
RAYMA HARCHAR OUTSTANDING RESEARCH PAPER AWARD**Committed and Engaged: A Mixed Method Phenomenological Study of the
Perceived Roles, Responsibilities, and Contributions of
Professional Support Personnel in Higher Education**

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Abstract

This mixed methods phenomenological study explored experiences and perceptions of professional support personnel in higher education regarding roles, responsibilities, and contributions to their institutions. Professional support personnel are the largest population of non-faculty staff in higher education institutions, and they serve an integral role in the day-to-day functions to advance the mission of the institution. The overarching question guiding this study was, *What are perceptions of professional support personnel in higher education regarding their roles, responsibilities, and contributions within their institutions?* Quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews of professional support personnel were used to examine their job demands, job resources available, level of work engagement, and participation in organizational citizenship behaviors. The major study findings show professional support personnel are highly engaged in their jobs and perceive their contributions to their institutions as positive. They describe their roles as student-centered, revenue generating, supporting faculty, partnering with the community, and overall supporting the institution. While professional support personnel indicated participation in organizational citizenship behaviors, further analysis showed the roles and responsibilities of professional support personnel in higher education are inherently comprised of organizational citizenship behaviors and thus are in-role behaviors. In contradiction to existing research, professional support staff described “other duties as assigned” as fun and a welcomed opportunity for professional development and networking.

Keywords: staff, professional staff, work engagement, higher education

Professional support personnel in higher education are the largest population of non-faculty staff in higher education institutions (Knapp et al., 2011) and have been directly linked to the success of their institution (Cameron, 1978; Mello, 2013). Professional support personnel play an integral role in the day-to-day functions that work to advance the mission of an institution (Rosser, 2000). Professional support personnel include full-time, non-instructional, non-supervisory staff in higher education institutions, such as admissions counselors, financial aid counselors, academic advisors, librarians, grant specialists, data analysts, payroll clerks, purchasing officers, and residential life coordinators (Rosser, 2000). They are immersed in the policies and procedures of their institution and are often the “frontline personnel whom students initially face when entering the college or university system” (Rosser, 2000, p. 8). Their unique positions within higher education allow them to “significantly affect the tone, manner, and style of the entire institution, and their daily performance levels can determine the quality of relationships with faculty, students, and the public they serve” (Rosser, 2000, p. 7). In sharp contrast with their influence on relationships between the populations served and the institutions represented, professional support personnel rarely have the authority or opportunity to make decisions regarding policies and procedures impacting outcomes for which they are responsible (Johnsrud et al., 2000; Scott, 1980).

Professional support personnel assist with achieving institutional goals through a myriad of programs, services, and functions and tasks and responsibilities necessary to meet those goals often fall under the “other duties as assigned” section of their job description (Amey, 1990; Rosser & Javinar, 2003). The role ambiguity which stems from “other duties as assigned” increases the probability of employees hesitating to make decisions, being dissatisfied with their role, experiencing anxiety, distorting reality, and ultimately performing less effectively (Rizzo et al., 1970). An unclear status along with stress from time constraints, limited resources, excessive bureaucratic paperwork, and negative interactions with students and colleagues over the policies they must enforce but had no part in creating results in role conflict and ambiguity which can negatively impact job performance (Amey, 1990; Austin, 1984; Rizzo et al., 1970; Rosser, 2000).

While studies on professional support personnel have furthered our knowledge of an under-researched, yet critical, group within higher education, what remains to be explored is a thorough assessment of the functional areas in which these professionals work, as well as the duties and responsibilities assigned to them. Additionally, the lived experiences and perceived roles,

responsibilities, and contributions from the perspective of professional support personnel is not present in the current body of knowledge.

Problem and Significance

Understanding the relationship between Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Theory and the perception of job responsibilities among professional support personnel in higher education can aid in determining the level of work engagement professional support personnel in higher education experience and their likelihood to engage in behaviors that may contribute to the success of their functional areas. Further, adding the voice of professional support personnel within higher education can contribute to the understanding of factors positively influencing work engagement and extra-role performance among this group of employees and will provide administration with the knowledge necessary to encourage work performance and institutional effectiveness.

Professional support personnel make up the largest administrative group within colleges and universities, however the amount of literature focused on this population of higher education staff is lacking (Ginder et al., 2018; Jo, 2008; Knapp et al., 2011). Professional support personnel in higher education have not been researched as much as executive leadership, faculty, or students (Mello, 2013; Rosser & Javinar, 2003), and when they are studied, professional support personnel are referred to as the *others* (Knapp et al., 2011; Mello, 2013), *general staff* (Dobson, 2000), or *invisible* (Szekeres, 2004). The value of professional support personnel in higher education has not been wholly ignored, however, having been described as “anonymous leaders” (Glenny, 1972, p. 10), “unsung professionals” (Rosser, 2000, p. 5), and the collegiate “lords, squires, and yeomen” (Scott, 1980, p. 386).

