The Impact of Perceived Supportive Supervision on Staff Retention

In a Human Service Nonprofit

By

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I certify that I have read this dissertation and that in my opinion it meets the academic and professional standards required by Wilmington University as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Business Administration.

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Dedication

This milestone in my life is dedicated to my family, particularly to my parents Nirma and Jorge Velázquez, Sr. for their unwavering support, at times prayers, and encouragement. I appreciate everything you have done for me. My love and gratitude always.

Acknowledgements

To my dissertation committee who have played such an important role in helping me to reach this important goal in my life, I will always be thankful. In particular, to Dr. Amy Patrick for her good humor, advice, and statistical knowledge which was invaluable. To Dr. Clinton Robertson for his interest, and for providing me patient guidance and wisdom throughout the process. And to Dr. Dan Young for his insightful critiques and comments early in the process.

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Abstract

Staff and worker retention issues are major challenges to the human service nonprofit sector. Using an exploratory cross-sectional quantitative study, the impact of perceived supportive supervision on staff retention was examined. Additionally, this study reviewed the relationship between key demographic variables and perceptions of supportive supervision. Commitment and professional support, organizational and job characteristics, collegial sharing and support, professional commitment, and quality of supervision and leadership are the moderator variables. The study found evidence that a positive relationship exists between respondents' decisions to remain with the organization and perceptions of commitment and professional support. The study also found that of the variables examined related to retention, sub-factor commitment and professional support was most foretelling of retention. This further suggests that the specific elements of supportive supervision found in sub-factor commitment and professional support; degree of mentoring and support, quality of mentoring and professional support, interpersonal relationships with colleagues, and the degree of commitment to the profession, if improved would mitigate some of the retention issues.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Staff and worker retention issues in the human service (HS) nonprofit sector are acknowledged to be challenging. In addition, the impact of human service nonprofit supervisors or managers on worker retention is seen as critical; surprisingly, there is very little research available in this area. However, the importance of a supervisor or manager's role in staff retention has been studied in the public human services (Ellett, Ellett, & Rugutt, 2003; Ellet, Ellis, Westbrook, & Dews, 2007; Westbrook, Ellis, & Ellett, 2006).

National child welfare and human service advocacy organizations like the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) have expressed concerns about supervisory practices in nonprofit organizations. Senior leadership and practice experts at CWLA leadership described the retention challenges faced by their nonprofit member agencies as:

The need for supervisors and managers to be supportive while elevating existing staff practices. Improving outcomes for customers or clients and maintaining a well-trained stable workforce through retention are interrelated strategic and service delivery challenges that should be central organizational goals for nonprofits (C. James-Brown, L. Spears, & J. Collins, personal communication, February 7, 2014).

A 2007 workforce survey administered by the John's Hopkins Nonprofit Listening Post Project outlined broad nonprofit retention concerns. Of the 231 nonprofit organizations that participated in the survey, 37% reported that retaining professional and support staff was a significant problem while 6% believed it was a very significant problem (Salamon & Lessans-Lessans-Geller, 2007). These findings are noteworthy since the study of nonprofits has been

challenged by limited data sources. Existing information regarding nonprofits is primarily collected to comply with state and federal government organizational employment reporting requirements which are broad in scope (Salamon & Sokolowski, 2005).

To examine the human service nonprofit staff retention problem further, a mid-Atlantic region human service nonprofit organization (NPO) was approached to be the subject of this study. The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) volunteered and welcomed the study as a way to gain staff insights to facilitate improvements in supervisory practices and retention. The organization is designated a 501(c) (3) nonprofit by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) and provides services to communities in a tri-county area. Like many human service (HS) organizations, it is community-based, meaning the organization provides a variety of services to individuals in or near the community where they live.

This study will determine how supervisors and managers that oversee line workers and staff in the subject mid-Atlantic region human service nonprofit are influencing retention levels. This issue will be reviewed using perceived supportive supervision and key demographic variables as mediators. Commitment and professional support, and quality of supervision and leadership are the moderators. The nonprofit studied will be referred to as "the organization" or "the nonprofit organization" in this study.

Statement of the Problem

According to a nationwide survey completed by 413 nonprofit organizations for Nonprofit HR's "2014 Nonprofit Employment Practices Survey," 46% of nonprofits surveyed expanded staff levels in 2013, while just 17% decreased staff, and approximately 45% are hiring staff for new programs. On the surface these results may look positive; however, upon closer review of the data, this is not the case. Approximately 20% of nonprofit new hires are brought on

to fill slots vacated by turnover. Not surprisingly, retention is the greatest human resources challenge facing nonprofits like the NPO that is being studied here (Otten, 2014).

The organization that is the subject of this study is a human service nonprofit that helps individuals and families attain stability and self-sufficiency. Maintaining a steady workforce is an essential element to sustaining their credibility and relevance within the community as well as with funders. The organization's chief executive officer reported to the researcher that their average turnover rate is higher than the national annual average. Nationally, the annual turnover or decision leave rates for line workers and staff are estimated to be 20%. These levels of turnover create challenges to the continuity of service delivery and the distribution of responsibilities within nonprofits (Nonprofit HR, 2014; Westbrook, Ellis, & Ellett, 2006).

Purpose of the Study

This study will highlight the impact that perceived supportive supervisory practices can have on the retention of line staff and workers in a mid-Atlantic region human service nonprofit. Additionally, key demographic variables will be examined to determine if there is a positive influence on the organization's staff and perceptions of perceived supportive supervisory practices.

The study will also provide the non-profit organization studied with recommendations related to staff retention and key demographic groups' perceptions of supportive supervisory practices.

Working Model

Figure 1 is a simple working model to illustrate the research questions for the study.
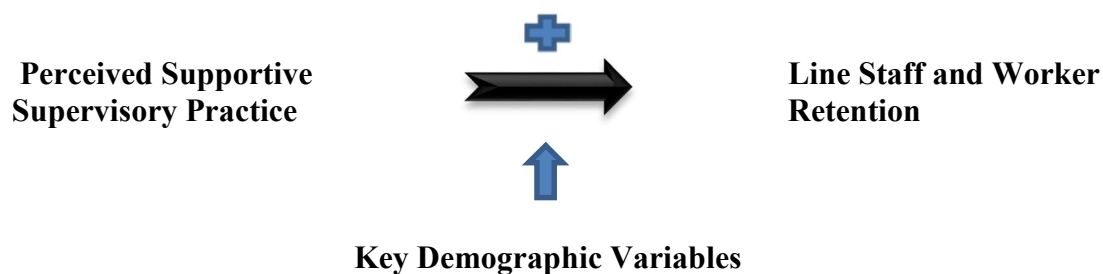
Figure 1. Working model.

