Abstract

The research topic of leadership at an East Coast Metropolitan Child Welfare Agency – Child Protection Services administration was examined. The primary research question that was investigated was: What are the current perceptions of leadership style among Child Protection Services Social Workers? Participatory Action Research, using mixed methods design, was utilized to identify current and desired leadership traits in management at the agency with a theoretical focus on Path-Goal Leadership Theory. The study included the use of the Path-Goal Leadership Perceptions Survey [PGLPS] followed by two in-person focus groups and use of a researcher field journal. Eighty-three participants within the Child Protection Services Administration were invited to participate in the study however only 15 completed the PGLPS survey. Each focus group had 8 participants. Due to low participation rates in the PGLPS data analysis included use of descriptive statistics and limited generalizability of these findings. Through data triangulation, results of the study indicated that ideal and current perceptions of leadership held by frontline workers were incongruent. The following themes related to worker satisfaction, job performance and retention were identified as important: consistency/expectation, relationships, and training.

Keywords: Path-Goal Leadership Theory, Child Welfare, Child Protection Services, Family Assessment, Management, Leadership, Worker Satisfaction, Retention, Performance,
Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to all those who love and supported me during this process. Many encouraged me from a far using Facebook as a platform to keep me fortified.

When I began this journey, I was single and childless. I want to thank Dr. Fatoumata Nelson for encouraging me that late night at work to apply for this program and for your unwavering support. To my best friend, Dr. Kimberly Mason for being a great example and mentor in this process – your advice often helped me at the darkest moments to see the light. To my mother and research assistant, Veronica Joy for without your help truly none of this would be possible and I look forward to the day when I can support your dissertation work! To my father, Nathaniel Joy, you have and always will be a perfect example of hard work and perseverance and I thank you for instilling those qualities in me.

At the close of this journey, I am a happily married mother of two. To my husband, Hakim Carroll, without you there would be no Chapter 4 or subsequently a Chapter 5. Thank you for motivating me at the exact moment I planned to quit. To my first born, Khaleesi Carroll, thank you for training me on sleep deprivation which prepared me for my “all-nighters” of research and writing. To my second born, Savannah Carroll, thank you for coming into this world and motivating me to get back on task with sleep deprivation just as your sister decided to sleep through the night. Both of my beautiful daughters are a blessing me to and give me the desire to achieve greatness to be a role model meant to be surpassed. To all of those that I did not name, that I could have named, THANK YOU. I love you all!
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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Background of the Problem

Within the field of child welfare and more specifically in Child Protection Services, there is no universally accepted style of leadership. Barnett (2006) contends that historically there are three different theoretical frameworks that shaped leadership research beginning in the 1930’s through the 1970’s which include: the trait approach, the behavioral approach and finally the situational or contingency approach (p. 449). Presently, there are numerous theoretical frameworks that integrate different tenets from these styles of leadership. Northouse (2013) offers a discussion on twelve different leadership theories that can all be applied and used within child welfare. However, it should be noted that these theories are generalist in nature and not specific to child welfare.

The field of child welfare has characteristics and traits that are specific to this field. Examining leadership or management strategies that are unique or specific to this field could serve useful. Current child welfare research has determined that implications related to job satisfaction, turnover and outcomes are specific to this field (Barth et. al., 2008; Hansen, Smith & Hansen, 2002; Landsman, 2007). Lizano and Mor Barak (2015) suggest that there are currently no standard rates related to job satisfaction of child welfare workers however in evaluating the findings of Barth, Lloyd, Christ, Chapman, and Dickinson (2008) a national study related to job satisfaction in the United States
among child welfare workers suggested that most child welfare workers describe their levels of job satisfaction as being between undecided and somewhat satisfied. These levels suggest that levels of job satisfaction among workers can be improved. Lizano and Mor Barak (2015, p. 19) further contend that these findings suggest implications on managerial and administrative functioning in child welfare settings to improve satisfaction, and subsequently impact worker performance and organizational outcomes. Kowaleski (2015, p 11) argued that “when workers perceive they are supported by their organization they believe in their ability to manage stress and complete their duties more efficiently (as cited in Erbes, 2009)” hence leading to higher levels of satisfaction and retention.

**Statement of the Problem**

Participatory Action Research, using mixed methods of qualitative and quantitative design, was utilized to identify current and desired leadership traits in management at the agency with a theoretical focus on Path Goal Leadership Theory. This research focused on addressing leadership style and worker job satisfaction at an East Coast Metropolitan Child Welfare Agency in the Child Protection Services Administration. In general, employees do not feel supported by current management leadership styles which impact desired changes in management style, unmet benchmarks, and general feelings of dissatisfaction.

At this East Coast Child Welfare Agency, frontline workers indicated that they do not feel supported by current management leadership styles which impact desired changes in management style, unmet benchmarks, and general feelings of dissatisfaction. Management has acknowledged the need for changes in leadership performance and
outcomes as evidenced by a survey that was conducted in 2013. On May 17, 2013 a Trauma Informed Survey was conducted with agency staff by a team comprised of agency employees with support from a KVC consultant and Dr. Brown from New York University. This survey produced an organizational plan which suggested that the agency has a distressed social and work environment. Within a report produced as a result of this Trauma Informed Survey the following statement further supported the need for current research, “Signals of past embarrassment and shame such as … poor performance on legal, District, Federal, and internal requirements lead to feelings of intense anxiety, fear and sadness which lead to behaviors and practices that strive for compliance but compromise respect for the emotional and physical health, integrity and safety of ourselves and other.” In 2015, the agency instituted a new initiative in support of leadership training, specifically examining Innovative Leadership principles to further invest in the leadership qualities in management via training.

Johnco et. al. (2014) further examined child welfare workers perceptions of worker retention and turnover. Data in this study supported different variables that impact worker retention and turnover among child welfare workers to include job satisfaction levels, having a supportive work environment, and levels of communication and supervision. This research further supported the need for change at this agency.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this Participatory Action Research study was to work with frontline staff to identify both ideal and perceived leadership traits held by management and to offer next steps in making changes to leadership in order to impact worker satisfaction, retention and improved outcomes. Using Participatory Action Research
cycles allowed for the agency to continue making progress related to these goals by allowing the agency to repeat the research cycles, using the surveys and focus groups, at future dates to monitor changes and further evaluate the effectiveness of Path Goal Leadership Theory on worker satisfaction, outcomes and retention.

**Significance of the Study**

This study was significant because it examined the specific use of both Participatory Action Research and Path Goal Leadership Theory among child welfare workers and specifically Child Protection Services social workers. This research study allowed special attention to be paid to the unique challenges and practice implications faced by social workers and their managers within this field. Using Participatory Action Research suggested that changes may occur as a result of the study and by achieving a deeper focus or understanding of the needs of subordinates in the field of child welfare the changes can be guided by the people that were most impacted (Ozanne & Saatcioglu, 2008). Using an improved understanding of the preferences and perceptions of frontline workers supported possible changes in job satisfaction, performance improvements and retention among workers. “In 2008, Chen proposed causal relationships between leadership behavior, organizational commitment, and job satisfaction, which in turn influence turnover intention (Larson, 2014, p.41).” Chen determined significant and direct effect between leadership paths and job satisfaction, organizational commitment and turnover (Chen, 2008; Larson, 2014).

**Research Design**

Mixed methods Participatory Action Research design was used with a data triangulation evaluation process to conduct this study (Creswell, 2009; Greenwood &
Levin, 2007). The use of Participatory Action Research principles to bring about change in leadership styles among child welfare workers and more specifically those involved in child protection was of interest. Using Participatory Action Research principles as described by Ozanne and Saatcioglu (2008, p. 425) the researcher was able to involve those most directly involved in this study’s design, child welfare social workers. Ozanne and Saatcioglu (2008) contend that participants in this form of research are collaborators with the researcher and are more likely to be committed to findings and application of these findings. Additionally, the use of Participatory Action Research refuted the assumption of the researcher holding all of the knowledge power within the research relationship, allowing the participants and researchers to work together to build new knowledge, information and skills.

Stringer’s (2007) “Look, Think, Act” model was utilized to guide the implementation plan for this Participatory Action Research study. Following the use of this model guided this investigator in developing critical questions and responses to begin the research process. This model was selected as it is fundamental to the use and development of action research cycles which allow for continued adaptation and change as the research process occurs. The Action Research Helix (Stringer, 2007, p. 5), commonly referred to as the “Look, Think, Act” model (Figure 1) illustrates the stages of this model:
Look Phase

The “look” phase of this research began with experiences as a frontline social worker at a child welfare agency in 2011 and later as a member of management in 2013. During these times, major changes were taking place within the Child Protection Services administration to include tour of duty realignments as well as the bifurcation of the Child Protection Services Administration into the Family Assessment Administration and the Investigations Administration. As a result of this division many workers’ job functions were changed, often with little input from the workers.

Using the Look principles, this research project began with a two part electronic survey disseminated using www.surveymonkey.com. The surveys examined or “Look” at the perceptions of both ideal and actual leadership styles using the Path Goal Leadership theoretical framework. For the purpose of determining leadership styles and job satisfaction a variation of the Path Goal Leadership Questionnaire as described by Northouse (2001, Fulk and Wendler, 1982) was utilized. Following survey data collection, the research project continued with two researcher lead focus groups. The
focus groups focused on providing information on the Path Goal Leadership Theory and collection of recommendations and next steps for the organization based on worker input.

The focus groups focused on the following research question: “What are the perceptions of leadership style in the Child Protection Services Administration and the relationship to job performance and worker satisfaction?” Recommendations and next steps focused around improving leadership style, meeting agency benchmarks, and increasing worker job satisfaction.

Think Phase

The “THINK” phase consisted of analyzing the researcher field journal, survey data and focus group data. The survey data was analyzed using tools provided via www.surveymonkey.com and Microsoft Office Products. The focus group resulted in concrete recommendations provided by the two focus groups’ participants. The focus group data was analyzed and tabulated into tables and charts to better communicate findings using a Five Stage model which includes: familiarization; identifying a thematic framework; indexing; charting; mapping and interpretation (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994). To analyze the qualitative data the study employed grounded theory and employed inductive coding rather than setting up the coding at the start of research.

Act

The “ACT” consisted of developing an Executive Summary of the research findings to provide to the agency. The Executive Summary was distributed via email to members of management at the agency with a recommendation that the information be
presented to members of the administration. The Executive Summary included recommendations and next steps for the agency to take action. The summary included data analysis from the researcher field journal, surveys and focus groups. This research satisfied the requirements for the doctoral research dissertation and journal articles and conference presentations were developed using the findings.

**Research Question**

The primary research question was addressed using a researcher field journal, a researcher developed online survey – Path Goal Leadership Perceptions Survey [PGLPS] and Focus Group Data. The research examined perceptions of ideal and actual leadership styles for members of management in the CPS Administration. See Appendix B for the specific questions included in the PGLPS and Appendix C for specific Focus Group Questions. Data from the PGLPS was analyzed and Path-Goal Leadership Theory was presented via a PowerPoint presentation during the Focus Groups. The primary research question was:

R$_1$ What are the current perceptions of leadership style among Child Protection Services Social Workers?”

The following objectives were addressed via the mixed methods Participatory Action Research:

O$_1$ Identify the current and ideal leadership styles of CPS administrations members of management.

O$_2$ Identify the relationship between leadership style and job satisfaction within the CPS administrations.
Identify the relationship between leadership style and job performance within the CPS administrations.

Identify next steps to improve leadership practices at the agency.

Introduce Path-Goal Leadership Theory as a possible leadership framework for the CPS administration.

**Assumptions and Limitations**

The key assumption of this research project was that leadership style of managers is important for Child Protection Services Social Workers and has some impact on their job satisfaction, turnover rates and client outcomes. Sullivan (2012) explored the correlation between perceived transformational leadership styles and job satisfaction of social workers. Findings from the study indicated statistical significant correlation between these two variables: transformational leadership and job satisfaction. The study also determined that the leadership style impacted worker retention and recruiting.

Another key assumption, identified by van Manen (1990), is the assumption that action research will bring about change. Van Manen suggests that the “change assumption” suggests that action research must focus on next steps or expected changes, but van Manen (1990, p 154) suggests that maybe it should instead focus on what could be changed about past actions. This study assumed that future steps and changes were identified.

Greene and Caracelli (2003) posit that the use of mixed methods design assumed that qualitative and quantitative methods were complimentary of each other to support the “efficacy of a treatment.” This action research mixed methods study assumed that the use of the researcher field journal, PGLPS and the focus group triangulated data supported
the use of Path Goal Leadership Theory and identified leadership styles and worker job satisfaction.

Another assumption of significance was that participants completed surveys in their entirety and truthfully. To support that this assumption was true, this researcher included confidentiality and anonymity information in the consent forms to assure participants that information provided was safeguarded. Creswell (2009, p. 89) indicates that informed consent forms should contain elements that grant participants the rights to have data that is collected to be protected and safeguarded.