The tendency to refer to non-instructional professional support personnel as *other* can be attributed to the muddled definition of the role. Academic support, student services, and institutional support, the primary roles of professional support personnel, are so interrelated that there can be no clear definition of each construct. The American College Personnel Association (ACPA), the leading student affairs association for professionals in higher education, offers multiple focus areas aimed at professionals in higher education. One such focus area is the *Academic Support in Higher Education*. The Commission for Academic Support in Higher Education conceptualizes academic support “to include academic advising; student academic transitions; academic preparedness; and developmental education among other forms of support”

such as tutoring programs, first year programs, living-learning communities, learning assistance programs, and learning centers (ACPA, n.d., para. 1). The Commission for Academic Support in Higher Education includes professionals in both student affairs and academic affairs who view learning as their primary functional area. While this information provides valuable insight into some of the responsibilities and tasks of professional support staff in higher education institutions, it does not provide a clear conceptualization of this population as a whole.

Although professional support personnel in higher education do include professionals who provide academic support and student services, there are others who work behind the scenes providing services aimed at institutional support. These services include a wide range of fiscal operations, administrative data processing, maintaining employee records, logistical activities providing procurement, safety, security, printing, and transportation services to the institution, support services to faculty and staff, and activities concerned with community and alumni relations, including development and fund raising (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). If the leading association aimed at higher education professional support staff cannot delineate the difference between academic support, student services, and institutional support, it is no surprise there is small body of literature on this mysterious group of professionals.

Of the existing literature, the focus has been on the job satisfaction and turnover rate of student affairs professionals (Davidson, 2009; Fey & Carpenter, 1996; Mather et al., 2009; Rosser & Javinar, 2003; Wilson et al., 2016) and institutional researchers (Knight & Leimer, 2010). The current body of knowledge of professional support personnel does not enumerate the multiple offices in which they work, nor does it delineate perceptions of their responsibilities or contributions. Instead, a general overview of the role of professional support personnel in higher education will be offered.

Professional support personnel provide academic support, student services, and institutional support through a variety of functional areas within higher education institutions. A functional area, defined by the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS), is a “distinct grouping of activities, programs, and services within higher education that can be differentiated from other groups (e.g., departments) by its purpose, mission, focus, policies, practices, staff, budget, and the professional interests and backgrounds of its practitioners” (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, 2018a). CAS developed 45 separate functional areas and continuously updates and revises the list to best match changes and

trends in higher education programs and services (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, 2018b). Common functional areas across post-secondary campuses include academic advising, career services, veterans and military programs, registrar services, financial aid, learning assistance programs, and internships (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, 2018b). These functional areas emerged as student enrollment grew at the turn of the twentieth century and “administrative positions increased in number and specialization to meet the needs of the institution” (Gerda, 2006, p. 149).

The role and functions of professional support personnel “support the goals and mission of the academic enterprise” (p. 318) for which they work (Rosser, 2004). Their responsibilities are so critical to their institution that their satisfaction has been linked to institutional effectiveness (Henkin & Persson, 1992; Mello, 2013; Volkwein & Parmley, 2000). Professional support personnel serve as the point of contact for various external entities, implement and enforce policies and procedures, and interact with the student population to help them in a wide range of areas – meeting admission requirements, graduation requirements, transitioning into university life, and post-graduation planning (Rosser, 2004; Scott, 1980).

Professional support personnel keep their institutions functioning, however, they rarely have the authority or opportunity to make decisions regarding policies and procedures that influence the outcomes for which they are responsible (Johnsrud et al., 2000; Scott, 1980). For the most part, professional support personnel have limited to no authority to “change, adjust, or develop the regulations they enforce” (Rosser, 2000, p. 8). Their roles require them to “engage in both vertical and horizontal levels of communication,” (p. 36) sharing information across departments and bringing important issues to higher level administration (Hammons, 2013). Despite this, there are instances of feeling underappreciated or unrecognized by faculty and other members of the academic community (Jo, 2008). Professional support personnel experience frustration due to unclear status in the organization along with stress from time constraints, limited resources, excessive bureaucratic paperwork, and negative interactions with students and colleagues over the policies they must enforce but had no role in creating (Austin, 1984; Rosser, 2000). One group of professional support personnel, however, may be exempt from this frustration. Glenny (1972) argued that those working in institutional research, finance, and to a lesser extent, admissions and financial aid, have “extraordinary influence on policy” (p. 13).

Considering the ambiguous role professional support personnel play in influencing policies and procedures, yet the immense responsibility of implementing and enforcing them, further research on the roles, responsibilities, and contributions on this population of employees in higher education is necessary.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of professional support personnel in higher education in relation to their perceived roles, responsibilities, and contributions within their institutions. The research study intended to “explore, understand and communicate the experiences and viewpoints” of professional support personnel and give voice to their perceived roles, responsibilities, and contributions (Larkin et al., 2006, p. 103). Through an examination of the institutions in which professional support personnel work, the job demands of their positions, the job resources available to them, level of work engagement, and the participation in organizational citizenship behaviors, this study moves research in a positive direction to fully understand this population of higher education staff.

