creates a loss of knowledge, experience, and relationships while disrupting programming and increasing the strain on the remaining employees, including the agent's successor (Harder et al., 2015). The consequences of burnout also extend beyond the individual and to the clients and the organization that employs them, with Maslach et al. (1996) finding that burnout can cause a decreased level of care provided to clients and be a contributing factor to job turnover.

Currently, the workforce is made of members from generational cohorts including Baby Boomers, Generation X (Gen-X), Millennials, and Generation Z (Gen-Z). A generation is defined as all the people in a group who share birth years and significant life events, especially when they are considered as having the same experiences or attitudes (Collins, n.d.). Generational differences occur because of changing cultural practices and values (Schroth, 2019). In a workplace setting, these shared experiences and attitudes can guide how a person feels about their job, what they hope to gain from their job, and how they plan to accomplish their work goals (Chieh Lu & Gursoy, 2016). Understanding the needs and perceptions of generational cohorts makes it easier for organizations to hire, train, and retain employees from each cohort. The research team selected generational cohorts after reviewing various generational cohort-related research (Chieh Lu & Gursoy, 2016; Gamble, 2014; Schroth, 2019).

Regarding the workplace, Baby Boomers tend to think of work and their job as a more central part of their life in comparison with Gen-X and Millennials (Chieh Lu & Gursoy, 2016). Employees who belong to the Baby Boomer generation tend to have greater loyalty to their organization and are less likely to move between companies (Chieh Lu & Gursoy, 2016). Since Baby Boomers are more loyal to the organization they work for and tend to place work in a more central part of their lives, they are more likely to attribute burnout as just a result of having a demanding job (Chieh Lu & Gursoy, 2016). When compared with younger employees, Baby Boomers experience less job dissatisfaction and reduced turnover intentions because they tend to place less blame on the position or organization (Chieh Lu & Gursoy, 2016).

Gen-X and Millennial employees tend to place more importance on their individual careers and success over loyalty to the organization they work for (Beutell & Wittig-Berman, 2008). Both generational groups value work-life balance and tend not to be as work-centric as Baby Boomers (Chieh Lu & Gursoy, 2016). While Baby Boomers are more settled into their careers and looking to maintain their current positions, Gen-X and Millennial employees look for new opportunities and challenges in the workplace (Chieh Lu & Gursoy, 2016). Since they are not as established in their careers and perceive work as equally or less important as their personal lives, Gen-X and Millennial employees tend to blame feelings of burnout on their position or organization they work with (Chieh Lu & Gursoy, 2016). When it comes to Millennials, the need for work-life balance is likely because Millennials grew up watching their Baby Boomer parents work long hours in

stressful work settings (Gaidhani et al., 2019). Burnout can contribute to increased job dissatisfaction among Gen-X and Millennial employees, leading to them experiencing higher rates of turnover intentions to find (Chieh Lu & Gursoy, 2016).

Gen-Z is the newest generation to be incorporated into the workforce. Gen-Z is the most educated generation and has more ethnic and racial diversity than previous generations (Schroth, 2019). Members of the Gen-Z generational cohort are also more likely to have mental health problems like anxiety and depression (Schroth, 2019). This generation also has the least amount of work experience, with only 34% of teenagers reporting holding a job in 2017 (Morisi, 2017), which is important to consider given the potential for that generation to enter the Extension workforce. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (2024) reported 54.5% of people ages 16 to 24 were employed, but this data includes a broader scope of individuals than just teenagers. Since this generation has grown up with technology, they like for it to be incorporated into their jobs and value instant communication or feedback (Gaidhani et al., 2019). Gen-Z employees want their ideas acknowledged and value a workplace that places emphasis on contributions instead of age (Gaidhani et al., 2019).

A 2019 study by De Maeyer and Schoenmakers exploring generation differences in burnout confirmed these findings, noting younger generations (i.e., Gen-X, Millennials, and Gen-Z) are more prone to burnout. Younger people were defined in this study as being between the ages of 21 and 35, and the study showed almost one in four young people face burnout (De Maeyer & Schoenmakers, 2019). De Maeyer and Schoenmakers (2019) also found younger employees feel higher performance pressure because they are less established in their jobs. This finding supports Chieh Lu and Gursoy's (2016) assumption that the Baby Boomer generation is less likely to experience burnout because they are more settled into their jobs and the status associated with their positions.