Limitations regarding this research project were seen as a result of utilizing the qualitative method of a focus group. The presence of this researcher during the data gathering phase was unavoidable and may have impacted the participant’s responses and input. Additionally, researcher bias and idiosyncrasies of this researcher are more likely to impact findings as a result of the use of focus groups. The amount of data collected and the time needed to interpret that data greatly increases with the use of focus groups as well which can delay the completion and accuracy of communicating findings. Redesigning the research project to address these limitations did not occur because despite the limitation associated with the use of focus groups, they do provide a great opportunity and mechanism for effective action research to occur.

Additionally the use of convenience sampling could suggest a limitation for this research. Much like Landsman (2007) who examined “child welfare supervisors of child protective assessment and case management services” the findings may not be generalized easily to other aspects of child welfare.

**Definition of Terms**
The following terms were used in this research study:

**Child abuse.** “Physical abuse is nonaccidental physical injury (ranging from minor bruises to severe fractures or death) as a result of punching, beating, kicking, biting, shaking, throwing, stabbing, choking, hitting (with a hand, stick, strap, or other object), burning, or otherwise harming a child, that is inflicted by a parent, caregiver, or other person who has responsibility for the child” (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2008)

**Child neglect.** “Neglect is the failure of a parent, guardian, or other caregiver to provide for a child's basic needs. Neglect may be:

- Physical (e.g., failure to provide necessary food or shelter, or lack of appropriate supervision)
- Medical (e.g., failure to provide necessary medical or mental health treatment)
- Educational (e.g., failure to educate a child or attend to special education needs)
- Emotional (e.g., inattention to a child's emotional needs, failure to provide psychological care, or permitting the child to use alcohol or other drugs)

(Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2008)

**Child Protection Services – Family Assessment (CPS-FA) Social Work Investigators.** In this research project this term was used interchangeably with the term *frontline staff* as defined above. This term refers specifically to licensed Social Workers that are tasked with the investigation of child maltreatment with allegations that can be addressed via a family assessment or differential response.

In this research project this term was used interchangeably with the term *frontline staff* as defined above. This term refers specifically to licensed Social Workers that are tasked with the investigation of child maltreatment with allegations that cannot be addressed via a family assessment or differential response.

**Frontline Staff.** Frontline staff refers to licensed social workers within the Child Protection Services division. It is inclusive of both Investigative Social Workers and Family Assessment Social Workers. These staff work directly with clients and do not act in a supervisory or management role at the agency. This term also excludes any other employees that may work within the Child Protection Services division at the agency in other roles such as administrative staff, support staff, supervisors, managers or administrators.

**Leadership / Management.** It should be noted that leadership and management are two constructs that have notable differences based on empirical data however for this research project these two terms were used interchangeably. Northouse (2010) defines management and leadership using Kotter (1990) which indicated that “to manage means to accomplish activities and routines, whereas to lead means to influence others and create visions to change (Northouse, 2010, p.11).” For this Participatory Action Research, Leadership and Management were used to refer to members of management with the Child Protection Services Division to include supervisors, program managers and administrators. There is a clear distinction between leadership, management and frontline staff.
Participatory Action Research (PAR). PAR is defined by Kidd and Kral (2005, p. 187) as “a process in which people (researchers and participants) develop goals and methods, participate in the gathering and analysis of data, and implement the results in a way that will raise critical consciousness and promote change in the lives of those involved—changes that are in the direction and control of the participating group or community.”

Path-Goal Leadership Perceptions Survey [PGLPS]. The PGLPS is a research investigator developed tool which does not have psychometric information and underwent field testing. The PGLPS examines perceptions of ideal and actual leadership styles for members of management using the following four leadership behaviors: Directive, Supportive, Participative, and Achievement-Oriented. This 40 question online survey was developed using the Path Goal Leadership Questionnaire as presented by Northouse (2001) (Fulk and Wendler, 1982). The Path Goal Leadership Questionnaire provided a basis for the development and use of the PGLPS.

Path-Goal Leadership Theory (PGLT). The Path-Goal Leadership Theory was developed by Robert J. House in 1971 and re-vamped in 1996. This theory of leadership focuses on defining goals, clarifying paths, removing obstacles and providing support to subordinates by being flexible and adaptive to subordinate characteristics and task characteristics. Four major leadership behaviors examined via this theory include: Directive, Supportive, Participative and Achievement-Oriented. (House 1971; House, 1996, Northouse, 2010)

Expected Findings
The results of this action research study will highlight frontline workers’ perceived and desired leadership styles held by members of management. Using tenents of Path-Goal Theory, leadership styles were explored and the correlation to worker job satisfaction. Two focus groups were held to accommodate the varying tour of duties of workers and to improve participation rates. The focus groups also served as an opportunity for participants to make recommendations and identify action steps to further change at the agency related to leadership and worker job satisfaction.

The evaluation of the project included information from the two focus groups which was analyzed in draft form by focus group participants to allow for member checking ensuring the data and information being collected and reported was accurate. Following integration of any necessary revisions, additions or corrections a final Executive Summary was provided to the agency which included final data analysis and recommendations for next steps. The use of the Executive Summary allowed the agency to determine if additional research cycles will improve practice or bring about change at the agency. Stringer and Dwyer (2005) indicate that action research is completed in cycles to allow innovation within social work practice and the general body of knowledge.

In addition to the creation of an Executive Summary, plans for the development of journal articles, training recommendations and conference presentations were developed based on the dissertation research.

**Organization of the Remainder of the Study**
The remainder of this study is organized into four additional chapters which focus on the Review of Literature, Methodology, Results and Discussion, Implications and Recommendations.

Chapter two of this research project will focus on a review of relevant literature related to the theoretical framework of Participatory Action Research. Child Welfare Leadership and the use of Path-Goal Leadership Theory. This chapter will include a review, evaluation and synthesis of pertinent research. It will also identify gaps in literature and appropriate next steps for future research.

Chapter three of this research project describes in detail the methodology that was applied in this research project. More specifically the purpose of the study, research design, population, procedures, instruments, research questions, data analysis, ethical considerations and expected findings was outlined in this chapter.

Chapter four will present both the qualitative and quantitative results of the Participatory Action Research project. This chapter will present data that was derived from survey participation and focus group participation. In addition to presenting the data the analysis of this data will also be presented within chapter four.

Finally, chapter five serves as the closing chapter in which a summary of the results was provided. A brief discussion of these results was included in this chapter along with a discussion of conclusions, recommendations for future research and limitations that occurred within the research project.
CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction to the Literature Review

This literature review contains information regarding the research focus of perceptions within child welfare leadership especially as it relates to leadership style, organizational performance and outcomes, worker satisfaction, and worker retention. A review of relevant literature indicates that several research based critiques concerning the topic of Child Welfare Leadership, Path-Goal Leadership Theory and Participatory Action Research exist.

For the purpose of this Participatory Action Research project, Path-Goal Leadership Theory serves as a foundational theoretical orientation and the study was designed to suggest and explore the usefulness of this theory as a proposed leadership framework for management at this Child Welfare Agency. Research related to the use of Participatory Action Research within child welfare was also examined within this review of the relevant literature. Special attention was paid to organization outcomes, job satisfaction and worker retention and the impact of leadership style on these factors within child welfare.

This literature review contains information regarding the research focus of Path-Goal Theory of Leadership and leadership models used with large child welfare agencies. A review of relevant literature indicates that several research based critiques concerning the topic of Path Goal Leadership Theory as a model of leadership exist. Examination of these scholarly writings reveal pertinent information related to variables that are critical in management and leadership within the child welfare field. Following is currently
accepted research on uses of Path Goal Leadership Theory, related leadership theories and the use of these leadership styles with child welfare agencies. This review of the literature was presented and summarized; methodology, strengths and limitations of this research was explored; and relativity to future research was identified.

The articles reviewed for this literature were all published in scholarly journals. Articles included in the review were relevant and were primarily published within the last decade with the exception of articles that were included for classical or critical information that was relevant to current use of the Path-Goal Leadership Theory. These articles included a classical work by R.J. House (1971) which introduced the theory and an article by authors, Chester A. Schriesheim and Linda L. Neider (1996). Schriesheim and Neider (1996) provided a commentary on the development of the Path-Goal Theory since its inception in 1971 by Robert J. House via the published article, “A Path-Goal Theory of Leader Effectiveness” in *Administrative Science Quarterly*. This article clearly indicated the need for reactivation of the use of the theory in research and highlighted an advantage of using Path-Goal Theory to improve job satisfaction in child welfare agency by postulating that research supported the effectiveness measures as subordinate job satisfaction (Schriesheim and Neider, 1996).

**Theoretical Orientation for the Study**

For the purpose of this study is it important to examine the use of PAR and Path-Goal Leadership Theory with child welfare workers as theoretical frameworks to guide this research study. A review of PAR principles and the Social Work Code of Ethics demonstrates the alignment of PAR with social work core values. The seven core values include: service, integrity, social justice, the dignity and worth of the person, the
importance of human relationships, and competence (NASW 2004). Via PAR social work practitioners and researchers employ integrity to assist those in need and aides in addressing social problems. Additionally, PAR affords practitioners the opportunity to address social justice via seeking knowledge while respecting the dignity and worth of people. This is inherent in the collaborative nature of the PAR process between those in need, researchers, policy makers, funding sources and other stakeholders. Finally, the alignment between PAR and social work core value of competency is achieved via this collaboration of stakeholders. This research project will rely heavily on the use of PAR to accomplish change and innovation through partnering with the stakeholders or child welfare workers.

Kidd and Kral (2005) discuss the practice of Participatory Action Research [PAR]. PAR is defined by Kidd and Kral (2005, p. 187) as “a process in which people (researchers and participants) develop goals and methods, participate in the gathering and analysis of data, and implement the results in a way that will raise critical consciousness and promote change in the lives of those involved—changes that are in the direction and control of the participating group or community.” The authors stress the importance of the collaborative nature of PAR between the stakeholders. Kidd and Kral (2005) discuss information presented by McTaggart (1997) which contends that PAR is comprised of sequences of “of reflecting, planning, acting, and observing (p. 189).” Different PAR methods include the use of focus groups, obtaining feedback from participants and incorporating the feedback to develop action oriented outcomes.

DeTardo-Baro (2004) highlights the differences between PAR and positivist
research. DeTardo-Baro suggests that positivist research and PAR are in opposition due to issues related to “voluntary participation, confidentiality, and risk to the participant are debatable for action research and need to be negotiated or perhaps reconsidered.” The author suggests that without resolution to these issues inherent to PAR, positivist researchers will not employ this model and PAR was “marginalized.” (DeTardo-Baro, 2004). According to DeTardo-Baro, the primary goal of positivist research is to present a research hypothesis and establish causal links to sustain the hypothesis, often using strict empirical methods. In contrast, PAR uses a “‘methodologically eclectic’ approach and welcomes changes to methodology during the research phases (DeTardo-Baro, 2004, 242).” It is also argued that positivist research can sometimes be considered unethical as it strictly addresses a problem without accounting for intricacies and the unique nature of participants.

In addition to examining relevant research related to PAR as a theoretical orientation, Path Goal Leadership Theory was also adopted as a theoretical orientation for this study. Path-Goal Theory is often used to identify a leadership style that is flexible and adaptive to individual subordinates. Within the Path-Goal theoretical model the leader adjusts the leadership style based on the motivational needs of the subordinates. Northouse (2010) indicated that within this theory, leaders “…make paths to the goal clear and easy to travel through coaching and direction, removing obstacles and roadblocks to attaining the goal, and making the work more personally satisfying (p.126).” Leadership behaviors identified in this framework include: directive, participative, and achievement-oriented but the theory is not limited to these attributes.
Changes in the leadership style and motivation are predicated by subordinate characteristics and task characteristics. Within the field of social work practice and specifically among Child Welfare workers, Path-Goal Theory may be used effectively. This framework provides a model that can be used in practical ways to help subordinates achieve goals; have clarity concerning obstacles and produce job satisfaction (Northouse, 2010, p.133). House and Mitchell in 1974, presented the basic principles behind Path-Goal theory as illustrated in the Figure 1. The Basic Idea Behind Path-Goal Theory below (Northouse, 2010, p. 126).