A convergent mixed methods design was used in which the quantitative and qualitative data are collected in parallel, analyzed separately, and then merged to compare “if the findings confirm or disconfirm each other” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 264). Equal emphasis was placed on both methods since both play an equally important role in understanding the perspectives of professional support personnel. Surveys were distributed to all full-time, non-instructional, unclassified employees (n=3,458) from nine institutions within a single university system. Since the universities were not able to forward the survey invitation to only the specifically targeted population of professional support personnel without supervisory responsibilities, a larger population received the invitation than desired. Survey data were collected from 260 participants representing all nine institutions and adhering to the intended target population. Interview data were collected from 28 semi-structured, in-depth interviews which explored the lived experiences of professional support personnel and how they perceived the responsibilities and contributions of their respective roles.

Using a survey instrument combining items from Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) (Schaufeli et al., 2006), and the Organizational Citizenship Behavior Checklist (OCB-C) (Spector & Fox, 2011), the quantitative phase of this study tested work engagement and

participation in extra-role behaviors in professional support personnel within multiple functional areas within a single university system in Louisiana.

The qualitative phase of this study sought to explore the lived experiences of professional support personnel in higher education and thus used a phenomenological approach (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The phenomenological approach to this study collected data from multiple semi-structured, in-depth interviews and explored the lived experiences of professional support personnel within multiple functional areas within a single university system in Louisiana and how they perceived the responsibilities and contributions of their respective roles. The interviews also included items measuring job demands and job resources of professional support personal. These interview items were used to test Job-Demands Resources Theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, 2017; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004) to assess whether job demands and job resources relate to work engagement and the perception of and participation in organizational citizenship behaviors.

Research Questions

Through an examination of the institutions in which professional support personnel work, job demands of their positions, job resources available to them, level of work engagement, and participation in organizational citizenship behaviors, this study sought to answer a primary overarching research question and was guided by three secondary research questions.

Overarching Research Question

What are perceptions of professional support personnel in higher education regarding their roles, responsibilities, and contributions within their institutions?

Research Question 1

What are perceived contributions of professional support personnel in higher education in relation to in-role and extra-role behaviors?

Research Question 2

How do professional support personnel perceive their job responsibilities, both formal and informal?

Research Question 3

How engaged are professional support personnel in their work as measured by the Job Demands-Resources model?

Research Question 3a

Is there a difference in level of work engagement among professional support personnel as compared to the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale database of group norms?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework shown in *Figure 1* demonstrates how multiple constructs work together to understand professional support personnel's perception of their roles, responsibilities, and contributions to their institutions. Professional support personnel in higher education play an integral role in the day-to-day functions that work to advance the mission of an institution (Rosser, 2000). Tasks necessary to meet the explicit job responsibilities assigned to professional support personnel often fall under the "other duties as assigned" section of the job description (Amey, 1990; Rosser & Javinar, 2003). Professional support personnel's perceived contributions to the goals and mission of their institutions, therefore, will be based on their work performance.

Work performance is characterized using two categories: in-role behaviors and extra-role behaviors (Bakker et al., 2004). In-role behaviors refers to the execution of formal, explicit job responsibilities for the purposes of a position (Bakker et al., 2004). Performing the informal, assumed job responsibilities of their positions that are not explicitly stated through a job description or training, but which promote the objectives and goals of an organization, is extra-role behavior (Bakker et al., 2004; Van Dyne et al., 1995). The most common label for informal, extra-role behavior is organizational citizenship behaviors (Morrison, 1994; Organ, 1988; Rich et al., 2010).

"Other duties as assigned" is often clearly listed on the job description; however, the responsibilities within this area overlap between explicit job responsibilities and organizational citizenship behaviors. The role ambiguity that may result from "other duties as assigned," however, can possibly result in employee dissatisfaction, anxiety, and ineffective performance (Rizzo et al., 1970). Whether an employee considers participation in organizational citizenship behaviors as in-role or extra-role is contingent upon their perceptions of their job responsibilities (Morrison, 1994). Participation in work-related tasks, both in-role and extra-role, is predicated on positive performance influenced by work engagement (Bakker et al., 2008).

Employees who are engaged in their work are dedicated and absorbed in their tasks and also display vigor (Bakker et al., 2008). Work engagement is a consequence of job demands and job resources, as determined by Job Demands-Resources theory (Hakanen et al., 2005).

Job demands-resources (JD-R) theory proposes that when combined, challenging job demands (high workload, demanding clientele, role ambiguity) and job resources (autonomy, supervisor support, performance feedback, opportunities for growth or advancement, and skill variety) have the “strongest positive impact on work engagement” and thus, extra-role behaviors (Bakker et al., 2014, p. 401). Additionally, personal resources (self-efficacy, organizational-based self-esteem, and optimism) engage in a reciprocal relationship with job resources whereby a “supply of job resources activates employees’ self-efficacy, self-esteem, and optimism” (Xanthopoulou et al., 2007, p. 136) and the presence of personal resources increase employees’ ability to “identify or even create more aspects of their environment that facilitate goal attainment” (Xanthopoulou et al., 2007, p. 137).