A 2014 study by Susan Gamble utilized a demographic profile, including a generational cohort framework, to evaluate job satisfaction in the West Virginia University Extension Service (WVUES). Data were collected through interviews with county supervisors and a modification of the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ) Short-Form that included questions about the work environment and demographics (Gamble, 2014). The findings were based on the Herzberg Motivation-Hygiene Theory (MHT). The MHT is a two-dimensional theory surrounding employee satisfaction (Herzberg et al., 1959). Motivative factors contribute to internal growth, while hygiene factors come from the work environment itself (Herzberg, 1966). Overall, generational cohorts were not predictors of job satisfaction for WVUES county employees, but there were some differences in perception noticed between the generational cohorts within the two dimensions of the MHT (Gamble, 2014).

In the motivation dimension, Gamble (2014) assessed achievement, the work itself, responsibility, recognition, and advancement. When analyzing qualitative data from the achievement factor, it was found Gen-X and Millennials defined achievement as the success of their programs, so feedback from supervisors was better received if it related directly to the success of their programs (Gamble, 2014). Baby Boomers defined achievement as the formal or informal feedback they received from clients, coworkers, and supervisors (Gamble, 2014). Supervisors noted Gen-X and Millennials use more technology within their positions and are used to a certain

level of immediate feedback because of this, so they expect the same feedback timeframe from supervisors (Gamble, 2014). Since Millennials were the youngest generational cohort in Gamble's study, they were the most likely to seek recognition to justify later promotions (Gamble, 2014). Baby Boomers were more likely to report administrative responsibilities when it came to the work itself, likely because they have been in their positions longer (Gamble, 2014). When asked about advancement, all three generational cohorts addressed the process but had different perceptions about it. Millennials described the promotion process as a "high stakes process that creates stress," while Gen-X and Baby Boomers just referred to it as time-consuming (Gamble, 2014). This is likely because the promotion process may be something new to a Millennial who has not been employed as long as someone from the Gen-X or Baby Boomer cohort. While different scholars use different cut points between generations, this study defines Baby Boomers as being born between 1946 and 1964, Gen-X between 1965 and 1976, Millennials between 1977 and 1995, and Gen-Z between 1996 and 2010.

The factors assessed for the hygiene dimension were supervision, salary, policy and administration, interpersonal relationships, and working conditions (Gamble, 2014). Consistent with the findings related to feedback regarding achievement, Millennials need more supervision than other generational cohorts (Gamble, 2014). Regarding salary, Gamble (2014) found Gen-X was the least satisfied, perhaps because Baby Boomers have had years of raises, and Millennials are satisfied with what they were offered as a starting pay rate. Gamble (2014) also found Millennials are less worried about policy and administration because they can change jobs if needed and are not as invested in the success of the organization. This supports the findings of Chieh Lu and Gursoy (2016) and De Maeyer and Schoenmakers (2019), who found Baby Boomers tend to be more loyal to the organization they work for because they have more time invested. No generational differences were found in work conditions; however, it was found Millennials are more likely to speak out if they are not satisfied with their work environment (Gamble, 2014). A key difference noticed between the generational cohorts was how they defined their interpersonal relationships with coworkers. Millennials defined them as a partnership, while Gen-X and Baby Boomers defined those relationships as friendships or mentorships (Gamble, 2014).

Research on Extension employee burnout dates to 1984, with many concluding similar factors, such as low pay, lack of work-life balance, and long hours contribute to burnout (Chandler, 2005; Harder et al., 2014; Harder et al., 2015; Igodan & Newcomb, 1986; Strong & Harder, 2009). Even with these factors established, high turnover rates remain, leading to the question of why burnout and high turnover are still issues within the Cooperative Extension system. This study will investigate six work constructs as potential contributors to Extension employee burnout. The constructs are workload, control, reward, values, community, and fairness. This study's results will aim to provide insight into how different generational cohorts affect the perceptions of Cooperative Extension employees towards constructs that impact burnout. As the workforce population shifts, the values of new employees need to be acknowledged by the Extension Administration.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this research is to identify Clemson Cooperative Extension agents' perceptions regarding the six work constructs (i.e., workload, control, reward, values, community, and

fairness) that may lead to burnout and explore potential relationships between those factors and demographic traits. Three research objectives guided this study:

1. Explain the demographic characteristics of Clemson Cooperative Extension agents.
2. Describe Clemson Cooperative Extension agents' perceptions of six work constructs (workload, control, reward, community, fairness, and values) that may lead to burnout; and
3. Determine relationships, if any, between the six work constructs leading to burnout and generational cohort affiliation of Clemson Cooperative Extension agents.