![Figure 1. The Basic Idea Behind Path-Goal Theory](image)

**Figure 2. The Basic Idea Behind Path-Goal Theory (Northouse, 2010, p. 126)**

Leaders determine which leadership behavior to use based on subordinate characteristics and task characteristics. This model suggested the following related to leadership behaviors:

**Directive.** According to Malik (2013), directive leaders instruct subordinates on exactly what they should do. Directive leadership behavior should be used when tasks are complex, there are unclear rules or the task is ambiguous. It should also be used when
the subordinate or follower desires an authoritarian, is inexperienced or if they believe they have an external locus of control. (Northouse, 2010)

**Supportive.** Supportive leaders respond specifically to the needs and well-being of subordinates by showing they care and are concerned (Malik, 2013). Supportive leadership behavior should be predicated by tasks that are repetitive, mundane or unchallenging. Subordinates with characteristics such as needing affiliation, general feelings of dissatisfaction and demonstrating the need for human touch typically respond better to this leadership style. (Northouse, 2010)

**Participative.** Participative leaders collaborate with followers when making decisions (Malik, 2013). Leaders that have followers that demonstrate a need for control or clarity and are autonomous in nature should use the participative behavior style. Tasks that are conducive to this leadership style include ambiguous, unclear or unstructured tasks. This style allows the leader to partner with the follower to address obstacles and create clear paths to positive outcomes. (Northouse, 2010)

**Achievement-oriented.** Achievement-oriented has high expectations for subordinates and sets challenging goals for subordinates (Malik, 2013). A leader that uses achievement-oriented style of leadership has subordinates that have a need to excel and hold high expectations. These followers like recognition for the work they complete. Task characteristics that typically predicate the use of achievement-oriented practice include ambiguous, complex and challenging tasks. (Northouse, 2010)

**Review of Research Literature and Methodological Literature Specific to the Topic or Research Question**
A review of research literature and methodological literature specific to the of Path-Goal Leadership Theory and Participatory Action research were of significant importance. Following is a discussion of research articles concerning Path-Goal Leadership Theory, organizational outcomes, job satisfaction and worker retention and the impact of leadership style on these factors within Child Welfare to include a review of strengths, weaknesses, limitations, and gaps.

**Path-Goal Leadership Theory**

By reviewing the literature, strengths and weaknesses became apparent. Armandi, Oppedisano and Sherman (2003) indicates that the Path-Goal Theory can be successful based on “research [that] demonstrated that employee performance and satisfaction are likely to be positively influenced when the leader compensates for the shortcomings in either the employee or the work setting” (p.1078). Barth et. al (2008) had similar research findings and noted that child welfare workers suggested the strongest predictor of job satisfaction was directly correlated to the quality of supervision. The definition of quality supervision was defined by “workers' perception of emotional support, advice giving, and amount received. Among urban workers, those receiving more than two hours of supervision had significantly higher levels of satisfaction” (p. 207). Dixon and Hart (2010) concluded that the use of Path-Goal Theory, as suggested in related research, can effectively impact the effectiveness of work groups and encourages employee retention.

The effectiveness of Path-Goal was highlighted in many articles. Hansen, Smith and Hansen (2002), supported the use of Path-Goal Leadership Theory and specifically, the attention paid to recognizing and rewarding employees to inspire motivation. Research findings suggest that an integral part of Path-Goal Theory, which is the
interaction between the supervisor and the employee, is an important aspect of employee retention. Landsman (2007) contends that

Current research indicates that many of the factors that affect the ability to recruit and retain staff have more to do with supervision and organizational issues in public child welfare agencies than with the attributes of their staff. In particular, studies have found that support from supervisors is positively related to job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and intentions to stay in child welfare (p.106-107).

Zell (2006) researched child welfare workers and how they view the child welfare system. Zell concluded the importance of supportive and strong administrative leadership, which are both tenets of Path-Goal Leadership. Although Malik (2013) did not look specifically at Child Welfare Workers he did examine the relationship between leader behaviors and employee satisfaction between frontline worker and managers with emphasis on Path-Goal Leadership Theory. Research has revealed a positive correlation between job satisfaction among employees and leadership (Malik 2011; Malik, 2013; Nissa, 2003; Yousef, 2006).

Research conducted by Malik, Aziz and Hassan (2014) concluded “There is a significant relationship between linear combination of four leadership behaviors (directive, supportive, participative and achievements-oriented) and subordinate’s acceptance of leader” (p.173). This research finding supports the effectiveness of the use of Path Goal Theory. Within this research study, a significant relationship was also determined between leadership behavior the acceptance of that leader by subordinates which is an integral component of Path Goal Theory. This research cannot be generalized
to Child Welfare Worker however as it was conducted with mobile companies in Pakistan’s telecom industry.

Some weaknesses inherent in the research included research design. The study conducted by Densten (2006), employed a cross-sectional design which indicates the findings may not be generalizable to other populations, despite having favorable findings that contingent reward had on extra effort of workers sampled. Additionally, many of the articles lacked references to recent research. The article composed by Hansen, Smith and Hansen (2002) could be strengthened with increased references to recent research as much of the research reviewed was classical in nature. Landsman (2007) examined “child welfare supervisors of child protective assessment and case management services” and findings may not be generalized easily to other aspects of child welfare. Similarly, Lietz (2008) research presented with several limitations. These limitations included the use of convenience sampling versus the use of probability sampling which may have skewed the results. Additionally, Lietz (2008) noted that threats to internal validity were not managed which impairs the ability to draw causal references.

In addition to research design, some researchers concluded that Path-Goal Theory may not be effective. Despite Silverthorne (2001) findings effective use of Path-Goal Theory, it was also determined via the research that use of this theory is less effective among peers. Silverthorne reported that “the theory was supported for the relationship between managers and subordinates but not supported for the relationship between managers and peers” (p.157). The major strength of this article is that the author employed correlation analysis to evaluate the data obtained which strengthens the value of the findings. Yoo, Brooks and Patti (2007) suggest a need to look more closely at
client outcomes to determine the effectiveness and understand the implications of management practices on service effectiveness.

**Organizational performance and outcomes**

Research suggests that within child welfare organizations, organizational performance is impacted by many of the following conditions: low wages, random risk of violence to workers, staffing shortages, high caseloads, administrative problems, inadequate supervision, and poor prospects for professional growth (Guterman & Jayaratne, 1994; McGowan & Meezasn 1983; Popa, 2012; Regehr, Chau, Leslie, & Howee, 2002; Vinokur-Kaplan, 1991). Hardina and Montana (2011) conducted a national study of social service managers which concluded that the use of an empowerment-oriented approach to leadership supported higher level of engagement by staff. This approach is more inclusive of staff and empowers them to participate more fully in organizational decision making and political empowerment of clients.

Additional research suggests relationships between leadership style and other variables and factors that contribute to organizational performance and outcomes. Popa (2012, p. 637) suggests that “. . . social workers leading organizations are often commissioned to impact organizational performance by motivating employees and leading the operations of a given organization.” Classical research articles related to child welfare leadership practices determined that in order to affect organizational climates a child welfare leader should create environments that empower, engage and inspire workers with respect to the mission and vision of the organization (Popa, 2012; Brilliant, 1986; Glisson, 1989; Patti, 1987). Popa (2012) highlights the need to further research
leadership practices is child welfare in order to impact organizational culture by inspiring workers, developing the organization and moving towards higher levels of performance and sustainability.

**Job satisfaction**

Factors that impact job and worker satisfaction are critical to the success of child welfare. Research that connects the relationship between leadership qualities and job satisfaction has been conducted, however, there are significant gaps in this research as much of the research focuses primarily on retention and organizational outcomes (Barth et al, 2008). Landsman (2001) and Barth et al (2008) indicate that recent research among child welfare workers highlight that perceived supervisory support, professional advancement opportunities, and a belief in the value of child welfare work all contribute to job satisfaction levels.

Other factors can contribute to both higher and lower levels of job satisfaction. Um and Harrison (1998) found that role conflict among child welfare workers can lead to low levels of job satisfaction, as does the perception of a non-supportive organizational climate (Zlotnik, DePanfilis, Daining, & Lane, 2005). Job characteristics to include, skill variety and role ambiguity, also are strong forecasters of worker satisfaction among human service workers (Glisson & Durick, 1988). Dickinson and Perry (2002) found a positive relationship between child welfare worker satisfaction to other job characteristics such as: compensation, promotional opportunities, support, and low role conflict. Examining both public and private sectors of child welfare, Washington et al (2009) determined additional factors that impact job satisfaction were found to include
developing positive relationships with families lead to higher levels of job satisfaction, as did work environment and extrinsic rewards.

Research conducted by Aydogdu and Asikgil (2011) found a positive statistical relationship between organizational commitment and job satisfaction. Based on research findings, the researchers asserted “Every employee has different kinds of needs and expectations and it is impossible to satisfy every need and expectation of the employees. Both employee and employer should try to generate a working condition that they will work in a happy, motivated and productive atmosphere to reach the certain goals” (Aydogdu & Asikgil, 2011 p. 52). Although this research was not conducted with Child Welfare workers it does support the tenet that organizational commitment and leadership practices can support job satisfaction levels.

Worker retention

Child welfare has been marred with high levels of worker turnover and retention. Research estimates national annual turnover rates among child welfare workers to range between 20% and 40% (American Public Human Services Association, 2005; Cyphers, 2001; General Accounting Office, 2003; Reagh, 1994: Rycraft, 1994 and Westbrook, T. M., Ellett, A. J., & Asberg, K., 2012). Drake and Yadama (1996) found that turnover rates evaluated over two year periods were as high as 90% within child welfare. These statistics demonstrate an unstable workforce and need to understand predictors of turnover. Chen, Park and Park (2012) found that managers can mitigate predictors of turnover by improving child welfare workers needs for growth related to incentives, having more meaningful daily practices and support related to personal career goals of
workers. Scannapieco and Connell-Carrick, (2007), had similar findings and indicated that employees that have supervisory support are more likely to remain at an agency.

Turnover rates among Child Welfare Workers were explored via research and found that California has a 33% turnover rate according to Weaver et al (2006) and between 6% to 27% (Cornerstones for Kids, 2006); Maryland was found to have an “upward turnover trend” (Hopkins et al, 2006); Milwaukee County had a rate of 38.6% (Joint Legislative Audit Committee, 2006) or less than 10% to 67% depending on the service area (Flower, McDonald & Sumski, 2005). An evaluation of different jurisdictions supported that leadership and supervisory style can impact retention. Burstain (2009, p. 7) indicated “a strong, supportive relationship between caseworkers and their immediate supervisors is essential for retention” when evaluating retention data among Child Protection Workers in Texas. The study also concluded that supervisor effectiveness is an issue for caseworkers and impacts retention in a jurisdiction that had retention rates of 31% in 2004, 20% in 2005, 30% in 2006, 33% in 2007 and 29% in 2008 (Burstain, 2009). While many factors can contribute to high turnover, research has supported that inadequate supervision, lack of supervisory support and difficult expectations of management such as large amounts of documentation and paper work are among these factors (CDF & Children’s Rights, 2007, Cyphers, 2001; Ewalt, 1991; General Accounting Office, 2003; Samantrai, 1992; Westbrook, T. M., Ellett, A. J., & Asberg, K., 2012). “Given the high rate of turnover in child welfare settings, the costs associated with training, and the effect that turnover has upon the quality of services for children, it is crucial to identify issues that contribute to turnover as well as retention” (Van Hook & Rothenberg, 2009 p. 36).
Synthesis of the Research Findings

The gaps in literature were often identified in the articles on leadership. Many articles addressed different tenets inherent in Path-Goal Leadership Theory but did not utilize this theory as the primary theoretical framework. Additionally, very little research has been conducted utilizing Path-Goal Theory since the inception of the theory in 1996. Finally, much of the research lacks the empirical frameworks to generalize findings. The research studies were often conducted on a small scale with a very specific population. Yoo (2007) also identify that there is gap in research related to the impact of management styles on client outcomes. The use of Path-Goal Theory often focuses on the outcomes related to subordinate satisfaction and does not correlate the impact on clients served by those subordinates.

Critique of the Previous Research

The future direction of research for Path-Goal Theory is open. Dixon and Hart (2010) recommends that future research studies conducted on Path-Goal Theory include larger groups of employees in diverse industries and geographies. This can frame the research design for the use of Path-Goal Theory within Child Welfare agencies. Hansen, Smith and Hansen (2002) suggest that closing the gap in literature requires future research which should be reflective of “how to apply recognition, and other intrinsic motivation techniques, more effectively” (p. 72). The written work of Kettner (2001) can be used to effectively practice empirical research on Path-Goal Theory as it presents a theoretical foundation for human services management.

Future research should also attempt to replicate successful research to further validate research findings. Schriesheim et. al. (2006) suggests that future research should
be conducted to combine the theory of Path-Goal Theory and Transformational Leadership. The authors suggested that research findings from the study highlighted that “In particular, for leader contingent reward behavior, a number of statistically significant positive moderator effects were obtained, conflicting with the revised path-goal theory” (p.34). This suggests the need to replicate this study to test the validity of the findings as historical empirical evidence presented by House in 1996 is contradictory. Finally, Wuenschel (2006) further suggests that managers in social services agencies must possess qualities and characteristics specific to social service agencies to include: “addressing difficult moral choices, accommodating the expectations of external constituents, advocating for stigmatized populations, collaborating with other agencies, and reliance on front-line professional personnel” (p. 13). This information becomes vital in addressing future research need related to the use of Path-Goal Theory in child welfare agencies.