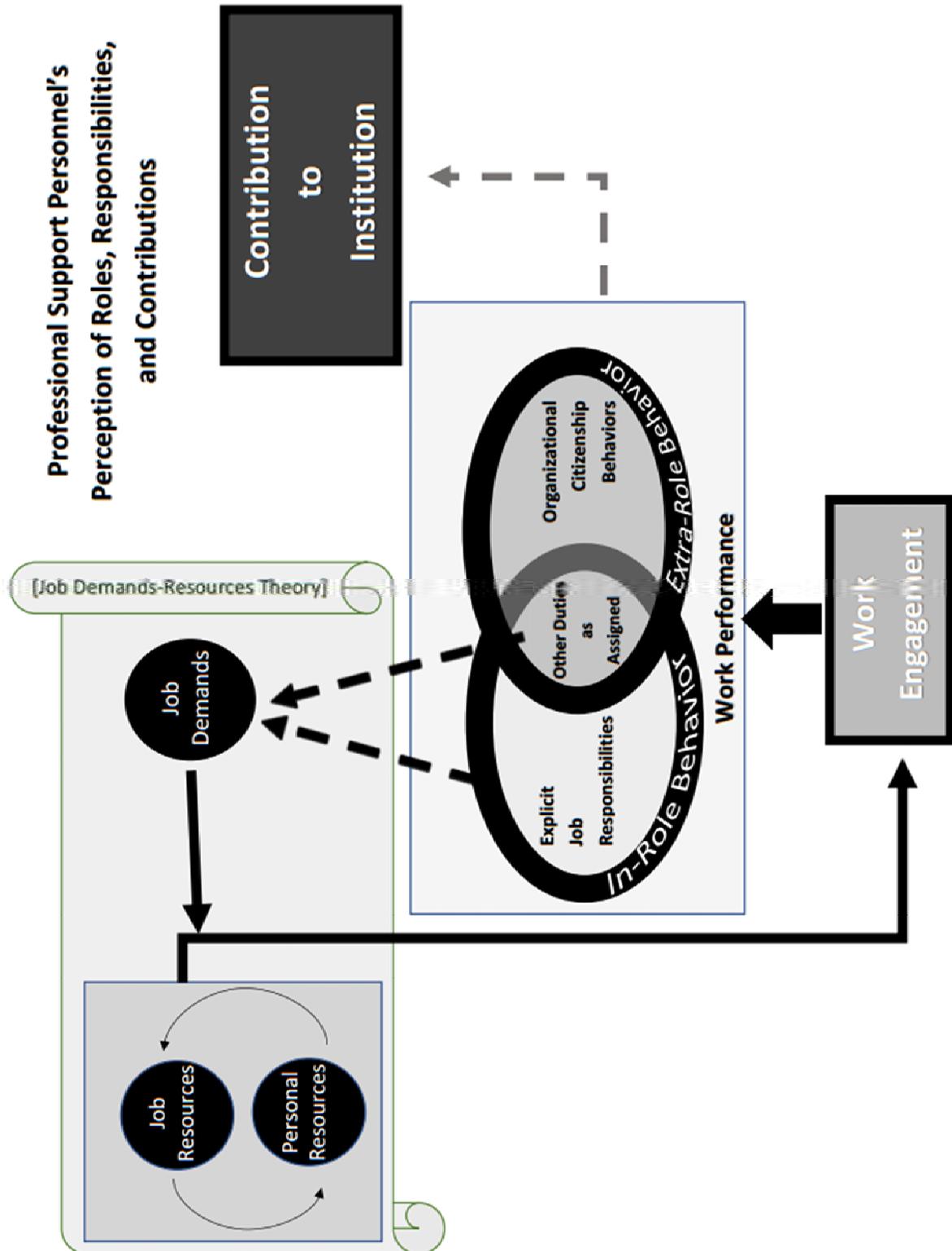
Methodology

The sample for the study derives from nine universities within a single university system in Louisiana. Each university was contacted for assistance with reaching potential respondents and a request for the institutional email address of all full-time, non-instructional, unclassified professional staff members was sent to the human resource office of each institution. Participants were contacted via their institutional email address with a letter of consent explaining the study and its purpose, risks, and benefits. A link to the online survey was included in the email. Participants had a two-week period to voluntarily and anonymously participate in the survey accessed through the email survey link. A reminder email was sent to participants after one week.