Theoretical Framework

The Motivation-Hygiene Theory (MHT) was created to fill a gap in the field of job attitudes and perceptions (Herzberg et al., 1959). The MHT describes employee satisfaction is two-dimensional made of motivational, or intrinsic factors, and hygiene, or extrinsic factors (Herzberg et al., 1959). Herzberg et al. (1959) described hygiene factors as similar to medical hygiene because they act as a preventative measure, not as a curative. Examples of hygiene factors are salary, supervision, administration, interpersonal working relationships, and physical working conditions (Gamble, 2014). In a 2021 study, Bundtzen found even with today's changing work environment, the MHT was still reproducible in a variety of contexts within the modern work environment. If hygiene factors are not met, employees leave positions before they develop motivational factors within their positions.

The second dimension is motivation, which explores things that increase employee productivity, like recognition, professional development, the work itself, and achievement. In the MHT (Herzberg et al., 1959), emphasis is placed on motivational factors rather than hygiene factors, as motivational factors are more encouraging to employees. However, this conclusion was challenged in a 2014 study that the found factors most important to Extension professionals fell into both motivational and hygiene categories, suggesting hygiene factors may play a bigger role in Extension employee job satisfaction (Harder et al., 2014).

In the context of this study, MHT is used to identify intrinsic and extrinsic work factors contributing to employee burnout. Intrinsic work factors include achievement, work itself, responsibility, recognition, and advancement. Extrinsic work factors include supervision, salary, policy and administration, interpersonal relationships, and working conditions. Understanding which work factors contribute to burnout will help serve the purpose of describing relationships, if any, between the six work constructs leading to burnout and generational cohort affiliation of Clemson Cooperative Extension agents.

Methods

A non-experimental design was developed to address the research objectives using a modified version of the Breakthrough Burnout Prevention and Wellness assessment (Eby, 2021). The Burnout Assessment was created in agreement with other experts on the topic of burnout, like Christina Maslach, Michael Leiter, the World Health Organization, and the National Institutes of Health (Eby, 2021). Maslach defined six dimensions of work that contribute to burnout: workload, control of resources, reward, community, fairness, and values (Maslach, 1999). Maslach theorized

burnout results from an imbalance between the employee and at least one of these dimensions, and a prolonged imbalance negatively affects the employees' health and performance in the workplace (Maslach, 1999). Using Maslach's dimensions of work, with the addition of the other resources mentioned above, the Breakthrough Burnout Assessment was created. The instrument includes questions in the fairness category related to diversity and inclusion within the workplace (Eby, 2021). This assessment tool was chosen for this study to introduce a new and free instrument for burnout assessment into the field of Extension work. Clemson Extension agents of all disciplines ($N = 132$) were invited to participate in the assessment. The survey was distributed using an anonymous Qualtrics link through an existing listserv owned and maintained by the Clemson Cooperative Extension Service (Clemson CES). An initial email and three contact points were used to invite Clemson CES agents to participate in the study. By survey conclusion, 90 completed responses were recorded for data analysis.

The Burnout Assessment is 110 questions total, but for the sake of this study, the component that addresses areas of well-being (personal profile) affected by work has been removed. The questions asked in the personal profile did not collect data that was relevant to the study and were removed to shorten the survey, since shorter surveys have been found to have higher response and completion rates (Kost, 2018; Sharma, 2022). The questions were replaced with demographics questions to see if there are relationships between the six work categories leading to burnout and the demographic characteristics of Clemson Cooperative Extension Agents. The modified survey resulted in 68 questions with a modified Likert-type scale. Privitera (2020) recommends reducing the time it takes participants to complete the survey by using restricted items when utilizing a longer survey. Accordingly, a modified four-point Likert-type scale was used to reduce the time it took participants to complete the survey and remove a neutral option to ensure that participants provided an attitude towards the statements. The survey did not ask for any identifiable information but asked participants to identify their gender, race or ethnicity, generational cohort, and highest degree held. Due to limited sample sizes from some generational cohorts and the similarities cited in the introduction, the Baby Boomer generation and Generation X were combined to create the "Born between 1946 and 1976" grouping, and the Millennial generation and Generation Z were combined to create the "Born between 1977 and 2010" grouping. Participants were also asked for professional characteristics related to their jobs, including level of service, program team affiliation, and years of service. The rest of the survey was divided into six sections, one for each work construct contributing to burnout, established by Maslach and Leiter (2016). Each section asked respondents to choose how they aligned with each statement in a Likert-type scale format that allowed participants to choose from the options of strongly disagree (1), somewhat disagree (2), somewhat agree (3), or strongly agree (4).