As mentioned earlier, the general conventional thought of NPO senior leaders and seasoned practitioners is that the supervisor is one of the most critical factors in determining staff retention. A review of the relationship between perceived supportive supervisory practice and the retention level of staff in human service nonprofits is warranted due to the lack of study in this research area.

In addition to adding to the body of work, the results of this study will provide nonprofits with a foundation to examine the skills, knowledge, and abilities of supervisors. These findings also have the potential to inform practitioners as they plan training and development for NPOs moving forward.

Research Question & Hypotheses

The primary research questions and hypotheses being considered in this study are stated as follows:

Research Question 1

What is the relationship between perceived supportive supervisory practice and the retention of staff in human service nonprofits?

Ho: Perceived supervisory practice has a positive impact on the retention of staff in human service nonprofits.

Ha: Perceived supervisory practice has no impact on the retention of staff in human service nonprofits.

Research Question 2

What is the relationship between key demographic variables and staff perceptions of supportive supervisory practice?

H2a: There will be a relationship between job level and perceptions of supportive supervisory practices.

H2b: There will be a relationship between the full-time and part-time work status and perceptions of supportive supervisory practice.

H2c: There will be a relationship between the county where respondents work and perceptions of supportive supervisory practice.

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Limitations, Delimitations & Assumptions

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Several primary limitations exist in this study. The first limitation is that the study is being conducted in one large mid-Atlantic NPO. Study results will not be representative of all nonprofits in the U.S.

The second limitation is that the NPO in this study represents one type of human service nonprofit and would not represent all nonprofits in the mid-Atlantic region. Other human service nonprofits range in size and in the number of programs and type of assistance they provide to

individuals and communities. This in-turn would impact their supervisor-staff ratios and responsibilities. Researcher bias would be the third limitation. He has more than 12 years of experience working as a manager and supervisor for various human service nonprofits. However, the researcher is confident that he can be objective regarding the conduct of the research and interpretation of the results. A validated and reliable survey instrument would ensure the objectivity of the study.

In terms of the NPO, a primary limiting factor was the researcher's very limited knowledge and the lack of information regarding the existing organizational culture and supervisory norms. There are also limitations related to the survey instrument used to collect data. Some of the questions may be perceived as two part or separate questions due to their construction. Also, there is no neutral option provided for respondents in the Likert scale.

There are also delimitations in the study. This study will only assess one aspect of the supervisor-staff relationship—retention. Secondly, the study will not discuss or review broad organizational or external influences on nonprofit staff retention. Lastly, only current full-time supervisors and line workers will be asked to complete the study's survey.

A basic assumption being made by the researcher is that all of the participants in the study will be doing so voluntarily. Also, that the participants are answering the survey questions sincerely and to the best of their knowledge.

Definition of Terms

The following terms will be used throughout the study and are based on the following definitions:

Human Services (HS): Broadly defined, the field of human services focuses on meeting human

needs through interdisciplinary knowledge, focusing on prevention, remediating problems, and improving the overall quality of life of service populations. The HS profession promotes improved service delivery to individuals and communities by addressing the quality of direct services, and by seeking to improve accessibility, accountability, and coordination among professionals and agencies that provide services (National Organization for Human Services, 2014).

Nonprofit Organization (NPO): An organization that is formed and operated exclusively for tax exempt purposes. None of its earnings may benefit any private shareholder or individual. Additionally, the organization it may not attempt to influence legislation as a primary part of its mission and it may not participate in campaign activity for or against political candidates (Internal Revenue Service, 2014).

Staff or Worker: For the purposes of this study, staff or workers is defined as anyone that provides direct care services or works directly with clients or customers. This includes professional and paraprofessional positions such as therapists, nurses, case workers, aides, family service assistants, and addictions counselors. In addition, the term staff or worker would also include administrative and clerical positions that do not supervise anyone and do not provide services or care directly to clients or customers (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014a; CEO HS NPO., personal Communication, January 29, 2015).

Supervisor or Manager: Social and community service supervisors or managers coordinate and supervise human service programs and community organizations. They direct and lead social and human service staff or workers who provide direct care and or human services programing to the public, and can design and oversee programs to meet the needs of the target audience or community (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014b).

Supportive Supervision: Supportive supervision is defined as an approach to supervision that employs joint problem-solving and goal setting, empathy, mentoring, and two-way communication between supervisors and their staff or workers. The concept of supportive supervision can be further expanded to include self-assessment, peer assessment, and community input as vital components of results-oriented supervisory practice (Ellinger, 2013; Marquez & Kean, 2002; Paustian-Underdahl et al., 2013a).

Background

In 2010, the nonprofit sector employed some 10.7 million people in the U.S. This represented 10.1% of the country's total private employment, placing it third behind retail and manufacturing (Salamon, Sokolowski, & Lessans-Geller, 2012). NPOs are in the forefront of the U.S. overall jobs market and recognized as an important economic engine in many local communities (Salamon & Lessans-Geller, 2007; Salamon, Sokolowski, & Gellar, 2012).

Other survey data targeting 277 NPOs revealed that a segment of the leadership believed their organizations' had significant (37%) or very significant (6%) problems retaining professional and support staff. These results are reflective of a broad spectrum of NPOs affiliated with the Johns Hopkins Nonprofit Employment Data project and not solely human service providers. Human service nonprofits represented 59% of respondent organizations (Salamon & Lessans-Geller, 2007).

Understanding this, it would be logical to assume that acknowledgement by nonprofit senior leaders regarding the ongoing challenges keeping entry and mid-level professionals that NPOs would plan, and be more deliberate and strategic about how they address staff retention (Mitchell, Holtom, & Lee, 2001; Ramlall, 2003). However, another national survey indicated

that only 17% of the nonprofits that participated (n = 413) have a formal retention strategy or plan in place to retain workers (Nonprofit HR, 2014).

The researcher initiated a series of online literature searches to determine the scope of research pertaining to the problem of retention in the nonprofit sector. These searches were conducted using the Wilmington University library and scholar.google.com data bases. Some of the many terms used in various combinations for these searches are "nonprofit", "not for profit", "employee retention", "supervision", and "supportive supervision". Several of the scholar.google.com searches conducted by the researcher using the specific term "supportive supervision" yielded over 336, 000 results and a search for "employee retention" produced 361,000 articles. This initially set an expectation that some combination of these search terms would result in a substantive listing of peer-reviewed scholarly articles. With the word "nonprofit" included as a search term, a little over 40 thousand entries appeared. The total number of articles dropped to a little over 17,000 with some variation of the terms "nonprofit", "supportive supervision", and "retention" in the title. Very few of the articles identified in the searches contained the three terms, "nonprofit", "supportive supervision", and "retention", in the title. The researcher identified this as a gap in the nonprofit literature.