Surveys were distributed to all full-time, non-instructional, unclassified employees (n=3,458) within a single university system in Louisiana. While the intended targeted audience was full-time, non-instructional, unclassified employees in non-supervisory roles, the universities had difficulty in identifying and sending invitations to just those targeted individuals. This results in an assumption and concern regarding the lack of agreement across the board in the classification of employees in higher education. The ostensibly simple process of sending a survey invitation to a clearly defined population of employees presented a difficulty at all universities. This speaks to the ambiguity of the role and responsibilities of professional support personnel in higher education.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework



Due to limited reporting options on the part of the institutions, individuals who received the survey invitation included those in supervisory roles. Eight percent (n=260) of survey recipients completed the survey. Of the total complete surveys, 58% (n=152) of responses were from the targeted group and 42% (n=108) were from the non-targeted group. The university with the highest number of survey invitations sent out was selected for deeper investigation of the number of employees in supervisory positions. Data from this university reported 27% (n=230) of employees who received the survey have supervisory responsibilities. Thus, the assumption was that an estimated 27% (n=934) of survey recipients were not eligible to participate due to supervisory responsibilities. The target sample response rate calculation, therefore, is based on the estimate that 73% of survey recipients (n = 2524) were eligible. Six percent of survey respondents (n=152) met the target population and completed the survey. With a low response rate, it is necessary to demonstrate the representativeness of the sample. An analysis of data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) 2017-2018 Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) survey showed the member institutions of the targeted university system reported a total of 2,729 full-time, non-instructional, non-management employees. IPEDS data indicate 48% (n=1,309) of employees are male and 52% (n=1,420) are female (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), 2017; Human Resources, n.d.). All institutions of the university system are represented in the sample. Also, the sample skews female, as does the population of employees within the system. Additionally, all educational attainment categories, age ranges, length in position, and length in higher education categories are represented in the sample. Participant responses to demographic questions are displayed and organized in Table A1 of the Appendix.

A total of 28 survey respondents participated in individual qualitative interviews. Interviews were conducted face-to-face and via video conference call. The 28 participants represented multiple functional areas within higher education ranging from student-facing positions to positions with little to no student contact. Participants also represented areas focused on institutional advancement, community engagement, and faculty support. A breakdown of interview participant demographics is displayed in Table A2 of the Appendix. Table A2, while including gender, educational attainment, and institutions represented, does not include the specific title or division of the participants. Due to the specificity of many departments and titles, the inclusion of the specific title would jeopardize the confidentiality of the participant.

Major Findings

Major findings of this study are based upon the analyses of data collected using mixed methodology measures including the quantitative survey instrument and qualitative interviews of volunteer survey participants. Data from all measures were considered separately and holistically in order to determine major findings.

Major Finding 1

Professional support personnel perceive their contributions as positive and integral to the mission of their institution.

Conclusion

When interview participants were asked to identify the role they play in their institution, professional support personnel overwhelmingly perceived their contributions to their institutions as student centered, revenue generating, supporting faculty, partnering with the community, and overall supporting their institutions. These contributions align with the literature, whereas professional support personnel recognize they play an integral role in the day-to-day functions that work to advance the mission of an institution (Rosser, 2000).

Major Finding 2

The roles and responsibilities of professional support personnel in higher education are inherently comprised of organizational citizenship behaviors.

Conclusion

While professional staff in higher education may engage in behaviors categorized as organizational citizenship behaviors, results from survey responses indicate their motivations are not discretionary. Professional support personnel engage in organizational citizenship behaviors because those behaviors are often an explicit part of their job description. Participation in these behaviors tend to be a requirement of their professional roles and not “a matter of personal choice” (p. 4), as conceptualized by Organ (1988).

Major Finding 3

Professional support staff perceive “other duties as assigned” as positive and an expected part of the job.

Conclusion

While the literature argues that role ambiguity which stems from “other duties as assigned” increases the probability of employees hesitating to make decisions, being dissatisfied with their

role, experiencing anxiety, distorting reality, and ultimately performing less effectively, interview participants described “other duties as assigned” as fun and a welcomed opportunity for professional development and networking (Rizzo et al., 1970). Often, interview participants considered “other duties as assigned” to be aligned with job resources due to the personal and professional growth, learning, and development they offer (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Bakker et al., 2014). Participant responses to questions on “other duties as assigned” also showcased a commitment to the goals and missions of their departments and institutions.

Major Finding 4

Professional support personnel are highly engaged in their work.

Conclusion

Professional support personnel in this study indicated high levels of work engagement. Compared to group norms presented by the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale, survey participants experience significantly higher levels of work engagement than group norms (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003). The high level of work engagement may be related to the positive perception of their contributions to their institutions as well as the combination of job demands and job resources (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2010).

Discussion and Summary of Findings

Professional support personnel are highly engaged in their jobs and perceived their contributions to their institutions as positive, describing their roles as student centered, revenue generating, supporting faculty, partnering with the community, and overall supporting their institutions. This perception aligns with the existing literature’s description of professional support personnel playing an integral role in the day-to-day functions of an institution (Rosser, 2000). While professional support personnel recognize the critical role they play in their institutions, they also experience frustration because they perceive a lack of respect and recognition from their campuses and communities.