The instrument used in the study did not have established reliability coefficients, so a post-hoc reliability analysis was conducted to assess instrument reliability. The reliability analysis established Cronbach's alpha using the 90 completed responses for each contributing work factor to burnout and for the assessment for an overall coefficient of $\alpha = .968$. Cronbach's alpha measures how closely related items are as a group and is considered a measure of scale reliability (Bruin, 2006). A high alpha score suggests the test is homogenous (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011).

The burnout work constructs were grouped into six subscales. The six work constructs were: workload, control, reward, community, fairness, and values. An alpha level of .85 was

accepted (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). Reliability coefficients for the six work constructs and the overall score were generated (Table 1).

Table 1

Reliability Coefficients for Work Characteristics and Overall Survey (n = 90)

Work Construct	Number of Items	Cronbach's alpha
Workload	10	0.863
Control	10	0.809
Reward	9	0.803
Community	10	0.838
Fairness	10	0.857
Values	9	0.882
Overall	58	0.958

Cronbach's alpha can be affected by the length of a survey, meaning a survey that is too short can reduce alpha or a survey that is too long can inflate alpha even if the survey is not homogenous (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). The modified Burnout Assessment used in this study from Breakthrough Personal and Professional Development, Inc. was 58 questions. Following the recommendation of Tavakol and Dennick (2011), the reliability coefficient was calculated for each work construct and the instrument as a whole to provide a measure of internal consistency without the high question count influencing the scores.

The data were analyzed using SPSS version 28. Frequencies and percentages were evaluated for research objective one. The second research objective employed descriptive statistics to indicate the central tendency or the center point of the scores to describe Clemson Extension agents' perceptions of the six work constructs (i.e., workload, control, reward, community, fairness, and values) that contribute to burnout, the mean scores for each question and construct were recorded.

Objective three was analyzed using a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) and a bivariate correlation in SPSS. For this objective, the null hypothesis was there is no difference in the generational cohort means (i.e., born between 1946 and 1976 or born between 1977 and 2010) when compared to the means for each work construct. The alternative hypothesis is there will be a difference in the mean scores for each work construct when compared to the generational cohort means.

Findings

Research objective one focused on demographics, including participants' personal and professional characteristics. Of the 90 completed responses, there were more female respondents ($n = 49$, 54.4%) than male respondents ($n = 32$, 35.6%). Many respondents identified as White or Caucasian ($n = 74$, 82.2%), with the second highest group being Black or African American ($n = 5$, 5.6%) respondents. Most respondents identified themselves as being born between 1977 and 2010 ($n = 53$, 58.9%), and the majority of respondents held at least a master's degree. Table 2 outlines the personal and professional characteristics of participants.

Table 2*Personal Characteristics of Participants (n = 90)*

Characteristic		<i>f</i>	%
Gender	Male	32	35.6%
	Female	49	54.4%
	Prefer not to answer	9	10%
Race/Ethnicity	White/Caucasian	74	82.2%
	Black/African American	5	5.6%
	American Indian	3	3.3%
	Hispanic/Latinx	1	1.1%
	Asian	2	2.2%
	Native Hawaiian	1	1.1%
	Other/Multiple Ethnicities	4	4.4%
Generational Cohort	Born between 1946 - 1976	35	38.9%
	Born between 1977 - 2010	53	58.9%
	Prefer not to answer	2	2.2%
Highest Degree Held	Bachelors	29	32.2%
	Masters	49	54.4%
	Doctorate	8	8.9%
	Prefer not to answer	4	4.4%

The questions to describe the professional characteristics of participants were the level of service (county, regional, state, or prefer not to answer), program team affiliation, and years of service. The largest group of responses came from agents who serve on the county level ($n = 46$, 51.1%), followed by 12 (13.3%) who serve on the regional level and 29 (32.2%) who serve on the state level. There were 10 program teams represented across the 90 respondents. The program teams with the highest response frequency were 4-H Youth Development and Horticulture, with 15 (16.7%) participants each. The years of service with Clemson Cooperative Extension of the respondents ranged from five or below to over 30 years or more. Table 3 provides the frequency and percentage of responses for each of the professional characteristics of participants.