Need for the Study

The results of this literature search were surprising given that staff retention has been determined by NPO leaders and organizations to be a persistent and acute challenge over several years. So why has there not been a more deliberate effort to understand or mitigate a problem that has been clearly identified? Some nonprofit leaders would excuse their inability to do something on a lack of resources. Others may decide that "new blood" or some retention issues are healthy as long as good people stay and those that are ineffective leave (Ban, Drahnak-Faller,

& Towers, 2003). Whatever the response, retention, as stated earlier, is a problem that can impede service delivery, influence morale, and prevent good people from working for the organization (Chiller & Crisp, 2012; Kim & Lee, 2007).

A diverse cross-section of researchers agreed that in a majority of instances, organizations have at their disposal one of the answers to the retention problems they face-- supervisors and managers (Duffield, Roche, Blay & Stasa, 2010; Ellinger, 2013; Hannay & Northam, 2000; Jacquet, Clark, Morazes & Withers, 2007). Minimal investments would go a long way to changing the existing retention dynamic. Specifically, employing new supportive practices or expanding supervisory practices perceived to be supportive would influence staff and worker retention (Ellinger, 2013; Hannay & Northam, 2000). In many instances, adjustments in the management approach to a more supportive and engaging practice will make a difference in worker perceptions (Landsman, 2007).

Initiating practices such as proactive decision-making and joint problem solving are two common examples of supportive supervisory staff and worker management methods (Marquez & Kean, 2002). Proactive decision-making would be supervisors being less reactive or knee-jerk in their responses to situations and joint problem solving would be the practice of including a worker or set of staff responsible for specific outcomes when developing solutions (Hannay & Northam, 2000; Messmer, 2006; The Nonprofit Times, 2012).

Nonprofit sector leaders need to recognize that if retention is managed correctly using supportive supervision as operating principle, it can also have a positive impact on recruitment (Hannay & Northam, 2000). When potential applicants learn that an organization and its leadership and management promote principles like being respectful, showing empathy, and encouraging collaboration, they can anticipate there being no shortage of applicants when a

vacancy occurs (Hannay & Northam, 2000). Low to no cost operational fixes or shifts in supervisory expectations have been identified as powerful counterbalances to lower salaries which are common in many NPOs, and highlighted as fostering retention (Ewalt, 1991). If staff feel supported by supervisors and managers who they can rely on and empower them with some level of professional decision-making flexibility, retention may be less of a concern for nonprofits (Kim & Lee, 2007; The Nonprofit Times, 2012).

In addition, human service nonprofit supervisors have broad influence on a worker's environment. Retention can also be promoted when there are good supervisor-worker relationships built on trust that provides social supports when needed. Workers with access to training and mentoring, supervisors that have an open door policy and make themselves accessible to staff would be other aspects of a supportive supervisory strategy that influences retention (Colton & Roberts, 2007; Ellinger, 2013; Hamama, 2012).

The prominent overall role that nonprofits have in the U.S. administering human service programs and providing direct care or interventions at every level of society makes the challenge they face regarding retention important. It is important from the perspective of not only their ability to function but more precisely how they work with individuals and communities that rely on their supervisors and workers on a daily basis.

Of paramount importance with regard to retention and NPOs are the ripple effects that occur every time a nonprofit loses a line worker or for that matter a supervisor (Marquez & Kean, 2002; Westbrook, Ellis & Ellett, 2006). Customers and clients that depended on these individuals have to be reassigned to other staff. This can cause a variety of problems, primarily for customers and clients. Because of the nature of the interactions between HS nonprofit staff

and their service populations which are personal and in most instances confidential, the wellbeing of clients and customers may be negatively impacted (Jacquet et al., 2007).

The reliability and effectiveness of a nonprofit impacted by retention may come into question when the organization is in a constant internal reactive cycle of minimizing the disruption of programs or services to individuals and communities such as drug treatment or counseling (Duffield et al., 2010; Landsman, 2007). NPO supervisors and workers perceive the departure of a colleague or peer as an increase in their workload and their stress level because a temporary reassignment of customers and clients to existing staff and workers is necessary for the continuity of services. Once a replacement is hired and trained there would be another redistribution of customers and clients in an effort to manage or stabilize the workload and make it more equitable (Ellett et al., 2003; Jacquet et al., 2007). Existing research points out that organizations without a plan or a way to support workers more concretely and consistently will predictably continue to experience retention challenges (Ellett et al., 2003; McAuliffe et al., 2013; Mitchell, Holtom & Lee, 2001).

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Literature regarding the impact of supportive supervisory practices (SSP) on staff retention in the nonprofit sector is very limited (Salamon & Sokolowski, 2005; Salamon et al., 2012; Warren, 2008). The focus of this chapter is to summarize what is known from the literature about this subject as well as the broader knowledge base around supportive supervision and staff retention.

This review of existing literature regarding supportive supervisory practices and staff retention will be divided into two primary parts. First, an overview of the nonprofit sector followed by an examination of retention literature regarding (1) existing general research of staff retention, and (2) more specifically, retention in the nonprofit sector. Secondly, an assessment of supportive supervision that will include (1) a review of how it is defined, (2) supportive supervisory practices, and (3) the role of supervision on nonprofit staff retention.

Before moving forward, it is necessary to clarify that although the literature on staff retention, and retention in general have broad bodies of work, the availability of data for research specific to the nonprofit sector is minimal by comparison (Bielefeld, 2000; Salamon & Sokolowski, 2005; Salamon et al., 2012). Literature regarding broader topics like supportive organizational structures, human resource management policies, the application of motivational theories, how employee burnout may influence retention, external influences, or the pressures of family on staff retention will not be highlighted in this study.

Nonprofits

Organizations that comprise the United States (U.S.) nonprofit sector are diverse and can vary greatly from one another in scope of purpose, size, and other characteristics. Nonprofits (NP) can be church-based soup kitchens, cultural arts centers, hospitals, or human service providers. The term "nonprofit" as used by the federal government applies to all organizations with tax-exempt status (Sherlock & Gravelle, 2009; Worth, 2014).

One way of identifying a nonprofit organization (NPO) is by examining their federal tax-exempt status. The U.S. Office of Internal Revenue Service (IRS) lists approximately 30 varieties of organizations as tax-exempt (Sherlock & Gravelle, 2009). The largest nonprofit category listed by the IRS are organizations eligible under Internal Revenue Code 501(c) (3) for tax exempt status. They can be charities, religious organizations, hospitals, and educational institutions.

Nationally, nonprofit organizations play a critical part in the overall economy and workforce of the U.S. The role of NPOs as local employers has been gradually increasing over the last decade (Nonprofit HR, 2014; Salamon et al., 2012). In 2005, it was estimated that the total employment in the NP sector was 12.9 million workers or nearly 10% of the 132.4 million employees nationwide. In terms of nonprofit organizations' economic impact on the U.S., the 512,889 NPOs that filed IRS Form 990 (tax reporting document) for 2009 recorded a total of $1.4 trillion in revenue for that year (Sherlock & Gravelle, 2009). More recently, nonprofits accounted for 5.3% of the nation's gross domestic product in 2014 (National Center for Charitable Statistics, 2014).