Summary

In summary, empirical research supports the use of both Participatory Action Research and Path-Goal Leadership Theory as theoretical frameworks for this research project. Both models present gaps in a research related to the specific use of each model with child welfare workers. These gaps in research were addressed by this research project and will also highlight the need for future research.
CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this study was to identify the ideal and perceived leadership styles held by frontline workers at an East Coast Metropolitan Child Welfare agency. This study utilized Path-Goal Leadership Theory as presented by Robert J. House to identify and define leadership behaviors. The leadership behaviors that were used to define leadership styles among members of management included: Directive Leadership, Supportive Leadership, Participative Leadership and Achievement Oriented Leadership. The research study explored the use of Participatory Action Research to effectuate change at the agency by allowing participants to make recommendations and outline next steps based on research conducted. The Participatory Action Research addressed the impact of leadership styles held by management on frontline worker job satisfaction, staff retention and organizational outcomes.

Research Design

The study included the use of mixed methods of qualitative and quantitative design. The data collected included qualitative responses and quantitative responses related to participants' demographics. In-person focus groups and an electronic survey was utilized to collect the data using the following website: [www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com). Microsoft Office Products were used to code and organize data for statistical analysis for both qualitative and quantitative data that is collected. The Path-Goal Leadership
Perceptions Survey [PGLPS] tool was used followed by two in-person focus groups.

**Target Population and Participant Selection**


All participants minimally held a Master’s Degree in Social Work and Social Work Licensure via the government Health and Human Services agency licensing board. Participants varied in years of experience, gender, ethnicity and age. The events included mixed methods related to Participatory Action Research to include: an online survey and two focus groups.

Participants were invited to participate in survey and focus groups based on employment in the Child Protection Services Administrations [Investigations Administration and Family Assessment Administration]. Social workers in other administrations at the agency and non-social work function positions was excluded from the study. In person contact, emails and flyers was utilized to request participation in the research study. The agency email was sent to all agency CPS frontline workers. The email:

1. invited participants and provide a description of the study,
2. discussed informed consent (to include the research purpose, procedures, possible risks, benefits and explain confidentiality), and
3. provided a link to complete the PGLPS.
Consent was assumed based on the participant’s completion of the PGLPS survey.

A second email was sent after an inventory of initial responses was completed to remind participants of the survey completion due dates. Within a month of survey completion, an email with preliminary findings and an invitation to participate in the follow-up Focus Groups was sent. Within a month of the Focus Group an email with a Draft Executive Summary was sent to the CPS Administration frontline workers requesting feedback followed by a final Executive Summary to communicate research results within three months of Participatory Action Research study completion.

Creswell (2009) presents the four aspects of “purposefully select participants or sites” as indicated by Miles and Huberman (1994) to include the “setting, event, actors, and process.” For the purpose of this Participatory Action Research design, the setting was an East Coast Metropolitan Child Welfare Agency and more specifically the Child Protection Services administrations. The expected sample size included approximately 83 social workers at the agency based on current staffing patterns at the time of the initial research cycle.

A convenience sampling approach was used to recruit participants. Participants for this study will include employees within the agency that hold frontline positions in the Child Protection Services Administration to include Investigations and Family Assessment employees. A similar study conducted by Popa (2012) supported the use of convenience sampling approach in identifying leadership perceptions in a Child Welfare agency. The sample size included approximately: Forty-nine CPS-I Social Work Investigators and forty CPS-FA Social Work Investigators.

According to Baker and Charvat (2008) a large sample size is supported by
research to increase the estimation accuracy for population’s statistics and the
generalizability of the research findings. The large sample size will allow the research
findings to be more applicable to the Administration by including more members of that
population in the surveys and focus groups.

**Procedures**

Frequencies, percentages, means, medians, and standard deviations for participant
demographic were computed to provide descriptive statistics. Participant demographics
were collected for the purpose of providing a contextual representation related to the
rating of leadership in the CPS Administration of the agency. This data was used to
examine correlations between demographic information and perceptions related to
leadership style and job satisfaction.

Three methods of data collection were used to include: the researcher field
journal, an online survey and two in-person Focus Groups.

**Researcher Field Journal**

The researcher field journal consisted of a notebook that tracked and logged
details related to the Participatory Action Research. The journal was used to collect data
related to: thoughts processes, identifying the problem, observational notes, questions
regarding the study, needed steps during the research process and other similar notions
(Craig, 2009). The journal included descriptive entries and reflective entries.

**Path-Goal Leadership Theory [PGLPS]**

The survey was collected using the intra-agency email system for communication
purposes. The website www.surveymonkey.com was used for: collection, storage and
protection, management, processing, organization, and analysis of data. The data was
collected and processed using Survey Monkey. This data was exported into the Microsoft Office Product programs to perform descriptive statistics and measures of association. The survey contained questions that examined perceptions of ideal and perceived leadership styles and job satisfaction. These questions were developed using tenets of Path-Goal Leadership Theory. This framework provides a model that can be used in practical ways to help subordinates achieve goals; have clarity concerning obstacles and produce job satisfaction (Northouse, 2010, p.133).

**Focus Groups**

The focus groups were held in a conference room identified by the agency within the secured agency building. The focus groups were audiotaped to support the transcription and preparation of data for analysis. A Microsoft Power Point and projector system were used to facilitate the focus group. Laptops and/or other tablets equipped with a data processor such as Microsoft Word was used to collect the qualitative responses from participants in the focus group. See APPENDIX C.

Data collected during the Focus Groups was coded and presented in rank order of themes or levels of saturation. Saumure and Givens (SAGE, 2008) indicated that data saturation “is the point in data collection when no new or relevant information emerges with respect to the newly constructed theory.”

Data analysis was completed and reviewed using a combination of evidenced based data analysis approaches. These approaches included elements of Krueger’s (1994) framework analysis approach as well as stages described in the framework analysis approach described by Ritchie and Spencer (1994). Rabiee (2004, p. 657) indicates that “Framework analysis’ as described by Ritchie & Spencer (1994), is ‘an analytical
process which involves a number of distinct though highly interconnected stages’. The five key stages outlined are: familiarization; identifying a thematic framework; indexing; charting; mapping and interpretation.”

**Data Triangulation**

Creswell (2009, p. 121) indicates that triangulation is used to confirm data findings of the researcher by using multiple types of data collection points. Data collected using the researcher field journal, PGLPS and the Focus Groups was used to perform data triangulation. Information from the researcher field journal and the Focus Groups was coded and themes were identified. The PGLPS suggested trends in leadership style perceptions. Data triangulation was critical in assisting with the validation of findings and patterns within the data to support or address the overarching research question.

**Instruments and Measures**

The study included the use of mixed methods of qualitative and quantitative design. The data that was collected included qualitative responses and quantitative responses related to participants’ demographics. An in-person focus group and electronic survey was utilized to collect the data using the following website: www.surveymonkey.com. The Path-Goal Leadership Perceptions Survey [PGLPS] tool was used followed by two in-person focus groups.

**Path-Goal Leadership Perception Survey [PGLPS]**

The PGLPS is a research investigator developed tool which does not have psychometric information and will undergo field testing. See APPENDIX B for the tool and scoring information. The field testing ensured that questions were: clear, language use was appropriate, culturally sensitive, and solicited desirable responses related to
research objectives. The field testing took place within the online research forum to test the reliability and ease of navigation for the survey website, www.surveymonkey.com.

Northouse (2001) describes and presents the Path-Goal Leadership Questionnaire (Fulk and Wendler, 1982). The Path-Goal Leadership Questionnaire provided a basis for the development and use of the PGLPS. Permission was sought from Sage Publications and Dr. Peter Northouse to use this instrument and the request for permission was directed to Dr. Indvik. Permission was granted by the author and owner, Julie Indvik, Ph.D. Dean (Interim) of Business Office: 530-898-6272 California State University, Chico, California 95929, of the Path-Goal Leadership Questionnaire for use in this research project. No psychometric information is available for the Path-Goal Leadership Questionnaire published in Northouse (2001) which was developed using parts of research completed by Dr. Indvik.

The survey that was distributed to frontline workers was the PGLPS. The PGLPS was also amended to collect demographic information of participants to include: gender, ethnicity, job status, salary, and current workload. This survey was developed into electronic format and then completed by frontline workers. The scores that managers receive on the PGLPS provide information related to the perceived and ideal style of leadership that managers use most often and those used less frequently based on frontline worker perceptions. The PGLPS uses a 7-point Likert scale to measure leadership behaviors. The rating scale ranges from: 1 = Never, 2 = Hardly ever, 3 = Seldom, 4 = Occasionally, 5 = Often, 6 = Usually and 7 = Always. The questionnaire uses the following schema to score items:

1. Reverse the scores for items 7, 11, 16, and 18.
2. Directive style: Sum of scores on items 1, 5, 9, 14, and 18.

3. Supportive style: Sum of scores on items 2, 8, 11, 15, and 20.

4. Participative style: Sum of scores on items 3, 4, 7, 12, and 17.

5. Achievement-oriented style: Sum of scores on items 6, 10, 13, 16, and 19.

The scores are then interpreted as follows:

- Directive style, a common score is 23; scores above 28 are considered high and scores below 18 are considered low.
- Supportive style, a common score is 28; scores above 33 are considered high and scores below 23 are considered low.
- Participative style, a common score is 21; scores above 26 are considered high and scores below 16 are considered low.
- Achievement-oriented style, a common score is 19; scores above 24 are considered high and scores below 14 are considered low.

Focus Groups

Focus groups are often used in qualitative research design as a method of data collection. Morgan (1996) suggests that focus groups are defined using three specific elements: “First, it clearly states that focus groups are a research method devoted to data collection. Second, it locates the interaction in a group discussion as the source of the data. Third, it acknowledges the researcher's active role in creating the group discussion for data collection purposes” (p. 130). The data collected during the Focus Groups was coded and presented in rank order of themes or saturation levels. The researcher facilitated the focus groups and analyzed the data collected (See APPENDIX C).

Kidd and Parshall (2000) described the importance of roles within focus group
The internal consistency of coding is enhanced if one team member has the primary responsibility for conducting the analysis, participates in as many groups and debriefings as possible, and communicates regularly with other team members as the analysis proceeds (e.g., as coding of each transcript is completed) (Kidd & Parshall, 2000, p. 303).

Many efforts were made to incorporate participation by all stakeholders to support the continuation of the action research cycles.

The Focus Groups occurred as in-person Focus Groups. Participants decided to participate in either the morning or afternoon session. Each focus group was provided a data processor to document participants’ responses to the researcher-developed questions. Focus Group Data was captured electronically and each group responded to the same set of questions (Appendix C).

**Researcher Field Journal**

During the course of the study, a research journal was maintained. Craig (2009) highlights the importance of including three major tenets in the researcher field journal to include: Ideas and wonderings, general research information, and environment and participant-based information. For this research project the journal was ongoing and reflective. Craig (2009, p.144) provides a guide to document field notes and the guide was used during the Participatory Action Research project.

The researcher field journal consisted of a notebook that tracked and logged details related to the Participatory Action Research. The journal was used to collect data.
related to: thoughts processes, identifying the problem, observational notes, questions regarding the study, needed steps during the research process and other similar notions (Craig, 2009). The journal will include descriptive entries and reflective entries.

**Research Questions**

During the course of this research study, the correlation between job satisfaction and leadership qualities were examined. The question was formulated in an effort to address leadership qualities, with an emphasis on Path-Goal Leadership Theory and frontline worker job satisfaction. It should be noted that research questions can be further developed via focus groups held with stakeholders and during future action cycles of the research.

The following objectives and research questions were investigated via the research. The primary research question was: \( R_1 \) What are the current perceptions of leadership style among Child Protection Services Social Workers?” The primary research question was addressed using an online survey - Path-Goal Leadership Perceptions Survey [PGLPS]. The PGLPS will examine perceptions of ideal and actual leadership styles for members of management in the CPS Administration. See Appendix B for the specific questions included in the PGLPS. Data from the PGLPS was analyzed and presented via a PowerPoint presentation during the Focus Groups.

The following objectives were addressed via the mixed methods Participatory Action Research:

- \( O_1 \) Identify the current and ideal leadership styles of CPS administrations members of management.
O2 Identify the relationship between leadership style and job satisfaction within the CPS administrations.

O3 Identify the relationship between leadership style and job performance within the CPS administrations.

O4 Identify next steps to improve leadership practices at the agency.

O5 Introduce Path-Goal Leadership as a possible leadership framework for the CPS administration.

Data Analysis

Creswell (2009) clearly presents important steps inherent to completing the data analysis process. The first step is a discussion of survey participation. A table which highlights numbers and percentages of surveys that were returned and those that were not returned by study participants was communicated in the research. Limitations related to obtaining high retention and participation rates were addressed. This step was followed by examining and acknowledging response bias on research findings. Creswell indicates that response bias examines whether the responses that were not received would have impacted research findings (2009, p. 150). It should also be noted that when using multiple surveys, validity and reliability must also be addressed. The next step involves analyzing the variables using different data analysis tools.

The research questions of this study informed the data collection and analysis measures. In this mixed methods, Participatory Action Research study, both quantitative and qualitative data was collected and described independently.

Quantitative Data

To analyze quantitative data the use of quantitative researcher coding was
employed. The web enabled features of Survey Monkey were used to code and organize data for statistical analysis. Using descriptive statistics, the researcher established frequencies, trends, percentages, means, medians, modes and standard deviation.