Table 3*Professional Characteristics of Participants (n = 96)*

Characteristic		<i>f</i>	%	
Level of Service	County	46	51.1%	
	Regional	12	13.3%	
	State	29	32.2%	
	Prefer not to answer	9	10%	
Program Team	4-H	15	16.7%	
	Agribusiness	7	7.8%	
	Agronomy	3	3.3%	
	Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program	1	1.1%	
	Food Systems and Safety	6	6.7%	
	Forestry and Natural Resources	6	6.7%	
	Horticulture	15	16.7%	
	Livestock and Forages	7	7.8%	
	Natural Resources – Water	4	4.4%	
	Rural Health	9	10%	
	Other	5	5.6%	
	Prefer not to answer	12	13.3%	
	Years of Service	≤ 5	37	41.1%
		6 – 10	17	18.9%
11 – 15		6	6.7%	
16 – 20		10	11.1%	
21 – 25		6	6.7%	
26 – 30		3	3.3%	
> 30		3	3.3%	
Prefer not to answer		8	8.9%	

For research objective two, the overall mean scores for each construct in the survey and work instrument were calculated along with an overall mean for the burnout work assessment. The mean scores for individual constructs ranged from $M = 2.82$ to $M = 3.48$ (Table 3). The highest mean score was in the values construct with a score of $M = 3.48$ ($SD = 0.70$). The lowest mean score came from the workload construct with a score of $M = 2.82$ ($SD = 0.77$). Table 4 provides the mean and standard deviation for each of the constructs.

Table 4*Mean Scores for Burnout Assessment Work Constructs (n=90)*

Construct	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Workload	2.823	0.773
Control	3.183	0.653
Reward	3.169	0.684
Community	3.377	0.642
Fairness	3.192	0.722
Values	3.476	0.699
Overall	3.204	0.723

Note: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = somewhat disagree, 3 = somewhat agree, 4 = strongly agree

The survey instrument asked respondents to choose how they aligned with statements in each work construct using a 4-point Likert scale format. The lowest mean score was for question eight in the workload construct at $M = 1.80$ ($SD = 1.23$), which asked participants how they aligned with the statement “I do not think about unfinished work after leaving for the day.” The highest mean score was $M = 3.98$ ($SD = 0.21$) for questions four in the community construct and six in the reward construct. Question four in the community construct asked participants how they aligned with the statement “I treat people at work with care and respect,” and the statement for question six in the values construct was “I make positive contributions to my organization.” Table 5 provides the individual questions for each of the constructs along with the corresponding mean and standard deviation.

Table 5*Mean Rating and Standard Deviations for Burnout Assessment Questions (n=90)*

Construct	Question	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Workload	I have the capacity to keep up with my work and do so with excellence.	3.54	0.901
	I have the training necessary to excel at my job.	3.41	1.004
	I do not feel burned out from my work.	2.60	1.261
	I am able to finish my responsibilities without working overtime.	2.34	1.273
	I have time to plan and prioritize my work.	3.17	1.073
	I have time to work on my most important responsibilities.	3.41	0.970
	I do not take work home to complete on evenings, weekends, or vacations.	2.16	1.306
	I do not think about unfinished work after leaving for the day.	1.80	1.229
	I have the support and resources needed to perform my job with excellence.	2.90	1.255
	My work does not take precedence over	2.90	1.200

Construct	Question	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
	my personal interests.		
Control	I can handle the pace and my amount of work long-term.	3.37	1.054
	My work environment and tasks feel predictable.	2.98	1.161
	I am equipped to meet the challenges of my work.	3.58	0.861
	I have clarity regarding expectations and priorities.	2.78	1.197
	Communication in my organization is effective, authentic, clear, and adequate.	2.22	1.216
	I feel positive about my job.	3.22	1.109
	I have influence within my team.	3.37	1.086
	I have control over where, when, and how I do my work.	3.19	1.160
	I have a proper work set up to perform my responsibilities.	3.62	0.869
	I have adequate decision-making influence over my work.	3.51	0.974
Reward	I feel inspired and take pride in my work.	3.74	0.787
	I make a significant contribution at work.	3.84	0.539
	I feel my effort is noticed and rewarded.	2.99	1.259
	My manager or team encourages and appreciates my work.	3.31	1.148
	I receive adequate health benefits to support myself and my family.	3.46	1.051
	I can save for the future rather than living paycheck to paycheck.	2.09	1.233
	My workplace invests in my professional growth.	3.19	1.160
	I feel appreciated for my contribution to my team or organization.	3.01	1.204
	I have sufficient time away from work and feel in control of my time off.	2.89	1.267
Community	I enjoy working with my manager and co-workers.	3.84	0.539
	The culture of my organization is positive.	2.91	1.269
	I do not get irritated easily by my work or co-workers.	3.22	1.079
	I treat people at work with care and respect.	3.98	0.211
	I feel comfortable sharing my concerns with my manager.	3.44	1.040
	I feel heard and that my voice counts with my manager and team.	3.07	1.243