According to a 2012 national study conducted by Salamon, Sokolowski, and Geller (2012), and released by The John's Hopkins Center for Civil Society Studies, three

service areas dominate the overall nonprofit sector with 10.7 million employees--health care, education, and social (human service) assistance. Combined they account for 84% of all nonprofit jobs. Over half (57%) of all nonprofit positions are in health care. Nonprofit hospitals hold the majority of these jobs employing 37% of all workers in this sector. Fifteen percent of nonprofit positions are in public and private educational services. Nonprofits that provide social or human service programs and support make up 13% of all the jobs in the sector (Salamon et al., 2012).

In some states this has meant that nonprofits are relied upon and considered a major source for jobs. Nonprofit sector jobs, unlike many others, are found in urban, suburban, and rural communities throughout the country. The highest concentration of these jobs is found in the northeastern U.S. where it is estimated that in the New England region nonprofits provide up to 13% of private employment followed by the mid-Atlantic States with a little over 12% (Salamon & Sokolowski, 2005; Salamon et al., 2012).

The overall growth of the nonprofit sector has depended on a variety of events, including the efforts that began in the 1980s toward the devolution of federal programs to state and local jurisdictions outsourcing the provision of many services to nonprofits by government at all levels. Also contributing to the development and expansion of NPOs was the healthy economy of the 1990s, which supported an 81% increase in the number of foundations created by wealthy individuals and a doubling of assets making funding more available to design nonprofit programs (Worth, 2014).

Retention

Given the large investments in employee retention efforts by organizations, this literature review included existing literature from various work sectors that focus

specifically on retention. While much of the retention literature reviewed for this study is about health care, for-profit, and corporate entities, in recent years the body of work focused on the HS sector has grown. Various qualitative and quantitative studies have been done in the public human services around personal and organizational factors and how they relate to staff retention (Chiller & Crisp, 2012; Ellett et al., 2007; Ewalt, 1991; Hamama, 2012; Jacquet et al., 2007). The results of this research primarily highlight broad workforce issues for agencies, particularly in human services organizations.

Child welfare (protective services) is one of the most complex and challenging subsections of the human service sector. As such, a considerable amount of research has focused on identifying and examining the reasons why staff (social workers or case managers) leave the profession. Human service public and nonprofit organizations, supervisors and workers are required to work with individuals and communities that frequently experience challenging situations which are more often than not, perceived as negative by the general public. The majority of their work is done in person or face-to-face. This requires that workers manage emotions and in many cases their beliefs. Supervisors and workers employed by human service nonprofits engage with people around treatment, counseling services, and many other confidential circumstances that are not always going to be predictable (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014a; Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014b).

These work related factors become more challenging for workers when supervisors and managers are not providing adequate support to staff. Without the supportive, proper involvement by supervisors, retention will then become a problem. Some of the evidence highlighted in the literature points to the lack of supervisory

support, high caseloads, and inadequate time to engage in training as a few of the factors contributing to limited staff commitment to these organizations (Telles-Rogers, Pasztor & Kleinpeter, 2003).

In an effort to address the challenges of poor retention rates which include the expenses associated with constantly recruiting and training new staff, some researchers are calling for organizations to recognize the importance of regular and supportive supervision (Chiller & Crisp, 2012).

Theorists and researchers have long studied retention in the for-profit and corporate sectors using assessments generally rooted in variations of organizational support (OS) or job satisfaction theory (Eisenberger et al., 2002; Griffin, Patterson & West, 2001). OS theory is most frequently applied by juxtaposing perceived supervisor support and perceived organizational support to assess staff perceptions about retention or intent to leave (Eisenberger et al., 2002; Lingard & Francis, 2006). Recognized as one of the major research frameworks in the study of supervisor-worker relationships, elements of OS have been found to be relatable to retention questions in the healthcare branch of the nonprofit employment sector (Marquez & Kean, 2002).

The healthcare and medical sectors have made major contributions to the study of staff retention over the years. Most of the research is concentrated around nonprofit medical organizations and nursing services. A recent multilevel analysis by McAuliffe et al. (2013) examined the direct engagement of workers through regular supervision meetings and found that when a supervisor facilitated feedback, identified development needs, and reinforced expectations and goals, staff reported feeling supported. These variables align with established nonprofit literature about retention and supportive

supervision. Further, other studies of the nursing profession determined that workers do not necessarily leave their organizations (hospitals); they generally leave because of their managers and supervisors. To mitigate retention issues, research findings indicated that leadership in the nursing job sector that promote positive perceptions, facilitate supportive activities, and work to enhance the work environment fostered retention (Riebelin, 2003).

The training and education of supervisors to lead and manage staff was also a factor in some of the literature. Inadequate preparation of supervisors and managers to engage subordinates is not supportive or good management practice (Riggs & Rantz, 2001).   Relatedly, the coaching abilities of supervisors have been cited as important for the retention of staff. Supervisors and managers that display helpful attitudes, make efforts to develop others, have empathy, and are open to learning and receiving feedback are identified in some research as effective coaches (Ellinger, 2013). The assumption is that employee or worker retention is improved when supervisors display the previously mentioned effective coaching characteristics.

Other research regarding HS workers and retention found that there was a negative correlation between bad work related experiences, resistant clients, negative community reactions, or failed outcomes to retention (Ellett et al., 2007). The significance and challenges raised by results like these is critical as the human service sector is being required to maintain and in some cases increase their support or involvement with individuals and communities without expectations for increased funding or resources (Jacquet et al., 2007; Kim & Lee, 2007).

Human service careers inherently bring with them retention issues that may impact a worker emotionally or psychologically. Research points out that the personal aspect of the work outweighs compensation related issues when it comes to staff and worker retention (Shanock & Eisenberger, 2006; Sheridan, 1992; Zeni et al., 2013). An important point to highlight here is that any supportive retention approaches that are developed and applied in the human service sector to minimize the negative personal impacts of the work will require the involvement of supervisors.

Sheridan (1992) established a foundation for the various studies related to the broader organizational culture and the retention of employees like those cited earlier. Specifically, it was the research focusing on specific cultural values to determine if they supported an organization's ability to retain their most productive workers. This has parallels across work sectors and disciplines in terms of the amount of influence the organizational culture has on its employees and their intentions to remain or leave (Sheridan, 1992). While the organization has some influence, more recent studies have determined that personal factors can be more important to a worker. Similarly, other research studies frame the organizational environment and culture discussion around retention with the personal factor of respect. Specifically referring to the level of respect found in an organization as important as the ability of workers to advocate and find support from supervisors and their colleges (Ramalall, 2003).