The primary goal of this Participatory Research project was to explore perceptions of leadership behaviors of child welfare leaders as perceived by frontline workers. Data analysis compared findings related to how frontline workers perceive current leaders to actually behave and compared these findings to how they desire leaders to perform by identifying ideal leadership behaviors. Due to low survey participation rates the use of bivariate correlational analysis was not supported and instead descriptive statistics were used in the identification of any differences or relationships that exist between the actual and ideal leadership styles.

Additional data analysis explored a second tier goal to determine if a statistical difference existed between frontline workers and different demographic variables such as years of experience, gender, level of licensure, income, and administration [Family Assessment versus Investigations]. Again due to low survey participation rates the use of bivariate correlational analysis was planned but not executed in the identification of any relationships that may surface from the data collected via surveys and focus group coding. A t test for independent samples was used to compare mean score differences in leadership perceptions for the variables identified. Using descriptive statistical analysis, statistical significance was measured to indicate the perceptions and preferences of the four Path-Goal Leadership Behaviors: Directive, Supportive, Participative, and Achievement Oriented held by frontline workers and by the different demographic variables being measured.
Qualitative Data

To analyze the qualitative data the study employed grounded theory and inductive coding rather than setting up the coding at the start of research. The use of open coding allows the researcher to develop codes by evaluating the quantitative data. Using the framework identified by Creswell (2009), this step involves, reading through all of the data, coding the data and determining the themes or descriptions deduced from the data. As a result of carefully reviewing the quantitative data collected via observation of supervision and focus groups with stakeholders, the data was coded.

Creswell used a definition of coding presented by Rossman and Ralliss in 1998 on page 171 which defines coding as “the process of organizing the material into chunks or segments of text before bringing meaning to information” (2005, p.186). Using actual terms provided by participants or “in vivo terms” are highly recommended at this stage. Technology exists to assist in the analysis of data, such as Atlas.ti (www.atlasti.com) or MAXqda (www.maxqda.com). These options were explored but ultimately not used to conduct the analysis as the options were cost prohibitive. The study followed steps recommended by Creswell (2005, p.186) which were taken from a detailed coding process developed by Tesch in 1990. The study also included in vivo responses of the participants as they relate to each code. This information is vital in completing the next step of research which is to identify themes, descriptions and describe the interrelatedness of the data (Creswell, 2005). A Five Stage model which includes: familiarization; identifying a thematic framework; indexing; charting; mapping and interpretation (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994) was utilized to assist with communicating research findings.

The final steps were to interpret the research findings, conduct additional action
research cycles if required, and present findings to stakeholders, the community and the field of research.

**Ethical Considerations**

Ethical dilemmas exist during the planning and the execution of the research cycles being conducted via this research process. The NASW Code of Ethics (NASW, 2008) is designed to be a guidepost for social workers in times of such dilemmas. Two different frameworks can be used to make ethical decisions. These include: Pragmatism and the Utilitarian viewpoint (Meacham, 2007). A pragmatic leader is one that measures the consequences of choosing a specific choice in making an ethical decision. The utilitarian approach suggests that the decision that is best for the majority be selected. Meacham (2007) also presents systematic approaches that social workers can use to conduct ethical leadership and decision making. One such approach presented by Meacham (2007) was the work conducted in 2000 by Lowenburg et.al.

Lowenber et.al (2000) suggests the use of an Ethical Assessment Screen. This tool was used when ethical concerns arise during this action research study. Utilizing this tool involves taking several methodical steps. The steps are summarized as follows:

1. Be introspective about personal values related to the dilemma,
2. Identify societal values related to the dilemma;
3. refer to professional values and ethics;
4. consider alternative ethical options;
5. consider most client focused utilitarian response;
6. consider most societal focused utilitarian response;
7. & 8. Consider how to minimize conflicts in preceding step;
9. Which decision causes “least harm” possible;

10. Consider alternative actions efficient, effective, and ethical? and

11. Consider short-term and long-term consequences. (Meacham, 2007)

During preparation and throughout the study, ethical issues related to this study and participants were acknowledged and addressed. Especially important areas of concern included: anonymity, confidentiality, privacy, lack of coercion, and informed consent.

The use of www.surveymonkey.com as a platform helped to ensure that information collected afforded all participants appropriate levels of anonymity, confidentiality, and privacy. Participants had unique user id numbers assigned to them to ensure the ability to measure the data however these id numbers did not reveal participant demographic information.

Informed consent was obtained to ensure voluntary participation in the research study, clear presentation of information related to the study and an opportunity for participants to address questions related to the study was provided.

It was also vital to address that special attention be paid to power differential related to participants and members of management. The study relied on the ability of workers to speak freely without fear of retaliation or disciplinary action from members of management. Ensuring anonymity, confidentiality, privacy, lack of coercion, and informed consent supported any concerns related to this aspect of power differential.

**Expected Findings**

The first cycle of action research produced a great deal of statistical data (focus groups, field journal, two electronic surveys). Using the statistical data collected the
action phase cycle of the research commenced. The development and application of this action cycle was guided largely via feedback from stakeholders, continual reviews of the literature and involvement of the researcher. This action cycle was developed by the participants themselves, however possible interventions or strategies will include integrating the research data into staff trainings, policy development and supervision methods. The action study will involve replication of the initial action cycle once the intervention is developed and applied with a projection to have improved data sets and outcomes.

The projected findings included identification of current and ideal leadership traits of members of management at the agency as identified by frontline social workers. The utilization of outcomes can be seen to address the organizational problem of effective leadership of social workers. This can be done as follows:

- use outcomes to develop leadership focused training initiatives,
- use outcomes to inform policy development
- use outcomes to provide theoretical frameworks for more effective supervision,
- gained level of introspection by management and employees,
- impact employee/management morale and execution of job duties, and
- impact client outcomes by improving employee practice and supervision.

Summary

In summary, this chapter detailed the methodology that was applied throughout this Participatory Action Research. Using mixed methods of qualitative and quantitative design allowed for data collection and triangulation. The PGLPS, researcher field journal
and the focus groups provided extensive information related to the research questions and objectives. Significant ethical considerations were explored and the desired outcomes or research expectations were outlined within this chapter. Using the information and frameworks outlined in this chapter inform and are further addressed in the following chapter. Chapter 4 provides an in-depth presentation of the data collection and analysis. Chapter 4 also provides critical information related to the role of the researcher and the research sample.
CHAPTER 4. DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Introduction: The Study and the Researcher

A Participatory Action Research study was conducted with frontline workers in the Child Protection Services administration in an East Coast Child Welfare agency. During this Participatory Action Research study data was collected to explore how frontline staff identified both ideal and perceived leadership traits held by management and to offer next steps in making changes to leadership in order to impact worker satisfaction, retention and improved outcomes. This chapter presents both the qualitative and quantitative results of the Participatory Action Research project. Data that was derived from survey participation, focus group participation and the researcher field journal are presented. A brief analysis of the data follows presentation of the data.

To collect demographic information and data related to worker perceptions, an online survey was utilized. In person focus groups were used to obtain information related to job satisfaction, worker retention and improved outcomes. A researcher field journal was maintained throughout the study to support data triangulation and to address the research questions.

The Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher shifted during the course of the research project. At the onset of the Participatory Action Research study the investigator positionality included the researcher as an insider with collaboration. At the onset, I was employed as a member
of management within the administration in which the research was to be conducted. My role as the researcher shifted to that of an outsider utilizing collaboration with insiders at the time of data collection. I held a clinical level of licensure to practice social work and held positions of both a frontline worker and member of management within the field of child protection services and child welfare at the time the research was conducted.

Ethical considerations were required throughout the duration of the study to ensure that the researcher acknowledged and addressed concerns related to anonymity, confidentiality, privacy, lack of coercion and informed consent. I initially held a position of authority within the agency, which could have led to a perceived power differential. Despite the new positionality of being an outsider, I gave special attention to power differentials related to participants and members of management. The study relied heavily on the ability of workers to speak freely without fear of retaliation or disciplinary action from members of management.

**Description of the Sample**

The mixed-methods Participatory Action Research study utilized a convenience sampling approach to recruit participants. Participants for this study included frontline workers in the Child Protection Services Administration to include Investigations and Family Assessment employees. The sample size included eighty-three Frontline Social Workers. All participants minimally held a Master’s Degree in Social Work and Social Work Licensure via the government Health and Human Services agency licensing board. Participants varied in years of experience, gender, ethnicity and age. This Participatory Action Research consisted of mixed methods and utilized an online survey and two in-person focus groups.
The sample was determined using an email roster of frontline workers provided by agency leadership. Eighty-nine Frontline workers were represented on the roster provided by that agency. All eighty-nine frontline workers were invited to participate in completion of the PGLPS and Focus Groups via email using addresses that were provided by the agency administration’s leadership. Per the agency leadership, this email listing was inclusive of all frontline social workers within the Child Protections Services Administration at that time. Of the eighty-nine frontline workers invited, one Family Assessment Frontline worker immediately opted out of the research study and requested that all future contact would cease. Five of the emails were returned as undeliverable leaving a total of eighty-three potential participants for the study.

**Path-Goal Leadership Perception Survey [PGLPS]**

There were eighty-three total participants invited to participate in the PGLPS. Twenty participants completed all demographic questions in the survey, eighteen completed partial surveys only answering questions related to rating current leadership styles of managers, one participant accessed the survey and immediately exited the survey, declining to participate, and fifteen completed the survey in its entirety answering questions related to rating current and ideal leadership styles of managers. Three potential participants accessed the survey and completed only the demographic screens, and therefore, that data was excluded from the demographic sample information because those participants did not provide data related to their perceptions of leadership styles. In total, the PGLPS was completed in its entirety by fifteen frontline workers and only complete data sets were analyzed for the purpose of this research study.

The survey was fully completed by fifteen participants. These participants were
comprised of 12 females and three males. Race of participants included Black or African American (86.67%), White (6.67%) and 6.65% of participants chose not to answer the question related to their ethnicity. Ages of participants ranged from 20 – 41+ years of age. Income ranged from $51,000 - $80,000+. Half of the participants were Family Assessment (FA) frontline workers (53.33%) and half were Investigations (CPS) frontline workers (46.67%). Most of the participants held a graduate level licensure (66.7%) and some held a clinical level of licensure (33.3%). Years of social work experience ranged from >1 year – 15+ years. The CPS Investigations Administration is divided into three shifts to include Day Shift, Evening Shift and Midnight Shift. Shift of the frontline worker was not captured during the course of this survey. The demographic information collected was used to complete descriptive statistical analysis to identify differences or relationships that exist between the actual and ideal leadership styles. The goal to perform bivariate statistical analysis was not feasible due to the small sample size resulting from low survey response rate. The low response rate is explored in depth during the discussion of limitation in Chapter 5.

Table 1.

*Frequencies and Percentages for Demographic Characteristics of PGLPS Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or African American</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>86.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian or Alaskan Native</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chose Not to Answer</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 - 30 years old</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 - 40 years old</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>73.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41 + years old</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Income</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$40,000 - $50,000</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$51,000 - $60,000</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7.14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$61,000 - $70,000</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14.29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$71,000 - $80,000</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$80,000+</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>28.57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CPS Administration</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Assessment</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>53.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Protections Services</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>46.67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Licensure Type</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate Level</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>66.67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IL Level</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Experience</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;1 – 5 years</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 – 10 years</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 – 15 years</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15+ years</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The survey was sent out using Survey Monkey link on: 11/18/15, 1/10/15, 1/17/15.
Reminders for survey completion were also sent using email links from this researcher’s email account on 11/24/15 and 1/8/15.

**Focus Groups**

The recruitment and announcement of the Focus Groups began on 11/18/15.
Fliers were posted in common areas of the administration inviting frontline workers to participate in both the survey and the focus groups. An invitation email was sent on 11/18/15 and then again on 11/19/15 prior to the commencement of each focus group.
There were eight-three total participants invited to participate in the Focus Groups via email. The researcher utilized the same sample and email list used for the survey to invite participants to the focus groups. Two focus groups were held to accommodate the varying schedules and duties of the workers and to improve participation rates.