Construct	Question	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
	I feel psychologically safe at work.	3.54	0.973
	I trust my co-workers.	3.47	0.997
	My co-workers do not adversely affect my work.	3.44	0.973
	My team is free from conflict.	2.84	1.235
Fairness	I am fairly compensated relative to others in my organization and field.	2.34	1.300
	I have adequate opportunities to move upward in my organization.	2.30	1.276
	I feel respected regardless of my gender or sexual orientation.	3.30	1.166
	I have the same opportunities as people of other genders or orientations.	3.11	1.213
	I feel respected regardless of my spiritual orientation.	3.72	0.848
	I have the same opportunities as people of other spiritual orientations.	3.71	0.838
	I feel respected regardless of my ethnic identity.	3.64	0.852
	I have the same opportunities as people of other ethnicities.	3.41	1.037
	My organization wholeheartedly embraces diversity, equity, and inclusion.	3.49	0.986
	I can climb the ladder at work while keeping my integrity.	2.89	1.267
Values	My personal values align with the values of my organization.	3.41	1.069
	My organization's mission, vision, and values are authentically lived out.	3.11	1.156
	My responsibilities align with my organization's values.	3.52	0.951
	I am treated with respect at work.	3.57	0.925
	Team successes are acknowledged and shared by the entire team.	3.32	1.100
	I make positive contribute to my organization.	3.98	0.211
	I feel engaged in my role at work.	3.70	0.785
	My organization's goals fit well with my career ambitions.	3.42	1.016
	I am growing personally and professionally within my organization.	3.26	1.176

Note: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = somewhat disagree, 3 = somewhat agree, 4 = strongly agree

For research objective three, the demographic of interest was generational cohort affiliation (i.e., born between 1946 and 1976 or born between 1977 and 2010) and burnout recognition. For

this objective, the null hypothesis is no difference in the generational cohort means when compared to the means for each work construct. The alternative hypothesis would be an identifiable difference in the mean scores for each work construct when compared to the generational cohort means. A one-way ANOVA was performed to evaluate the relationship between the workload constructs and generational cohort affiliation. The descriptive statistics for the six work constructs leading to burnout by generational cohort are presented in Table 6.

Table 6

Descriptive Statistics for the Six Work Constructs Leading to Burnout by Generational Cohort (n=88)

Variables	N	M	SD	Std. Error	90% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound			
Workload	Born between 1946-1976	35	2.84	.80	.13672	2.6088	3.0712	1.40	4.00
	Born between 1977-2010	53	2.80	.74	.10231	2.6343	2.9770	1.30	4.00
	Total	88	2.81	.76	.08171	2.6835	2.9552	1.30	4.00
Control	Born between 1946-1976	35	3.21	.76	.12943	2.9926	3.4303	1.10	4.00
	Born between 1977-2010	53	3.18	.53	.07343	3.0638	3.3098	1.90	4.00
	Total	88	3.19	.63	.06743	3.0845	3.3087	1.10	4.00
Reward	Born between 1946-1976	35	3.28	.76	.12853	3.0716	3.5062	1.33	4.00
	Born between 1977-2010	53	3.10	.61	.08416	2.9681	3.2499	1.78	4.00
	Total	88	3.18	.67	.07215	3.0606	3.3005	1.33	4.00
Community	Born between 1946-1976	35	3.38	.61	.10474	3.2029	3.5571	1.80	4.00
	Born between 1977-2010	53	3.37	.66	.09095	3.2232	3.5278	1.40	4.00
	Total	88	3.37	.64	.06843	3.2635	3.4910	1.40	4.00
Fairness	Born between 1946-1976	35	3.38	.62	.10633	3.2088	3.5684	1.90	4.00
	Born between 1977-2010	53	3.07	.76	.10490	2.8960	3.2474	1.30	4.00
	Total	88	3.19	.72	.07743	3.0690	3.3265	1.30	4.00
Values	Born between 1946-1976	35	3.47	.71	.12157	3.2674	3.6786	1.33	4.00
	Born between 1977-2010	53	3.49	.67	.09209	3.3426	3.6511	1.67	4.00
	Total	88	3.48	.68	.07316	3.3657	3.6090	1.33	4.00

Note: Born between 1946-1976 = Baby Boomer and Generation X; Born between 1977-2010 = Millennial and Generation Z.