Personal factors play a major role in the research reviewed. In addition, a worker's experience and education can be highly impactful when they are considering decisions about continued employment with some types of human service organizations.

However, supervision and supervisory influences regarding professional development and education have to be further explored and measured (Holochwost et al., 2009).

The for-profit and corporate sectors have well developed professional and educational development tracks. On the nonprofit side it is highly dependent on the size of the organization, budgetary commitments or funding streams, and the priorities of senior leadership. Supervisor or manager encouragement and support of workers seeking professional development and training is important; however, without broader organizational support, there may be little impact on retention (Ban et al., 2003; Messmer, 2006).

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Nonprofit Retention

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The available information on nonprofit (NP) retention indicates that the sector experiences on average, an estimated turnover rate of 20% of their line staff annually (Nonprofit HR, 2014; Westbrook, Ellis & Ellett, 2006).

To prepare for the recruitment and more importantly for the retention of qualified employees, boards of directors, senior executives, program managers, and supervisors in the NP sector must consider issues likely to affect the availability and broad demographics of potential new hires. These are critical considerations for NPOs because the quality of staff is their most significant characteristic (Ewalt, 1991).

Staff turnover or the challenge of worker retention is a management problem that has serious implications for NPOs nationally. The departure of qualified staff can take a financial toll on a nonprofit organization as a whole but operationally recruitment,

training, morale, and service effectiveness can be negatively impacted (Kim & Lee, 2007; Mitchell et al., 2001).

As major employers of just over 10% of the U.S. workforce, nonprofits face competition from the for-profit and public sectors for workers (Nonprofit HR, 2014). Enhancing staff and worker management practices based on the supportive supervision approach would make NPO retention less challenging and more cost effective in the long-run (Ban et al., 2003; Hannay & Northam, 2000; Kim & Lee, 2007).

The direct costs of employee departures or negative retention to nonprofits can include advertising, human resource staff time, and potentially overtime pay to compensate remaining staff with increased workloads. When an employee leaves, it costs NPOs anywhere from $2,000.00 to $5,200.00 (Kim & Lee, 2007). These expenses reduce resources that may be used to improve services or support other staff. There are indirect costs that nonprofit agencies must absorb when staff leave. Administrative, induction and training associated with service delivery, and the loss of experience are considered examples of indirect costs (Colton & Roberts, 2007).

Supervisors have been directly linked to whether or not NP workers decide to remain in their positions. For example, when supervisors provide support to specially trained workers, retention has been shown to be enhanced in sectors of the human services where studies have been conducted. Conversely, the lack of support to workers by supervisors can negatively impact retention (Jacquet et al., 2007).

While not all retention issues are perceived as damaging, any staff departure can create challenges. However, when staff that have negative attitudes or are performing less

than satisfactorily leave, it is widely seen as an opportunity to bring in new skills or a fresh perspective to the organization (Ban et al., 2003).

Nonprofits provide a wide range of services in communities. To be effective and remain relevant, nonprofit senior leadership is tasked to ensure that the supervisor-staff relationship is strong. Supervisors that develop partnerships with staff foster greater effectiveness and organizational stability (Duffield et al., 2010; Ellinger, 2013; Garubo & Rothstein, 1998).

The available literature points out that nonprofits consistently face the challenge of retaining line staff and workers (Ewalt, 1991; NonprofitHR, 2014; Salamon & Lessans-Geller, 2007). It is even more challenging for human service nonprofits. Human service nonprofits provide services to individuals and communities that frequently experience challenging situations looked upon by the general public as negative. Supervisors and workers employed by social service nonprofits engage with people around treatment, counseling services, and many other personal circumstances that are not always going to be predictable (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014a; Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014b).

Organizational issues such as salaries, administrative policies, the lack of decision-making authority, and stress have been cited in research studies as additional factors that contribute to the general issue of retention and staff decisions about whether to remain with an employer (Eisenberger et al., 2002; Ellett et al., 2007). However, very few of these studies have focused exclusively on retention in the nonprofit sector. Fewer still are those that have examined supervisory practices in these organizations and how they may influence employee decisions to leave. However, various studies reviewed

regarding an array of supervisory practices have been done over the years in corporate, for-profit, and to a lesser extent, public sector organizations around supervision and its effects on staff retention (Hannay & Northam, 2000; Holochworst et al., 2009; Jacquet et al., 2007).

Although aspects of the supervisor-staff relationship are evident in the existing body of work related to staff retention, the factors related to supportive supervisory practice are not a specified value. Based on what can be characterized as broad agreement among scholars in health care, education, business, and public human services, some conclusions can be made regarding supervisor–staff relationships. Several studies indicate that supervisors and managers have a direct impact not only on the retention of staff but also on a worker's overall success and professional development (Colton & Roberts, 2007; Duffield et al., 2010; Ellett et al., 2007). Additionally, there is some consensus that an employee's sense of value to an organization is dependent on the skills of their direct supervisors or managers (Eisenberger et al., 2002; Lapierre & Allen, 2006; Sheridan, 1992).

Supportive Supervision

Supervision as a worker management tool has evolved in response to the increased emphasis on quality, process, and systemic issues. The concept of supportive supervision is an approach to management that employs joint problem-solving and goal setting, empathy, mentoring, and professional two-way communication between supervisors and their staff or workers (Marquez & Kean, 2002).

Literature about supportive supervisory practice (SSP) emphasizes that for these practices to be effective, organizations have to create a management and engagement

framework that supports respectful and regular professional dialogue between supervisors and those they manage (Ellinger, 2013; Garubo & Rothstein, 1998; Marquez & Kean, 2002). Other aspects of SSP include the use of periodic self-assessments, peer assessments, community input, and customer or client feedback in determining if the management of staff, programs, and services is effective in achieving desired outcomes (Marquez & Kean, 2002).

What is less clear in existing research is how SSP factors impact the nonprofit sector. The importance of a supervisor's role and how they engage with staff and the implications to retention for nonprofits needs further exploration. This study will review how perceived supportive supervisory practices are impacting staff retention at a mid-Atlantic human service NPO.

Supportive supervision as a staff or worker management approach draws on a variety of perspectives and theories that address the supervisor-worker relationship. The researcher observed in the literature that elements of corporate organizational support theory--perceptions of supervisor support (Eisenberger et al., 2002; Loi, Hang-yue & Foley, 2006; Maertz, Griffeth, Campbell & Allen, 2007) and managerial coaching concepts (Ban et al., 2003; Ellinger, 2013) -inform the supportive supervision methodology studied and promoted in healthcare (Duffield et al., 2010; McAuliffe et al., 2013; Marquez & Kean, 2002), and to a lesser extent education (Garubo & Rothstein, 1998).