Participants were not required to provide demographic information during focus groups participation. Demographic information was recorded in the Researcher Field Journal by the researcher via observation and prior knowledge of the agency and participants. During the morning Focus Group there were a total of eight participants. There were seven female (87.5%) participants and one male (12.5%) participant. Race of participants included Black or African American (75%), White (12.5%) and Hispanic (12.5%). Ages of participants ranged from 20 – 41+ years of age. Participants ranged in experience from being in the training unit to fifteen plus years and based on experience level the salary ranged from ~40,000 to 80,000 plus annually. Half of the participants were Family Assessment (FA) frontline workers (50%) and half were Investigations (CPS) frontline workers (50%). Most of the participants held a graduate level licensure (87.5%) and one held a clinical level of licensure (12.5%). The CPS Investigations Administration is divided into three shifts to include Day Shift, Evening Shift and Midnight Shift. Participants included only Day Shift (87.5%) and Midnight Shift (12.5%) frontline workers. It should be noted that two participants were called out of the focus group by members of management and did not complete the full focus group however data collected from these participants were recorded and included in data analysis.
Table 2

_Frequencies and Percentages for Demographic Characteristics of Morning Focus Group_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>87.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or African American</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian or Alaskan Native</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chose Not to Answer</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPS Administration</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Assessment</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Protections Services</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Licensure Type</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate Level</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>87.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During the afternoon Focus Group there were a total of eight participants. There were six female participants (75%) and two male (25%) participants. Race of participants included Black or African American (85.5%) and White (12.5%). Ages of participants ranged from ~20 – 41+ years of age. Years of social work experience ranged from >1 year – 15+ years and based on experience level the salary ranged from ~51,000 to 80,000 plus annually. Half of the participants were Family Assessment (FA) frontline workers (50%) and half were Investigations (CPS) frontline workers (50%). Most of the participants held a graduate level licensure (87.5%) and one held a clinical level of licensure (12.5%). The CPS Investigations Administration is divided into three shifts to include Day Shift, Evening Shift and Midnight Shift. Participants included only Day Shift
(50%) and Evening Shift (50%) frontline workers.

Table 3

Frequencies and Percentages for Demographic Characteristics of Afternoon Focus Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or African American</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>85.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian or Alaskan Native</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chose Not to Answer</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPS Administration</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Assessment</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Protections Services</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Licensure Type</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate Level</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>87.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each focus group was structured and conducted using the same format and procedures. Each focus group occurred in a conference room identified by the agency leadership. Each focus group was allotted a two-hour period to discuss focus group questions. The morning focus group lasted approximately one hour and 15 minutes and the afternoon focus group lasted approximately one hour. The focus groups began with an introduction of the researcher and the researcher assistant. The research assistant provided support related to room set-up and collecting documentation for consent. The
researcher then explained the consent form and answered questions regarding participation and consent. Consent to participate in the focus group were signed by participants and the focused groups commenced. Each focus group was informed that audio recording of focus group discussions would take place for transcription purposes only. The focus groups were recorded using laptop microphone programs.

One of the objectives for this PAR was to introduce Path-Goal Leadership Theory as a possible leadership framework for the CPS administration. This objective was achieved primarily through the Focus Groups. The researcher presented a brief PowerPoint Presentation of the Path-Goal Leadership Theory at the beginning of each Focus Group. Prior to moving forward in the focus group process questions regarding the PowerPoint were addressed.

Following the PowerPoint presentation, each focus group was provided a laptop computer which was connected to a projector and screen. The focus group questions were provided in an electronic format via a form-fill Word document using the computer that was connected to a projector. Use of the projector allowed for each member to read the focus group questions and monitor the typed responses to each question. The focus groups self-selected a member to transcribe the responses of the group. Each focus group was provided the same instruction to: “Please discuss the following questions and develop a concise written response documenting the groups input. Discussions and written responses should be specific to tasks, job functions and performance within the CPS administration.” The group openly discussed each question and then developed a concise written response to the questions. The transcriber typed the group’s response to each question which was visible to the entire group via the projector. Member checking
occurred following each question to ensure the group reached a consensus regarding the group’s response to the data collected.

The researcher served as a facilitator and observer. The Researcher Field Journal was utilized to collect additional data and did not actively contribute information or feedback to the focus groups during the sessions. Clarity regarding questions was provided when the researcher was prompted by the participants. The researcher also assisted in monitoring the member checking of the data and timeliness of the group to ensure that each question was adequately addressed.

**Research Methodology Applied to the Data Analysis**

The research methodology applied to this study was Participatory Action Research. The study included the use of mixed methods of qualitative and quantitative design. Three methods of data collection were used which included: the researcher field journal, a researcher developed online survey - Path-Goal Leadership Perceptions Survey [PGLPS] and two in-person Focus Groups. A data triangulation evaluation process was also used throughout this study (Creswell, 2009; Greenwood & Levin, 2007) to bolster the trustworthiness of the results. The use of Participatory Action Research principles allows for stakeholders to guide the research and bring a level of insight and knowledge that is often unavailable to researchers. In doing so, the ability to bring about change in leadership styles among child welfare workers, and more specifically, those involved in child protection is more likely to occur.

The researcher field journal consisted of a notebook that tracked and logged details related to the Participatory Action Research. The journal was used to collect and capture thoughts processes, identifying the problem, observational notes, questions
regarding the study, needed steps during the research process and other similar notions (Craig, 2009). The journal included descriptive entries and reflective entries.

**Data Analysis and Triangulation**

Creswell (2009) indicates that triangulation is used to confirm data findings of the researcher by using multiple types of data collection points. Data collected using the researcher field journal, PGLPS and the Focus Groups was used to perform data triangulation. The primary research question was addressed using these three data collection methods. The research examined perceptions of ideal and actual leadership styles for members of management in the CPS Administration. Focus group data and entries from the field journal were coded and labeled to provide additional data collection points to address research questions. The table below displays how each research question and objective were addressed using different data points to include the PGLPS, Focus group data and the Researcher Field Journal.

Table 4.

**Data Triangulation Matrix**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overarching Research Questions and Objectives</th>
<th>PGLPS</th>
<th>FOCUS GROUP</th>
<th>RESEARCHER FIELD JOURNAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R&lt;sub&gt;1&lt;/sub&gt; What are the current perceptions of leadership style among Child Protection Services Social Workers?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O&lt;sub&gt;1&lt;/sub&gt; Identify the current and ideal leadership styles of CPS administrations members of management.</td>
<td>Yes Q1 – Q20</td>
<td>Yes Q1 – Q6</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O&lt;sub&gt;2&lt;/sub&gt; Identify the relationship between leadership style and job satisfaction within the CPS administrations.</td>
<td>Yes Q2, Q4,</td>
<td>Yes Q1, Q2, Q4, Q5</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Coding was employed to analyze Focus Group data, survey data and the researcher field journal. The data were coded manually to conduct the analysis. As much as feasible, in vivo responses of the participants, as they relate to each code are presented. This information is critical to identify themes, descriptions and describe the interrelatedness of the data (Creswell, 2005). A Five Stage model, which included: familiarization; identifying a thematic framework; indexing; charting; mapping and interpretation (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994) was employed to communicate research findings. Following is a more specific discussion of the research questions and objectives, data that was collected, and analysis of that data.

**Presentation of the Data and Results of the Analysis**

The primary research question that was explored was: \( R_1 \) What are the current perceptions of leadership style among Child Protection Services Social Workers? To answer this question, the PGLPS was administered and identified ideal and current perceptions of leadership styles as identified using Path-Goal Leadership Theory. Findings from the survey indicated some differences in current and desired leadership styles. The surveys provided a score based on participant responses to questions. These
scores fit into a baseline range and indicate the level of use of each leadership style as follows in Table 5.

Based on data collected it was determined that the members of management current application of leadership style are not aligned with the ideal or desired leadership style as identified by frontline workers that were surveyed. Frontline workers indicated that currently members of management utilize high levels of directive leadership style when average levels are desired. Frontline workers also desire a high level of participation from members of management but currently rate the participative style of leadership as being low. Both the Supportive and Achievement-Oriented style of leadership were consistent in terms of ratings achieving low levels and average levels respectively.

Table 5.

*PGLPS scores for leadership styles.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership Style</th>
<th>Average Score</th>
<th>High Score</th>
<th>Low Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Directive Style</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>28 and above</td>
<td>18 and below</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive Style</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>33 and above</td>
<td>23 and below</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participative Style</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>26 and above</td>
<td>16 and below</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achievement-Oriented Style</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>24 and above</td>
<td>14 and below</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data in Table 6 details the mode, median and mean scores of perceived ideal and current leadership styles of members of management which were held by frontline workers. The results of survey data were examined to determine the most frequently
The observed score for each category which is communicated via the mode. The median reflects the score that was the midpoint of the dataset. The mean score was also calculated for the data set to determine that average score for the surveys. Differences were determined across these three measures with some variance. These variances were measured using both standard deviation and population standard deviations. Table 6 also provides the sample standard deviation and the population standard deviation.

Differences between both the ideal and current leadership styles were noted consistently across the mode, median and mean.

Table 6.

*Mode, Median, Mean, Sample Standard Deviation and Population Deviation Scores for Ideal and Actual Perceived Current Leadership Styles of Members of Management*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>Mdn</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>S</th>
<th>σ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ideal Directive</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>4.423960733</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Directive</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>24.33</td>
<td>5.702964977</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideal Supportive</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>4.423960733</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Supportive</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>21.33</td>
<td>5.524835701</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideal Achievement-Oriented</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>27.47</td>
<td>5.527420823</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Achievement-Oriented</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25.33</td>
<td>3.754362542</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideal Participative</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>24.73</td>
<td>6.238894896</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Participative</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>17.53</td>
<td>5.902380472</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Using a side-by-side comparison of the current perceptions and ideal perceptions the differences are illustrated. Table 7 presents the data to allow for comparisons of the
ratings of leadership style using the mode as the frequency to compare styles. The data collected suggests that frontline workers indicate high levels of directive styles although they would prefer an ideal leader to demonstrate an average level of use related to this leadership style. The participative style of leadership is currently perceived to be used at a low level. Frontline workers surveyed indicated a desire for high levels of participation with management. Achievement-oriented style of leadership for both ideal and current perceptions were ranked in the average range. Supportive styles of leadership were also consistent with both being ranked as low. These levels suggest that members of management are meeting the desires of workers as it relates to these two aforementioned styles.

Table 7

*Side by side comparison of Leadership Styles frequency of use based on Mode*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership Style</th>
<th>Current Perceptions</th>
<th>Ideal Perceptions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Directive Style</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>HIGH</td>
<td>AVERAGE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive Style</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LOW</td>
<td>LOW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participative Style</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LOW</td>
<td>HIGH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achievement-Oriented Style</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AVERAGE</td>
<td>AVERAGE</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In addition to the PGLPS, Focus groups were held to address the primary research questions and the objectives of this PAR. The researcher became familiar with the data by reading, reviewing and listening to all available data as is suggested in Stage One Familiarization of the 5 Stage Model (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994). Emergent themes became evident when examining the data collected.

Frontline workers often shared very similar perspectives related to managers’ style of leadership. Using the next steps of Indexing, Charting and Mapping as suggested by Ritchie and Spencer (1994) several themes emerged. Themes directly related to worker satisfaction, job performance and perceptions of management were identified to include the importance of: consistency/expectations, relationships, and training.

**Consistency and Supervisory Expectations**

The theme of consistency and supervisory expectations were highlighted in both the morning and afternoon focus groups. In response to the focus group question: “Describe the level of consistency among manager’s leadership style within the CPS administration.” both focus groups overwhelmingly agreed that there was not a great level of consistency. In vivo responses collected on the written response from the morning focus group included:

- 0 – None
- depending on supervisor you get different answers
- broad diversity among supervisors
- There is inconsistency in removals or disposition outcomes because of the different expectations of different managerial staff.
- robot supervisors with unrealistic expectation
The researcher field journal also reflected observations and direct quotes from participants. The researcher noted that participants indicated, there are “. . . really good supportive supervisors” but “layers of management” and management being “very fragmented” reduce the level of consistency. Workers were also hesitant to note positive statements about managers within the written, member checked response, instead the response focused on the inconsistency.

The afternoon focus groups had very similar responses to this same question. The written responses from the afternoon focus group included the following quotes:

- There is not consistency
- There is a different expectation even within the same shift.
- The only thing that is consistent is inconsistency itself.
- Each supervisor has a different style and preference for completing the same work.

Observations of the afternoon focus group captured in the Researcher Field Journal noted that the participants agreed that the administration’s managers style of leadership was very inconsistent. Although the participant response was to another question, there were indications of satisfaction with supervisors, “… my first seven years I had a great fantastic supervision . . . that was always supportive” these statements were often not included in the written response that the group wanted reflected in the research (Field Research Journal Entry, November 19, 2015).

**Relationships**

Workers also addressed the impact of job satisfaction and performance as it related to the leadership style of managers at the agency. The most prevalent theme that
resulted from these focus group questions was relationships. These responses informed two objectives within the research study: **O2 Identify the relationship between leadership style and job satisfaction within the CPS administrations; and O3 Identify the relationship between leadership style and job performance within the CPS administrations.**

Both the morning and afternoon focus groups indicated that importance of relationship between the frontline worker and management; although the morning focus had a greater focus regarding the importance. “How well you can connect with your supervisor may impact your level of satisfaction” (Morning Focus Group, 2015). Workers provided feedback related to the need to do better matching between frontline worker and members of management, indicating “More work needs to be done with matching workers to supervisors” and “Emphasis on pairing worker to supervisor to encourage job satisfaction” (Morning Focus Group, 2015). During the Afternoon Focus Group workers responded to the impact that relationship has on productivity and satisfaction saying that, “Managers are not flexible to the individual needs of the work, but workers are expected to always be flexible.” The need for changes were highlighted consistently between the two groups. While acknowledging that the agency has “some great supervisors” the sentiment that management should make efforts to build better relationships with staff echoed through the morning focus group responses to include:

- I don’t think they care about burn-out
- Do something for upper management to be connected to frontline staff
- Be more objective and do not be personal or punitive
- Listen to worker = great productivity
The field researcher journal noted that workers in both groups talked with enthusiasm about the importance of how a good relationship with one’s supervisor can drastically impact their level of satisfaction and performance. Workers indicated having great supervisors. Despite many workers sharing with each other that they currently have or previously had excellent supervisors both groups continued to focus their member checked response on the need for change and continuity across the administration.