The ANOVA was only significant for the fairness work construct ($F(1,86) = 4.16, p < 0.05$). No statistically significant difference was found between generational cohort affiliation and the workload construct ($F(1,86) = 0.04, p = 0.84$), control construct ($F(1,86) = 0.03, p = 0.86$), reward construct ($F(1,86) = 1.50, p = 0.22$), community construct ($F(1,86) = 0.01, p = 0.97$), or values construct ($F(1,86) = 0.02, p = 0.87$) as demonstrated by the one-way ANOVA. In addition, point-biserial correlations were used to determine relationships between the six constructs leading to burnout and generational cohort (see Table 7). Of the six constructs, only one construct, fairness, was related to the generational cohort. A low significant negative correlation ($r = .22, p < .10$) was found between fairness and generational cohort. The 1946-1976 generational cohort group rated fairness slightly higher than the 1977-2010 generational cohort group ($M = 3.38$ vs. $M = 3.07$), respectively.

Table 7

Point-Biserial Correlation Findings for Generation and Work Constructs (n=88)

Construct	N	Mean ^a	SD	$r_{pt\ bis}$
Workload				
Born between 1946-1976	35	2.84	.80	
Born between 1977-2010	53	2.80	.74	-0.022
Control				
Born between 1946-1976	35	3.21	.76	
Born between 1977-2010	53	3.18	.53	-0.131
Reward				
Born between 1946-1976	35	3.28	.76	
Born between 1977-2010	53	3.10	.61	-0.019
Community				
Born between 1946-1976	35	3.38	.61	
Born between 1977-2010	53	3.37	.66	-0.003
Fairness				
Born between 1946-1976	35	3.38	.62	
Born between 1977-2010	53	3.07	.76	-0.215*
Values				
Born between 1946-1976	35	3.47	.71	
Born between 1977-2010	53	3.49	.67	0.017

Conclusions and Discussion

From the survey findings, it can be concluded the personal characteristics of the average Clemson Extension agent is a White/Caucasian female born between 1977 and 2010 with some advanced degree of higher education (i.e., master's or PhD). Furthermore, the Clemson Extension agents are primarily county employees with five or fewer years of service. The overall mean score for the Burnout Assessment was 3.20 ($SD = 0.72$). With an overall mean score above three, Clemson Extension agents are not experiencing burnout respective to the study's scope. However,

the lowest mean score was in the workload construct with an average score of 2.82 for both groups of generational cohorts. When analyzing the mean scores by generational cohort, both had scores under 3, with the younger generations (Born between 1977-2010) scoring $M = 2.80$ ($SD = 0.74$) and the older generations (Born between 1946-1976) scoring $M = 2.84$ ($SD = 0.80$). There was no significant difference in perceptions of the workload construct when compared to the generational cohort. Thus, there are negative perceptions of this construct regardless of generational cohort affiliation. The literature review established younger generations (i.e., Millennials and Generation Z) value a work-life balance more than Baby Boomers and Generation X (Chieh Lu & Gursoy, 2016). These findings challenge that ideal and bring to light that in the Clemson Cooperative Extension system, workload and a healthy work-life balance are important to employees of all ages.

Of the six constructs, fairness was the only one to have a significant relationship to the generational cohort. A low significant negative correlation ($r = .215$, $p < .10$) was found between fairness and generational cohort. The 1977-2010 generational cohort group rated fairness slightly lower than the 1946-1976 generational cohort group. Perhaps suggesting the younger a Clemson Extension agent is, the lower their fairness score will be. This finding is consistent with previous studies that have established younger generations value fairness in the workplace and believe emphasis should be placed on person's contributions in the workplace over other factors like years served (Gaidhani et al., 2019). A 2022 study found Millennials and Generation Z's highest priority when looking for employment was the fair treatment of employees across all genders and ethnicities (Kelly, 2022). Millennials and Generation Z have also been cited as valuing organizations that emphasize diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) and take action to incorporate a more diverse workforce (Miller, 2021). Millennials and Generation Z are more ethnically and racially diverse than previous generations making up the workforce, with Generation Z being the most diverse (Schroth, 2019). It is possible the push for DEI from the younger generations making up the workforce population stems from the diverse backgrounds they bring with them into the workplace.