Although professional support personnel indicated participation in organizational citizenship behaviors, further analysis showed the roles and responsibilities of professional support personnel in higher education are inherently comprised of organizational citizenship behaviors and thus are in-role behaviors. This is not surprising considering the nature of education, the population institutions of higher education serve, and the overall need to do more with less.

In contradiction to existing research, professional support staff described “other duties as assigned” as fun and a welcomed opportunity for professional development and networking (Rizzo et al., 1970). Tasks which fall under “other duties as assigned” provide professional support personnel with opportunities to interact with different populations in different capacities. Staff use those opportunities to network and interact with other departments around campus. “Other duties as assigned” also bring variety to the job and break up some of the mundane day-to-day responsibilities.

Implications for Theory, Leadership and Practice, and Future Research

The following section addresses the study in a broader sense and offers implications for theorists, practitioners, and future researchers.

Implications Related to Conceptual and Theoretical Concerns

This research study addressed two major constructs: organizational citizenship behaviors and work engagement. This study also explored the meaning of “other duties as assigned.” Findings from this study have resulted in implications for theory related to the major constructs.

Organizational Citizenship Behaviors

Performing the informal, assumed job responsibilities not explicitly stated through a job description or training, but which promote the objectives and goals of an organization, is considered extra-role behavior (Bakker et al., 2004; Van Dyne et al., 1995). The most common label for informal, extra-role behaviors is organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs) (Morrison, 1994; Organ, 1988; Rich et al., 2010). Current theory demonstrates participation in work-related tasks, both in-role and extra-role, is predicated on positive performance influenced by work engagement (Bakker et al., 2008). This study was unable to confirm whether work engagement influenced participation in OCBs because OCBs are not extra-role for professional support personnel. Exploring the relationship between OCBs and professional support personnel does not provide insight into the positive, discretionary behaviors of those individuals because the inherent nature of the job requires employees to engage in responsibilities including OCBs. Based on this finding, the conceptual framework of this study should be modified to remove organizational citizenship behaviors from extra-role behaviors and added to in-role behaviors.

Work Engagement

Survey and interview responses supported theory related to work engagement. Work engagement is a consequence of job demands and job resources, as determined by Job Demands-Resources theory (Hakanen et al., 2005). Job demands-resources (JD-R) theory proposes that when combined, challenging job demands (high workload, demanding clientele, role ambiguity) and job resources (supervisor support, performance feedback, opportunities for growth or advancement, and skill variety) have the “strongest positive impact on work engagement” (Bakker et al., 2014, p. 401). Analysis of survey items related to the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) indicated professional support personnel are highly engaged in their work. Analysis of interview responses related to job demands and job resources demonstrated professional support face challenging job demands in their roles; however, those demands are buffered by job resources including supervisor support, opportunities for professional development, feeling valued due to positive feedback, and engaging in rewarding work.

Other Duties as Assigned

The original conceptual framework for this study included “other duties as assigned” as a part of work performance and was considered a job demand due to the role ambiguity associated with the term (Amey, 1990). After analysis of responses to questions regarding “other duties as assigned,” findings demonstrated professional support personnel considered “other duties as assigned” to be aligned with job resources due to the personal and professional growth, learning, and development they offer (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Bakker et al., 2014). Based on this finding, the conceptual framework of this study should be modified to remove other duties as assigned from the work performance construct and instead be viewed as a job resource that impacts work engagement.