In the present study, supportive supervision is described as an active and engaging set of management practices whereby staff and workers are made to feel they are cared about and part of the decision-making process (Chiller & Crisp, 2012; Garubo &

Rothstein, 1998; Marquez & Kean, 2002). A more operationally specific definition would frame supportive supervision as the intent of the supervisor to foster positive outcomes through better communications, problem-solving, teamwork, leadership, and support (Ellett et al., 2003; Marquez & Kean, 2002).

As a staff or worker management approach, supportive supervision goes further than what have traditionally been identified as the four basic duties of a supervisor. These duties are referred to in the literature as setting expectations, monitoring and assessing performance, identifying problems and opportunities, and taking action (Duffield et al., 2010; Garubo & Rothstein, 1998; Marquez & Kean, 2002).

Supportive Supervisory Practice

As stated earlier, further review of supportive supervision revealed that related practices are frequently found, and to varying degrees studied, in the health care, educational, and public human service sector literature. However, as the literature review revealed, these practices are rarely examined in nonprofit research. The shortage of research in this area is attributed in some of the research to a historic lack of reliable source data and information outside of varied descriptive employment reporting required by entities like state labor departments or the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics (Bielefeld, 2000; Salaman & Sokolowsi, 2005; Warren, 2008).

The majority of available literature tends to focus on the personal traits or specific attributes of supervisors. A good example would be a recent study by Paustian-Underdahl et al. (2013a), which suggested that the determination of whether a supervisor was highly supportive (of staff) or not, could be predicted by a particular set of personal traits. The study found that supervisors perceived to be warm, approachable, and more involved in

external professional organizations and social groups were specifically associated with being more supportive (Paustian-Underdahl et al., 2013a). Another study focused on examining examples of HS supervisors' supportive attributes which included expressions of genuine interest in the well-being of workers, the ability to listen to workers experiencing difficulties, and a willingness to share personal professional experiences and examples through informal mentoring or coaching (Westbrook et al., 2006). These lines of investigation are important but do not address the gaps in the nonprofit sector or supportive supervisory practice.

Supportive supervisory practice is rarely listed as a primary factor in research literature hypotheses. The majority of the supervision research reviewed for this study included common aspects of SSP in surveys, focus group responses, or empirical studies' concluding commentary. The researcher observed in the retention literature that regardless of the research hypothesis or methodology applied, a form of supervisory support of workers or workers' needs to feel supported by their supervisors had been referenced or identified in the literature as significant to retention (Ellett et al., 2007; Hamama, 2012; Landsman, 2007; Vandenberghe & Bentein, 2009; Wayne, Shore, & Liden, 1997).

Role of Supervisors

As stated earlier, the prevailing consensus in the literature, no matter what aspect of supervision is being examined, is that supervisors as leaders play a unique and pivotal role in organizations, particularly when it comes to staff and worker self-perceptions about their jobs and performance (Ewalt, 1991; Kim & Lee, 2007; Salamon & Lessans-Geller, 2007). A common finding in the literature reviewed highlights the impact of

supervisors' actions on these worker perceptions. Leadership implies that there are followers. Elpers and Westhuis (2008) suggested that a constructive relationship between supervisors and those they lead can have a positive impact on productivity, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment in general. In addition, they posit that emphasizing customer satisfaction, team building, organizational communication, and staff training would require that supervisors engage employee rather than just managing them.

Research also indicates that in the workplace, staff develop opinions concerning the degree to which their contributions are valued by the organization and their well-being based on how they perceive the actions of supervisors and managers (Eisenberger et al., 2002; Ellett et al., 2007; Griffin et al., 2001). Tangentially, another aspect of the supervisor's role described by the literature that is particularly relevant to this study examines the relationship between supervisors and an employee or worker's decision to stay or leave an organization (Ewalt, 1991; Griffin et al., 2001; Hamama, 2012; Holochwost et al., 2009).

Studies have linked staff or worker retention and decisions to stay or leave to the degree of support they receive from their immediate supervisors as well as the organization. However, the lack of access to and support from supervisors has been cited as having a more significant effect on worker turnover across work sectors (Jacquet et al., 2007; Landsman, 2007; Lapierre & Allen, 2006; Maertz et al., 2007). Supervisors' accessibility and supportive behaviors make a difference in the stabilization of organizations where there is turnover by providing guidance and managing workloads for staff that remain (McAuliffe et al., 2013).

In terms of the relationship between perceived supervisor support (PSS) and worker turnover, research has found this relationship to be stronger when PSS was measured to be low (Lingard & Francis, 2006; Maertz, et al., 2007). These findings are reinforced in other literature where worker perceptions of supportive supervision are examined.

As part of their role, supervisors are expected to be able to effectively communicate and engage a variety of stakeholders both internally and externally (Westbrook et al, 2006). Supportive supervisors are effective communicators who model respectful engagement with staff and other managers or administrators (Marquez & Kean, 2002; Riggs & Rantz, 2001). Most positive or successful practices and behaviors ascribed to supportive supervisory approaches require direct engagement or communication with workers. The management and mitigation of unnecessary stress for workers or developing a personal understanding of each worker's strengths and weaknesses can be used as examples. While time consuming, these efforts facilitate other supervisory roles such as coaching or more formal training when necessary to support professional development which are also viewed as fostering retention (Ramlall, 2004; Ban et al., 2003).

One of the major challenges to the role of supervisors in human service organizations that has not been mentioned previously in this study relates to multiple responsibilities and accountabilities; doing more with less (Landsman, 2007). A supervisor may have multiple duties that go beyond their job description; however, they are most essential in their supportive role of workers (Kim & Lee, 2007; Marquez & Kean, 2002).

In general, the specific role a supervisor plays in the retention of human service staff has not been the primary focus of nonprofit studies reviewed; the supervisor has been referenced as a major influence on worker retention or decisions to stay by other HS sectors such as child welfare or child care (Colton & Roberts, 2007; Ellett et al., 2007; Ellinger, 2013; Lapierre & Allen, 2006).

Although few, there are some researchers that suggest the evidence that supportive supervisory practices correlate to worker retention is not definitive. Zeni et al. (2013) argued that supportive supervision was limited to increased worker satisfaction and work-life balance. They went on to state that retention was only impacted when workers had low degrees of self-efficacy.

Clearly, more research is needed to further assess a supervisor's impact on workers and the retention of those workers in the nonprofit human service sector. Ultimately, it is the role of nonprofit supervisors through their credibility, empathy, operational vision, knowledge, and support of their staff that have to ensure that services are provided and programs are managed (Duffield et al., 2010; Kim & Lee, 2007; Westbrook et al., 2006).

Summary

Retention in the nonprofit sector faces some of the same issues that are seen in public, for-profit, and corporate environments (Mitchell et al., 2001; Ramlall, 2003; Ribelin, 2003; Sheridan, 1992). The difference is that nonprofits are generally operating on more streamlined budgets and do not have the same regulatory constraints. However, this does not in any way diminish the expectations or demands made by the individuals and communities they serve. To some degree these expectations and demands are

magnified because the majority of NPOs are embedded within the service population (clients and customers).