Due to the overall positive perceptions by participants of five of the six work constructs investigated in this study, the findings of this study are inconsistent with previous literature (Chandler, 2005; Harder et al., 2014; Harder et al., 2015; Igodan & Newcomb, 1986; Strong & Harder, 2009) and leave the question of what is causing high turnover rates and burnout among Clemson Extension employees unanswered. It is recommended further research be conducted to determine what other factors contribute to burnout within the Cooperative Extension system. Since the workload construct was the lowest mean score, it is recommended this construct is further investigated within the Cooperative Extension system. An extension of this study that could be beneficial would be to include a qualitative portion where agents are interviewed to gain insight into some of the Burnout Inventory questions.

There were negative feelings toward the workload construct regardless of generational cohort and the lowest mean score for an individual question came from this category. The lowest scoring question for the assessment asked agents if they thought about unfinished work after leaving for the day, with many reporting they did and a mean score of 1.80 ($SD = 1.23$). Other low-scoring questions were related to being able to accomplish job responsibilities without having to work overtime or on weekends and holidays. Since the workload construct had the lowest mean

score of 2.82 ($SD = 0.77$), and because it has been previously established feelings of a lack of work-life balance are negative motivators of Extension agents (Harder et al., 2014), it is recommended Extension agents take precautions to protect their personal time through scheduling time off and sticking to set working hours (Chandler, 2005; Harder et al., 2014; Harder et al., 2015; Igodan & Newcomb, 1986; Strong & Harder, 2009). The Extension system may need to evaluate the work itself to see if it can be carried out in a way that allows employees more of a work-life balance. Recommended professional development opportunities for employees include managing work-related stress, the benefits of a work-life balance, and burnout prevention.

It has been speculated that Millennials change jobs because they feel underpaid, agreeing with previous Extension retention studies (Harder et al., 2015; Vemparala, 2023). With more employees from Gen Z entering the workforce, Vemparala (2023) concludes Gen Z did not have much time to establish roots in a career before the COVID-19 pandemic and accounted for 33% of people leaving their positions in 2020. Since Gen Z is not as connected or invested in the workplace, perhaps it is easier for them to leave positions to explore different careers and industries. Previous literature has determined there is a shift in what younger employees value in the workplace towards better work life balance, more flexible hours, and opportunities for advancement within the profession (Beutell & Wittig-Berman, 2008; Chieh Lu & Gursoy, 2016; De Maeyer & Schoenmakers, 2019; Gaidhani et al., 2019). This shift in workplace attitudes suggests that employees leaving jobs is not the fault of the employer nor an inherently bad thing.

A 2018 review by Goler and colleagues reported that employees chose to stay in their jobs when they develop skills to advance their careers. Future research should be conducted around the design of Extension work and professional development to support current Extension employees. Focus should be placed on work-life balance, career advancement, and the overall culture of Extension. Since this study is limited to one university's Extension system, replication of this work is imperative to determine factors related to burnout in Extension nationwide. Extension administration should consider the findings of this study as they work to provide opportunities for advancement within their system, while establishing a supportive culture with an emphasis on work-life balance. Although this study focused on work related burnout in a university Extension system, the instrument may be a valuable tool to assess burnout in other workplaces, which could provide benefits in the school-based agricultural education sector, considering the reoccurring themes related to burnout in the literature (Hainline et al., 2015; Kitchel et al., 2012; Schmidt et al., 2022; Smith & Smalley, 2018).

While this study was limited to Clemson Cooperative Extension agents, findings and conclusions should be considered transferable for like populations. The study also relied on self-report data, while this can sometimes be of concern, the variability in responses suggests that respondents were honest in their self-assessment. Given the differences in generational cohort preferences, it is recommended that future studies with similar populations rely on more than just an electronic email contact list from Clemson Cooperative Extension, as it is possible that the inclusion of paper instruments or in-person data collection could have increased responses. While the study utilized a burnout assessment that had not been previously used in Extension research, the study deemed the burnout assessment to be valid and reliable for Extension agents; therefore, future studies should consider the same burnout instrument.

This study also relied on several assumptions, including Cooperative Extension employee participants objectively responded to the questions in the survey instrument related to the six work categories that lead to burnout, all Clemson Extension agents received an email and had an equal opportunity to participate in the study, and all Clemson Extension agents responded to the questions accurately and to the best of their ability. To expand on the findings of this study, follow-up interviews with survey respondents could provide the Clemson Extension service with potential solutions to the identified problem areas.

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