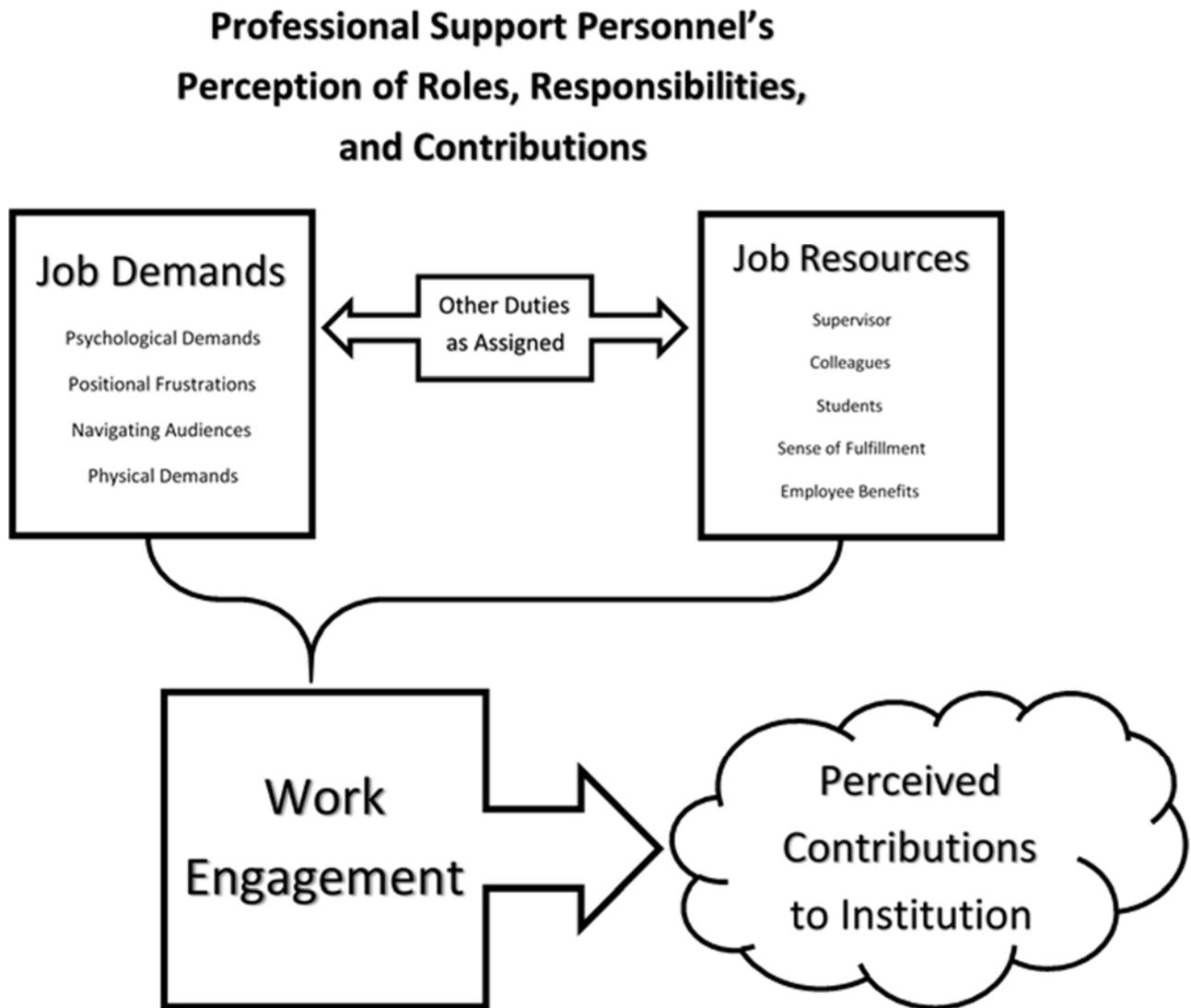
Revised Conceptual Framework

Analysis of literature on professional support personnel, organizational psychology, and work performance resulted in the creation of a conceptual framework expressing organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs) as an extra-role behavior within work performance (Figure 1). The original framework also illustrated “other duties as assigned” as a job demand that overlapped between in-role behavior and extra-role behavior. Analysis of the data collected resulted in a revision of the original framework.

Extra-role behavior was removed from the graphic depiction (Figure 2) due to results indicating OCBs as in-role behaviors that are explicit job responsibilities. Newly illustrated relationships between “other duties as assigned” and job demands and job resources are shown to depict the perception of “other duties as assigned” as opportunities for networking and professional development while also being an expected part of the job. Perceived job demands and job resources of professional support personnel are also depicted. In the revised graphic, the direct relationship between work engagement and contribution to institution has been reconsidered and indicates the *perception* of contribution to institution is influenced by level of work engagement.

Figure 2

Revised Conceptual Framework



Implications for Leadership and Practice

A dominant theme of job resources shared by professional support personnel was their direct supervisor. This finding has implications for leadership and practice regarding professional development of supervisors. It would benefit institutions to support efforts in providing professional development focused on leadership and mentoring to those who supervise professional support personnel. Another area that can benefit from focused professional development would be team building. Professional support personnel who listed colleagues as job resources also intentionally mentioned the close-knit relationships built within their departments. Supervisors and administrators can use these findings as support for when proposing team building professional development opportunities.

Further, professional support personnel's commitment to the goals and missions of their departments and institutions as demonstrated by responses to questions regarding "other duties as assigned," provides a strong foundation on which to build. Supervisors and administration should take action to include professional support personnel in department- and campus-wide decisions. Including professional support personnel will serve as an additional job resource, further increasing work engagement, and can provide insight and perspective to decisions that otherwise may not be incorporated.

Implications for Future Research

Future studies of professional support personnel should include a larger sample size to increase the significance level of findings. This can be accomplished by surveying all full-time employees of institutions of higher education. Surveying all employees will avoid participant confusion regarding qualifications, increase the amount of data collected, and provide for a streamlined analysis. The demographic questions included in the survey will allow the researcher to organize data according to employee group for specific group analysis and comparison across groups.

Future research should consider comparisons between faculty and staff of institutions of higher education regarding levels of work engagement and perceptions of "other duties as assigned."

Future research regarding extra-role behaviors of professional support personnel should consider the motivations of these individuals to work in a position with responsibilities encompassing organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs). When one's job responsibilities

include behaviors commonly categorized as discretionary and positive, it is necessary to explore if professional support personnel engage in any positive behaviors that are discretionary.