Regardless of how programs or services are funded, supervisors are recognized as the link between organizational leadership, the workers, and in many cases the customers, clients or service populations. Qualitative and quantitative measures have been used to measure supervisory relationships across several employment sectors. The measures have focused on supervisors' responsibilities, traits and attributes, how they perceive themselves as supervisors, as well as how they are perceived by upper management and their subordinates or staff.

As the nonprofit employment sector grows, more will be expected of the individuals they employ. Nonprofits will also need to look at recruitment and retention efforts that will create continuity and reliability internally, but more importantly to ensure that services and programs are administered and delivered in the most appropriate and cost effective manner.

The key is the line supervisor and manager corps of the nonprofit and their ability to focus on supportive approaches to manage staff and workers (Garubo & Rothstein, 1998; Landsman, 2007; Marquez & Kean, 2002; Zeni et al., 2013). Having policies and enforceable operational guidelines in place that outline the supportive role of supervisors will establish a strong foundation for the retention of staff and foster a level of confidence with the community.

Supportive supervisory practices in the nonprofit sector have not been broadly studied. Some of the research regarding retention has shown a correlation between supportive supervision and management, and the retention of staff and workers.

Promoting continuous improvement, being accessible, fostering positive relationships, pursuing clear outcomes, encouraging open communications, and building team approaches to problem-solving are practices that define supportive supervision and foster retention.

Additional research of retention as it relates to supportive supervision in nonprofits is needed to create a new professional development framework for supervisors. Nonprofits have to be able compete with other employment sectors for a younger and more educated workforce that has different expectations of employers. To recruit and retain these jobseekers NPO supervisors have to be more engaged—supportive practices will be critical to ensure stability and competitiveness.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This quantitative study was designed to discover the impact that perceived supportive supervisory practices (SSP) have on the retention level of staff in a mid-Atlantic human service (HS) nonprofit. The study reviewed the relationship between nonprofit staff perceptions of SSP and retention, and examined the relationship between supervisory experience and perceived SSP. The research questions and the corresponding hypotheses that will be addressed by the study are stated as follows:

RQ1: What is the relationship between perceived supportive supervisory practice and the retention of staff in human service nonprofits?

> **Ho:** Perceived supervisory practice has a positive impact on the retention of staff in human service nonprofits.

> **Ha:** Perceived supervisory practice has no impact on the retention of staff in human service nonprofits.

RQ2: What is the relationship between key demographic variables and staff perceptions of supportive supervisory practice?

> **H2a:** There will be a relationship between job level and perceptions of supportive supervisory practice.

> **H2b:** There is a relationship between the full-time and part-time work status and on perceptions of supportive supervisory practice.

> **H2c:** There will be a relationship between the county where respondents work and perceptions of supportive supervisory practice.

Research Design

A quantitative exploratory cross-sectional analysis design was used for this study because the time dimension was not being analyzed and very little is found in existing research about the relationship between SSP and staff retention. In addition, no interventions were applied or introduced to the population (Agresti & Finlay, 1999; de Vaus, 2001).

The use of a quantitative study was best suited to studying the primary data collected from the population (see Population) by way of a reliable survey instrument (see Instrumentation) in an attempt to explain the relationships outlined in the research questions. This methodology also establishes researcher objectivity and mitigates researcher biases (O'Leary, 2014).

Population

The population for this study was comprised of employees (n=1,032) of a mid-Atlantic region human service agency. This population was distributed throughout a tri-county area and was categorized as full-time or part-time staff.

All levels of responsibility and accountability throughout the organization were represented. Included were: staff and workers that provided direct care or services, supervisors or managers that directly lead and or managed staff or workers, and directors or administrators in the organization that directly evaluated supervisors or managers.

Procedures

To create the distribution procedures for this study, the researcher had to coordinate with the agency's CEO and information technology (IT) office. The survey was sent to all staff on a date convenient to the agency.

An email that contained an explanation by the researcher of the study's purpose and the survey link was initially transmitted to all staff on August 17, 2015 with a reminder email from the CEO on August 26, 2015. Additionally, the CEO provided an email cover letter encouraging all staff to participate as the results would ultimately inform the agency regarding any possible improvements. Included in the initial email was information about the estimated time it would take to complete the survey (15 to 20 minutes) and details about an optional researcher sponsored incentive of gift cards for completing the survey. Lastly, the email outlined for potential respondents how their anonymity would be protected. On August 28, 2015 the survey was closed.

SurveyMonkey™, an online survey site was used to create and collect survey results. Direct access to the survey was given to respondents using a SurveyMonkey™ link provided in the email. Respondents also had the ability to open the survey from any computer. Only those individuals that responded to all of the questions in the three-part survey would become eligible for a chance to win one of the incentive gift cards. Those interested in the gift card incentives were asked to opt in.

Instrumentation

The survey instrument for this study, Supportive Supervision/Staff Retention survey (SSSR), was developed using constructs from an existing instrument called the Georgia Child Welfare Survey (GCWS). GCWS was a statewide survey that included demographic information and a variety of measures of self-reported, personal characteristics of respondents, the intentions to remain employed in the Georgia child welfare system, and respondent perceptions of organizational work related factors. According to Ellett et al. (2003), the GCWS survey measures were selected and adapted

because they were easy to use and had been refined in previous studies. In addition, these measures were grounded in important organizational and psychological theoretical research associated with social work (human service) worker turnover (Ellett et al., 2007).

Overall, the GCWS contained questions that focused on human service workers needing to make a series of reflective judgements about their professional experience with a public HS agency, supervisors, and their intention to leave or stay (Ellett et al., 2003). In addition, GCWS was deemed the best model for this study because of its relevance to the research questions as well as its reliability and validity. Another instrument used by Jacquet et al. (2007) was briefly considered as a model for this study due to the similarity of purpose--to assess human service worker retention. However, it was operationalized for a longitudinal (period of nine years) and mixed methods study and was rejected by the researcher.

The SSSR instrument used here was piloted with a comparable human service NPO in the mid-Atlantic region. In addition, two subject matter experts reviewed the instrument and made minor recommendations that were adopted.

To further ensure the reliability and validity of the SSSR survey, Cronbach alpha reliability coefficients were established. A Cronbach alpha measure establishes the degree of internal consistency between questions – are the questions measuring the same underlying construct. These coefficients can range from 0.00 to 1.00 with a Cronbach alpha of .70 being the minimum acceptable level used to indicate a strong survey instrument.