A female participant in the morning group made the following comment that was not captured in the written response:

Yeah, but I think um, if we're going to be honest about what needs to be changed, and what needs to happen, unfortunately, we can't focus on the good supervisors because those supervisors are doing great. They don't necessarily need to change a lot. But we do need a majority of them to kind of move in this fashion. (Field Researcher Journal, November 19 2015)

During the Afternoon Focus Group another participant shared very similar sentiments indicating:

Her style of supervision and management was fantastic and it worked really well for me and I think everyone that was under her was always very happy regardless of how crazy, how many cases we got, whatever was going on in the news, she was very supportive. I came to work, I never was sick, I never com- I don't want to say never. But I would come when I was sick, I didn't complain. I had job satisfaction, and I think now there's a lower level of job satisfaction and overall happiness at the job because it's a different approach to leadership. (Field Researcher Journal, November 19 2015)
Training

The third theme that emerged from evaluation of the Focus Group data was related to training. Both groups discussed the relevance of training as it related to job satisfaction, performance and the quality of current leadership styles. Training was discussed to support some workers level of satisfaction with work saying, “Training provided has helped make SW feel satisfied” (Morning Focus Group, 2015. Others indicated within this same group the need for more training for frontline workers and across the administration, “Increase . . . cross training SW FA/CPSI.” The general sentiment that members of management are often hired without appropriate training was echoed between both groups. Via the field researcher journal, it was noted that many workers felt that frontline workers were often promoted as a result of receiving an advanced license and not due to their skill set. An excerpt from the field researcher journal indicated, “New supervisors should shadow supervisors for a year before managing workers . . . new supervisors are selected but not based on merit and need more training” (Researcher Field Journal, 2015). Written responses provided by the focus group questions included:

- There are more skills needed to be a good supervisor. Some SWs are great supervisors, others are great workers, everyone is not meant to be a supervisor.

- What is being done to prepare workers for leadership positions? Nothing is being done, workers are not trained before being appointed. (Afternoon Focus Group, 2015)

The researcher field journal also provided insights related to the research question and objectives. The research journal documented many shifts in thinking for the
researcher. The researcher began the PAR with enthusiasm and optimism about how participants would want to engage in the study, especially the survey given the opportunity for anonymity. The researcher journal noted that higher levels of participation was noted in the focus groups and per conversations with participants, the survey was likely “too time consuming” or “my workload was too heavy to complete the survey” even without workers opening the survey. The workers indicated just feeling “overwhelmed” in general.

It was also noted that overwhelmingly the participants in the focus groups agreed and shared very similar perspectives. Free discussions were held for each question and then a group consensus was met for the written response, allowing for member checking. Both focus groups provided very similar responses despite having varied demographics to include different years of experience, working different shifts and making different incomes. Following is an excerpt from the researcher field journal, “Group two almost quoted group one on that first question. Lack of consistency is a major theme related to leadership style” (Field Research Journal Entry, 2015).

Based on observation of the focus group, it was noted that the frontline workers also indicated that the agency had really good supervisors but opted to only make small references to these “good supervisors” in the written response to focus group questions because management would focus too heavily on those statements and not recognize the need for changes. The workers were also consistent in the belief that changes were not likely even when feedback is provided.

**Summary**

This chapter presented the qualitative and quantitative results of this Participatory
Action Research project. This data illuminated the perceptions held by frontline workers. Frontline workers in this study provided very candid insight related to perceptions of leadership style among managers at the agency. Many participants indicated that participation in the study was difficult due to the current workload and expectations of managers to perform. This sentiment was observed during the morning focus group as two workers were called to discontinue participation due to emergent job duties. The findings of this participatory research study highlighted that current perceptions of leadership when compared to ideal levels of leadership vary at the agency. Data triangulation using the researcher field journal, the PGLPS and the focus group demonstrated that frontline workers desire changes and noted differences between the ideal style of leadership when compared to the actual or currently held styles of leadership.

Information provided by the frontline workers can inform changes at the agency which can in turn support improvements in satisfaction and job performance. Based on observations by the researcher, the frontline workers did not believe that changes in leadership style is possible and that current trends in management style will continue despite any findings from research studies or from providing feedback to leadership. Frontline workers also acknowledged that at times supervisors are prohibited to respond effectively to worker needs. Despite some supervisors having the desired skills the “at-will” nature of employment prevents managers from reaching full potential as a leader. The morning focus group indicated, “being at will impacts the level of supervisory skill” and the afternoon focus group echoed this sentiment as was identified via a researcher field journal entry, “supervisors should stop working out of fear – managers often fear
being terminated due to lack of employment protection that frontline workers have via their union.”

The frontline workers provided several next steps for the agency to consider to impact changes towards job satisfaction, performance and leadership styles. A more detailed summary of these findings are presented in more detail in the following chapter as well as a discussion these results, limitations and recommendations for future.
CHAPTER 5. RESULTS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

Within this chapter, a summative discussion of this Participatory Action Research study is presented. This Participatory Action Research study was conducted with frontline workers in the Child Protection Services administration in an East Coast Child Welfare agency to explore how frontline staff identified both ideal and perceived leadership traits held by management and to offer next steps in making changes to leadership in order to impact worker satisfaction, retention and improved outcomes.

Following the presentation of the results is a discussion based on the data collected using the mixed method research design which included a survey and focus groups. The following research question guided this PAR: R1 What are the current perceptions of leadership style among Child Protection Services Social Workers?”

The following objectives were also addressed via the mixed methods Participatory Action Research:

O1 Identify the current and ideal leadership styles of CPS administrations members of management.

O2 Identify the relationship between leadership style and job satisfaction within the CPS administrations.

O3 Identify the relationship between leadership style and job performance within the CPS administrations.
O4 Identify next steps to improve leadership practices at the agency.

O5 Introduce Path-Goal Leadership as a possible leadership framework for the CPS administration.

This chapter also summarizes the limitations of this Participatory Action Research study and presents recommendations for future research. Finally, the chapter concludes with a brief summation of the study.

Summary of the Results

In order to effectively summarize the research findings, the overarching research question is reviewed.

R1 What are the current perceptions of leadership style among Child Protection Services Social Workers?”

Through data triangulation of the PGLPS, Focus Group data and analysis of the field researcher journal it was determined that the current perceptions of leadership style among Child Protections Services Social Workers was different when compared to the perceptions of ideal leadership styles.

Frontline workers indicated a desire for managers to utilize an average level of Directive Leadership style with a score of 23. The actual reported levels of currently used Directive Leadership style registered as high with a score of 30. A similar disparity was determined when evaluating the use of Participative Leadership style currently held and desired of members of management. Frontline workers desired high levels indicating a score of 29 related to this leadership style but reported that currently low levels of Participatory Leadership style were being implemented with a score of 15.
The scores of the PGLPS did indicate some congruency in the desired and actual levels of leadership as it related to the use of Supportive Style and Achievement-Oriented Styles of leadership. Frontline workers desired Low Levels, with a score of 20, and perceived actual levels to be with a score of 23 as it related to Supportive Style of leadership. The Achievement-Oriented style of leadership was perceived to be average and the ideal level desired by frontline workers was also average with scores of 20 and 22 respectively.

**Discussion of the Results**

Despite having a low participation rate in the PGLPS with only fifteen total completed responses (18.5%), this study can be generalized to the CPS Administration as it was representative of demographics of those workers. The Focus Groups had good attendance rates with a total of 15 participants and a mix of demographics of workers to allow for greater generalizability. Baker and Charvat (2008) suggest larger sample sizes increase the estimation accuracy for population’s statistics and the generalizability of the research findings. By inviting all frontline workers in the Administration, it increased the estimation accuracy for the population’s statistics and allowed for the research findings to be more applicable to the Administration by including more members of that population in the surveys and focus groups. However, it should be noted that these findings cannot be easily generalized to larger segments of the social work force due to the use of convenience sampling and the focus on Child Protection Social Workers.

The participants included in this study are representative of statistical demographics available for all fields of social work practice nationwide. According to Whitaker and Arrington (2008) in a study completed by the National Association of...
Social Workers Membership Workforce Study “Although women dominate social work (80% women versus 20% men), there are differences in the proportion of men and women across practice settings. Higher proportions of women are employed in child welfare agencies (88%)” (2008, p.4). Within this PAR study the participation rate among PGLPS and the Focus Groups included 80% of participants being female and 20% being male. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2016) these workforce statistics are consistent with a 2015 Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey which determined that 765,000 people identified as a social worker of which: 83.8% indicated that they were female; 22% indicated that they were African American; 3% indicated Asian and 12.5 indicated Hispanic or Latino. The PGLPS was completed by 86.67% African American, and 6.67% white while 6.67% chose not to answer this question.

**Discussion of the Conclusions**

Evaluation of the data allows for different conclusions to be made. The goal of this study was to illuminate and understand the perceptions held by frontline workers in order to inform the change process which is central to the use of action research. In order to address the research questions related to job satisfaction, job performance and perceptions of management leadership style this researcher analyzed the PGLPS, Focus group and field journal data and determined three major themes were identified and included the importance of consistency/expectations, relationships and training.

Data collected from both focus groups was consistent in indicating the lack of consistency among members of membership, especially as it related to expectations and leadership styles. The data collected suggested that members of management do not use
the same types of leadership style consistently and “depending on [your] supervisor you get different answers (Morning Focus Group, 2015)” and “the only thing that is consistent is the inconstancy itself.” These themes suggested a need for changes related to the application of leadership styles among members of management.

As Johnco et. al. (2014) suggested via the examination of child welfare workers’ perceptions of worker retention and turnover the level of job satisfaction, having supportive work environments and levels of communication and supervision are all critical to worker retention and job satisfaction. Data collected during this PAR suggested similar conclusions. Focus group data indicated the need for improved levels of communication and connection between frontline workers and members of management. Focus group data specifically indicated these factors as being directly relative to the impact on job satisfaction levels and job retention. Both focus groups independently noted the importance of relationship between the frontline worker and management. A similar study conducted by the University of Maryland School of Social Work (2007) also supported the conclusions of this research study related to retention indicating that “dissatisfaction with supervision . . . lack of respect, and stress, burnout, and frustration” (2007, p.10) all lead to turnover and conversely child welfare workers stay because of the “relationship with co-workers or supervisors” (2007, p.10).

Finally, training was a third theme that emerged from the data. This theme was reflected in two ways indicating that training could be used to support job satisfaction as it could be a reward for frontline workers. Training was also identified as an area of concern and need for members of management. It was suggested in both focus groups that members of management are often placed in positions of authority without
appropriate levels of training or skills required to be good managers. The need for increased levels of training was highlighted in the data.

Limitations

It is critical to identify limitations and the possible impact on findings within any research study. Within this Participatory Action Research study several limitations were noted. In identifying the limitations this researcher sought to focus first on those limitations that appeared to impact the quality of the research findings and the ability to best answer and address the research questions (Lund Research Ltd, 2012). One major limitation involved in this research project was the use of mixed methods design. Although this was a Participatory Action Research project, the use of one primary researcher to carry out both the survey and focus groups was extremely challenging. This researcher was required “learn about multiple methods and approaches and understand how to appropriately mix them” (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). This was especially challenging also given the restraints related to time management as this Participatory Action Research was conducted as part of requirement for completion of a doctoral research program.

Another limitation identified during the course of this PAR, was the use of convenience sampling. This PAR only distributed the survey and allowed focused group participation by Child Protection Social Workers in one East Coast Metropolitan child welfare agency. This limitation affects the ability of this researcher to generalize the findings to other aspects of child welfare and other child protection social workers in different geographical locations. Landsman (2007) who examined “child welfare supervisors of child protective assessment and case management services” discussed
similar limitations with findings indicating they may not be generalized easily to other aspects of child welfare.

Despite best efforts to ensure confidentiality of all participants, limitations related to ease of access and participation in the research study were noted. Due to the nature of the work completed by frontline workers, all participants required supervisory approval to participate in Focus Groups. Additionally, the location of the focus groups impacted participants’ ability to participate in an anonymous way as each room provided by the agency to conduct the focus groups had glass walls and made participants visible to passers-by.