Future research on why professional support personnel perceive their supervisors as job resources might prove important in considering individuals for supervisory roles and relevant professional development. Additionally, an interesting topic for future research would be an exploration of the duties falling under the category of “other duties as assigned” for professional support personnel.

Finally, future studies should aim to replicate results in other ways. Expanding this study to include all colleges and universities in the state, region, or nation may prove interesting. Future studies can also compare results of public institutions to private institutions and four-year universities to two-year community colleges.

Conclusion

This mixed methods study explored the experiences and perceptions of professional support personnel regarding their roles, responsibilities, and contributions to their institutions. Through an examination of professional support personnel’s job demands, available job resources available, level of work engagement, and participation in organizational citizenship behaviors, this study sought to answer the overarching question, *What are perceptions of professional support personnel in higher education regarding their roles, responsibilities, and contributions within their institutions?*

The major findings of this study show professional support personnel are highly engaged in their jobs and perceived their contributions to their institutions as positive, describing their roles as student centered, revenue generating, supporting faculty, partnering with the community, and overall supporting their institutions. This perception aligns with the existing literature’s description of professional support personnel playing an integral role in the day-to-day functions of an institution (Rosser, 2000). While professional support personnel indicated participation in organizational citizenship behaviors, further analysis showed the roles and responsibilities of professional support personnel in higher education are inherently comprised of organizational citizenship behaviors and thus are in-role behaviors. In contradiction to existing research, professional support staff described “other duties as assigned” as fun and a welcomed opportunity for professional development and networking (Rizzo et al., 1970).

These findings have several implications for theory, leadership and practice, and future research. The results surrounding job demands, job resources, and work engagement were consistent with the application of the conceptual framework; however, there were two areas that were inconsistent. The conceptual definition of organizational citizenship behaviors does not apply to professional support personnel. This study demonstrated professional support personnel engage in organizational citizenship behaviors because those behaviors are often an explicit part of their job description. The conceptual definition of “other duties as assigned” was also inconsistent with the findings of this study. Findings demonstrated professional support personnel considered “other duties as assigned” to be aligned with job resources due to the personal and professional growth, learning, and development they offer (Bakker et al., 2014; Bakker & Demerouti, 2017).

Suggestions for leadership and practice consisted of leadership and mentor professional development of supervisors as well as team building development among professional staff. There were several suggestions for future research including larger sample sizes to increase the significance level of findings, comparisons between faculty and staff of institutions of higher education regarding levels of work engagement and perceptions of “other duties as assigned,” and exploration of extra-role behaviors of professional support personnel.

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Author Biographies

Dr. Jami Rush is a professional staff member at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. She holds a Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership from the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. Since 2013, she has worked in higher education as a graduate teaching assistant, adjunct instructor, and professional staff member.

Dr. Dianne F. Olivier is a Professor in Educational Foundations and Leadership in the College of Education, University of Louisiana at Lafayette. She holds the Joan D. & Alexander S. Haig/BORSF Professorship in Education and was recognized as an Eminent Scholar and awarded the Dr. Ray P. Authement Excellence in Teaching Award.

Appendix

Table A1

Survey Sample Demographics

Domain	Target		Non-Target		Total	
	Numbe	Percentag	Numbe	Percentag	Numbe	Percentag
Gender						
Male	45	30%	37	34%	82	32%
Female	100	66%	68	63%	168	65%
No Response	7	5%	3	3%	10	4%
Educational Attainment						
Bachelors	46	30%	25	24%	71	27%
Masters	78	51%	51	49%	129	50%
Doctorate	12	8%	21	20%	33	13%
Other	12	8%	8	8%	20	8%
Age						
18 to 24 years	14	9%	0	0%	14	5%
25 to 34 years	59	39%	23	22%	82	32%
35 to 44 years	36	24%	28	27%	64	25%
45 years or older	36	24%	54	51%	90	35%
Years in Current Position						
0 to 3 years	102	67%	49	45%	151	58%
4 to 7 years	33	22%	27	25%	60	23%
8 or more years	17	11%	32	30%	49	19%
Years in Higher Education						
0-3 years	55	36%	10	9%	65	25%
4 to 7 years	51	34%	21	19%	72	28%
8 or more years	46	30%	77	71%	123	47%
Institution						
1	5	3%	8	7%	13	5%
2	10	7%	8	7%	18	7%
3	6	4%	9	8%	15	6%
4	10	7%	6	6%	16	6%
5	9	6%	9	8%	18	7%
6	22	14%	13	12%	35	13%
7	54	36%	33	31%	87	33%
8	9	6%	7	6%	16	6%
9	15	10%	11	10%	26	10%
No Response	12	8%	4	4%	16	6%

Table A2*Interview Participant Demographics*

Domain	Number	Percentage
Gender		
Male	7	25%
Female	21	75%
Educational Attainment		
Bachelors	11	39%
Masters	16	57%
Doctorate	1	4%
Institution		
1	0	0%
2	0	0%
3	1	4%
4	2	7%
5	0	0%
6	5	18%
7	18	64%
8	0	0%
9	2	7%