The use of technology in this focus group was intended to support ease of data analysis and allow for real-time member checking of data. While the use of data achieved these goals it appeared to also limit the responses of information provided in the focus groups. The use of the researcher field journal and transcription of the focus groups allowed for capture of additional data that was not presented by the focus groups using the laptops to provide written, group consensus response to focus group questions.

Finally, a major limitation of this PAR was the participation rate of participants in the survey. The survey was distributed and collected during the Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year’s holiday period which may have impacted participation as many workers were on leave during this period. Also based on field journal research notes, many Focus Group participants indicated heavy workloads which prevented them from having time to even open the survey request email. The survey also allowed for anonymous participation, which could have also contributed to low response rate. Additionally, there were no beneficial gains associated with completion of the surveys, which may have also
contributed to a low response rate. Due to the limited number of replies and overall decreased response rate the ability to generalize these findings across this sample is difficult.

**Recommendations for Future Research or Interventions**

Recommendations for future research emerged throughout the Participatory Action Research Project. Following is a discussion of recommendations for future research based on identified research limitations within this PAR, data collected during this PAR and participant feedback.

Limitations identified during this PAR suggested a need for future research to improve and support the findings of this action research study. The use of convenience sampling with the CPS Administration at one East Coast Child Welfare Agency impacted the generalizability of research findings. Future research should consider repeating this PAR and expanding the population to include multiple Child Protection Services frontline workers across the geographical area. Inclusion of additional agencies would likely increase the participation rates and allow for collection of data that is more representative of this population.

Future cycles of this PAR should also be attempted within this same agency incorporating the feedback from participants during each cycle in order to take informed action. The limitations associated with confidentiality should be addressed to support better participation rates and accurate data. It is recommended that future focus groups be conducted outside of the agency at a location that is neutral and accessible to participants to support anonymity. Additionally, future focus groups should also occur outside of the participants’ work hours to allow for participation without the need for supervisory
approval and to decrease interference with workload. In order to increase participation rates, it is also recommended that incentives such as a gift card be provided to participants that successfully complete surveys or participate in the focus groups.

Based on participant feedback several recommendations for future research and next steps were identified. The Morning and Afternoon Focus group identified many specific strategies and next steps that should be explored via additional cycles of action research. Future cycles of action research should be used to determine the feasibility and effectiveness of the recommended strategies. These recommendations for future research or interventions included: rewarding workers with ability to telework; listening to workers to increase productivity; ensuring transparency when issuing rewards to workers to ensure equity; increasing or improving time management of workers by allowing more access to resources such as client databases related to academic reports, government benefits, etc.; streamline/improve the web-enabled documentation database; and reduce redundancy in processes/tools. The Focus Group data also suggested a need for managers “to give more frontline assistance” and to become more “Connected with frontline staff” (Morning Focus Group, 2015). There was also a strong focus on establishing stronger policies and increased levels of training for supervisors to help regulate practice and support consistency.

The information and data collected throughout this Participatory Action Research study was analyzed and compiled into an Executive Summary. The Executive Summary included recommendations and next steps for the agency to take action. The summary included data analysis from the researcher field journal, surveys and focus groups. The data was also included in proposed training materials, and proposed policy implications
for the agency. The Executive Summary was provided to members of management at the agency with the recommendation to share information with frontline staff and conduct additional cycles of research to continue the change process at the agency.

Conclusion

In summary, this Participatory Action Research study sought to examine and identify the perceptions of leadership style of members of management held by frontline workers. The primary focus of this Participatory Research Study was that data collected would offer next steps in making changes to leadership practices at the agency. A critical step in making recommendations for changes was first identifying the perceptions of frontline workers regarding the ideal and perceived leadership traits held by management.

This Participatory Action Research study successfully identified the perceptions of frontline workers and provided an opportunity for these workers to communicate needs and desires related to the change process to increase job satisfaction, retention and improved outcomes at the agency. Recommendations provided by frontline workers and continual use of Participatory Action Research cycles will allow for the agency to continue making progress related to these goals. The goal of introducing Path-Goal Leadership Theory and future testing of the effectiveness of Path-Goal Leadership Theory on worker satisfaction, outcomes and retention can be achieved via additional action research cycles. It is the recommendation of this researcher that the findings of this Participatory Action Research project contribute to future changes at the agency.
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APPENDIX A. STATEMENT OF ORIGINAL WORK

Academic Honesty Policy

Capella University’s Academic Honesty Policy (3.01.01) holds learners accountable for the integrity of work they submit, which includes but is not limited to discussion postings, assignments, comprehensive exams, and the dissertation or capstone project.

Established in the Policy are the expectations for original work, rationale for the policy, definition of terms that pertain to academic honesty and original work, and disciplinary consequences of academic dishonesty. Also stated in the Policy is the expectation that learners will follow APA rules for citing another person’s ideas or works.

The following standards for original work and definition of plagiarism are discussed in the Policy:

Learners are expected to be the sole authors of their work and to acknowledge the authorship of others’ work through proper citation and reference. Use of another person’s ideas, including another learner’s, without proper reference or citation constitutes plagiarism and academic dishonesty and is prohibited conduct. (p. 1)

Plagiarism is one example of academic dishonesty. Plagiarism is presenting someone else’s ideas or work as your own. Plagiarism also includes copying verbatim or rephrasing ideas without properly acknowledging the source by author, date, and publication medium. (p. 2)

Capella University’s Research Misconduct Policy (3.03.06) holds learners accountable for research integrity. What constitutes research misconduct is discussed in the Policy:

Research misconduct includes but is not limited to falsification, fabrication, plagiarism, misappropriation, or other practices that seriously deviate from those that are commonly accepted within the academic community for proposing, conducting, or reviewing research, or in reporting research results. (p. 1)

Learners failing to abide by these policies are subject to consequences, including but not limited to dismissal or revocation of the degree.
Statement of Original Work and Signature

I have read, understood, and abided by Capella University’s Academic Honesty Policy (3.01.01) and Research Misconduct Policy (3.03.06), including the Policy Statements, Rationale, and Definitions.

I attest that this dissertation or capstone project is my own work. Where I have used the ideas or words of others, I have paraphrased, summarized, or used direct quotes following the guidelines set forth in the APA Publication Manual.

Learner name and date
Bernadette Carroll 11/30/2016

Mentor name and school
Dr. Tobi Delong Hamilton – Capella University
APPENDIX B. PGLPS SURVEY

PATH-GOAL LEADERSHIP PERCEPTIONS SURVEY

Screen 1: DEMOGRAPHICS
Demographic dimensions and contextual data was gathered from participants to include:
1. What is your gender? (Male, Female)
2. What is your ethnicity? (White, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, Hispanic, Choose not to answer)
3. Select the range that best describes your age? (20 – 30 years old, 31 – 40 years old, 40+ years old)
4. Select the range that best describes your income? ($40,000 - $50,000, $51,000 - $60,000, $61,000 - $70,000, $71,000 - $80,000, $80,000 +)
5. Select the CPS Administration in which you are employed? (Investigations, Family Assessment)
6. Select your Licensure Type: (Graduate Level, Clinical Level).
7. Select years of social worker experience: (>1 – 5 years, 6 – 10 years, 11 – 15 years, 15+ years),

Screen 2: CURRENT LEADERSHIP STYLES
Directions
Please give your immediate impressions. There are no right or wrong answers. For each of the statements below select number that indicates the frequency with which members of management CURRENTLY engage in the expressed behaviors.

Currently, most members of management . . .

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale:</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Hardly Ever</th>
<th>Seldom</th>
<th>Occasionally</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Usually</th>
<th>Always</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. lets subordinates know what is expected of them.
2. maintains a friendly working relationship with subordinates.
3. consults with subordinates when facing a problem.
4. listens receptively to subordinates’ ideas and suggestions.
5. informs subordinates about what needs to be done and how it needs to be done.
6. lets subordinates know that they are expected to perform at their highest level.

95
7. acts without consulting subordinates.
8. does little things to make it pleasant to be a member of the group.
9. asks subordinates to follow standard rules and regulations.
10. sets goals for subordinates' performance that are quite challenging.
11. says things that hurt subordinates' personal feelings.
12. asks for suggestions from subordinates concerning how to carry out assignments.
13. encourages continual improvement in subordinates' performance.
14. explains the level of performance that is expected of subordinates.
15. helps subordinates overcome problems that stop them from carrying out their tasks.
16. shows that he/she has doubts about their ability to meet most objectives.
17. asks subordinates for suggestions on what assignments should be made.
18. gives vague explanations of what is expected of subordinates on the job.
19. consistently sets challenging goals for subordinates to attain.
20. behaves in a manner that is thoughtful of subordinates' personal needs.

Screen 3: IDEAL LEADERSHIP STYLES

Directions

Please give your immediate impressions. There are no right or wrong answers. For each of the statements below select number that indicates the frequency with which you DESIRE members of management engage in the expressed behaviors.

Ideally, most members of management . . .

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale:</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Hardly Ever</th>
<th>Seldom</th>
<th>Occasionally</th>
<th>Often</th>
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<th>Always</th>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. lets subordinates know what is expected of them.
2. maintains a friendly working relationship with subordinates.
3. consults with subordinates when facing a problem.
4. listens receptively to subordinates’ ideas and suggestions.
5. informs subordinates about what needs to be done and how it needs to be done.
6. lets subordinates know that they are expected to perform at their highest level.
7. acts without consulting subordinates.
8. does little things to make it pleasant to be a member of the group.
9. asks subordinates to follow standard rules and regulations.
10. sets goals for subordinates' performance that are quite challenging.
11. says things that hurt subordinates' personal feelings.
12. asks for suggestions from subordinates concerning how to carry out assignments.
13. encourages continual improvement in subordinates' performance.
14. explains the level of performance that is expected of subordinates.
15. helps subordinates overcome problems that stop them from carrying out their tasks.
16. shows that he/she has doubts about their ability to meet most objectives.
17. asks subordinates for suggestions on what assignments should be made.
18. gives vague explanations of what is expected of subordinates on the job.
19. consistently sets challenging goals for subordinates to attain.
20. behaves in a manner that is thoughtful of subordinates' personal needs.

INSTRUMENT SCORING (not included in electronic survey)

Scoring:
1. Reverse the scores for items 7, 11, 16, and 18.
2. Directive style: Sum of scores on items 1, 5, 9, 14, and 18.
3. Supportive style: Sum of scores on items 2, 8, 11, 15, and 20.
4. Participative style: Sum of scores on items 3, 4, 7, 12, and 17.
5. Achievement-oriented style: Sum of scores on items 6, 10, 13, 16, and 19.

Scoring Interpretation
- Directive style, a common score is 23; scores above 28 are considered high and scores below 18 are considered low.
- Supportive style, a common score is 28; scores above 33 are considered high and scores below 23 are considered low.
- Participative style, a common score is 21; scores above 26 are considered high and scores below 16 are considered low.
- Achievement-oriented style, a common score is 19; scores above 24 are considered high and scores below 14 are considered low.

The scores received on the PGLPS provides information about which styles of leadership are used most often and which are used less frequently. It also identifies which leadership styles are preferred by workers. In addition, these scores can be used to assess use of each style relative to use of the other styles.

According to the principles of path-goal theory, if scores received matched these hypothetical scores, you would be effective in situations where the tasks and procedures are unclear and your subordinates have a need for certainty. You would be less effective in work settings that are structured and unchallenging. In addition, you would be moderately effective in ambiguous situations with subordinates who want control. Last, you would do very well in uncertain situations where you could set high standards, challenge subordinates to meet these standards, and help them feel confident in their abilities.

In addition to the Path-Goal Leadership Questionnaire, leadership researchers have commonly used multiple instruments to study path-goal theory, including measures of task structure, locus of control, employee expectancies, employee satisfaction, and others. Although the primary use of these instruments has been for theory building, many of the instruments offer valuable information related to practical leadership issues.

*Special Note: The Path-Goal Leadership Questionnaire provided a basis for the development and use of the PGLPS. Permission was sought from Sage Publications and Dr. Peter Northouse to use this instrument and the request for permission was directed to Dr. Indvik. Permission was granted by the author and owner, Julie Indvik, Ph.D. Dean (Interim) of Business Office: 530-898-6272 California State
University, Chico, California 95929, of the Path-Goal Leadership Questionnaire for use in this research project. No psychometric information is available for the Path-Goal Leadership Questionnaire published in Northouse (2001) which was developed using parts of research completed by Dr. Indvik.
APPENDIX C. PATH-GOAL LEADERSHIP FOCUS GROUP

PATH-GOAL LEADERSHIP FOCUS GROUP

Within your small group:

- Please discuss the following questions and develop a concise written response documenting the groups input. Discussions and written responses should be specific to tasks, job functions and performance within the CPS Administration.

1. Describe the level of consistency among managers’ leadership style within the CPS administration.

2. How does the leadership style of managers within the administration impact your job satisfaction?

3. How does the leadership style of managers within the administration impact your job performance?

4. How do managers address obstacles in achieving goals at the agency?

5. How do managers recognize and reward employees to inspire motivation within the CPS administration?
6. What actions or next steps do you think will improve practice specific to leadership within the administration?