Five measures were adopted from the GCWS survey and used in this study with original alpha reliability measures that ranged from .73 - .94. Table 1 displays the specific measures for this study and their corresponding Cronbach alphas (α):

Table 1

Reliability Statistics

Measure	GCWS (α)	This Study (α)	Items in Subscale
*Quality of Supervision and Leadership	0.94	0.87	5
*Collegial Sharing and Support	0.87	0.86	5
*Professional Commitment	0.82	0.86	6
^Organizational and Job Characteristics	0.78	0.84	9
^Commitment and Professional Support	0.73	0.71	4

*Part II - Organizational Work Environment Factor Items
^Part III - Decision to Continue Employment Factor Items

Part I of the SSSP survey instrument collected relevant demographic information from respondents. Demographic items that were included in the survey are: county where the respondents worked, job level, gender, age, full or part time employee, race/ethnicity, highest level of education completed, number of staff supervised, the number of years they would remain at the agency, the number of meetings with their supervisor each week, and years of experience supervising or managing workers/staff.

Part II of the survey labeled the Organizational Work Environment (OWE) measure included Quality of Supervision and Leadership (QSL) and Collegial Sharing and Support (CSS) factors. The original 4-point Likert response scale was adopted which did not include a neutral response option. This part of the survey asked respondents to

make judgements about how they saw the staff in their OWE using the following 4-point scale: 1 = strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=agree, and 4=strongly agree. The last section of the survey, Part III, was labeled Decision to Continue Employment (DCE) and contained Professional Commitment (PC), Organizational and Job Characteristics (OJC), and Commitment and Professional Support (CPS) factors. To determine respondents' DCE they were asked to rate work-related factors that might contribute to their decision to stay with the organization using the following 4-point scale: 1= no contribution, 2=weak contribution, 3=moderate contribution, and 4=strong contribution.

Approval to adopt this instrument was obtained by the researcher from the primary author of the GCWS. Permission was granted to adapt and use any sections of the GCWS that the researcher thought relevant and appropriate to conduct this study (A. Ellett, personal communication, October 9, 2014; Ellett et al., 2003).

Data Collection

This study was initiated by distributing an online survey questionnaire to the staff a mid-Atlantic human service nonprofit agency. The agency welcomed the study and facilitated the electronic distribution of the survey to the staff.

A survey introduction memo from the researcher described the study and its purpose, and provided a direct web link to the survey that staff could access at their convenience from any computer. The agency CEO sent an email with an encouraging note with the researcher's memo attached to all staff. Additionally, an explanation assuring respondents that their anonymity and privacy would be protected was underscored to support a higher level of participation. The email also requested that agency staff complete the survey within 12 days.

To maximize the response rate and encourage greater participation, a follow-up email was sent at the beginning of the second week reminding agency staff of the survey. The email encouraged them to participate by completing the survey. Additionally, the researcher offered an incentive of a chance to win one of three gift cards.

Data Analysis

To better understand if there is a relationship between perceived supportive supervisory practice and the retention of staff, descriptive statistics from the survey results were used to summarize the data. The data collected with the survey instrument were analyzed using two organizational work environment (OWE) and three decisions to continue employment (DCE) sub-factors.

The DCE, or the staying factor, includes two sub-factors: commitment and professional support, and organizational and job characteristics. Staying factor survey responses were coded 1=no contribution, 2=weak contribution, 3=moderate contribution, and 4=strong contribution. The organizational work environment (OWE) factor includes three sub-factors: collegial sharing and support, quality of supervision and leadership, and professional commitment. Responses for OWE were coded 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=agree, and 4=strongly agree.

A variety of methods of statistical analysis were applied in this study to address the research questions using IBM's Statistical Package for the Social Sciences or SPSS. Inferential and descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data to make determinations about the research questions. Means (M) and standard deviations (SD) were calculated for each item and scale. Particular attention was given to constructs of supervisory practice and support that were perceived to influence means scores the most.

Additionally, linear regression analyses were used to determine if there were relationships between perceptions of supportive supervisory practices and staff retention. After the survey was closed, the data collected through SurveyMonkey™ was downloaded into an SPSS document. The researcher used the SPSS applications to analyze the data.

Limitations

In the design of this research study, there are several limiting factors that need to be highlighted. First, the population for this study was only representative of one human service nonprofit organization that provides direct services and support to individuals and families. Therefore, any findings or conclusions drawn from this study could not be generalized for all human service nonprofit organizations. Secondly, this study was only being conducted in a human service nonprofit organization that provides services and support to three counties within the mid-Atlantic region of the U.S. The findings and results should not be interpreted as representative of the entire human service nonprofit sector of the United States.

Organizational limitations were also present. Agency personnel reluctant to complete the survey may create a challenge to the overall response rate or missing data. The working environment, organizational culture, or other factors not taken into account and out of the researchers control may influence the total number of responses received.

Although these limitations exist, the study is important and valuable to the nonprofit human service sector. It adds to the very limited research and review of supportive supervision's role and impact on the retention of direct service workers and

staff in nonprofit agencies. Further studies on this topic would be informed by the research and help advance the nonprofit sector in general.

Summary

This chapter has provided a review of the methodology used in this quantitative study to assess the relationship between supportive supervision and the retention of staff in human service nonprofit agencies. The study was conducted in collaboration with the agency senior leadership. The study's survey was available to respondents for 12 days and closed on August 28, 2015. The results of the study will impact the development and improvement of supportive supervisory practices in the organization to support worker retention.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

This quantitative research study sought to make a contribution to the limited body of academic knowledge that will help to improve understanding of the intersection of supportive supervisory practices and the retention of staff in human service (HS) nonprofits (NP). It sought to determine whether perceived supportive supervisory practices combined with key demographic factors influenced the intentions of staff in a mid-Atlantic region human service nonprofit to stay. The research questions posed were as follows:

RQ1: What is the relationship between perceived supportive supervisory practice and the retention of staff in human service nonprofits?

RQ2: What is the relationship between key demographic variables and staff perceptions of supportive supervisory practice?

The research was conducted within a human service nonprofit organization using a survey instrument created in the SurveyMonkey™ online system. Data captured from the survey results are organized, analyzed, and presented through researcher narrative and the use of descriptive tables and charts. The two research questions are presented, analyzed, and tested. The chapter will present demographic information about the survey respondents, overall means, correlations, ANOVAs, and regression analyses will be summarized and presented, findings will be determined, and a summary will conclude this chapter.

Population Demographic Information

Part I of the survey requested demographic information from those that participated in this study. Table 2 presents a summary of respondents' demographic information. Shown in the table are the variable and questions, the number (n), and the percentage (%) of respondents for each category. Several variables will be highlighted based on their statistical or numerical values. Overall, the ages of the respondents were relatively evenly divided within the four subgroups which range from <=35 to 55+. There are several points' difference between the youngest grouping which was the largest at 25.9% and the 55+ group representing 20% of the respondents. More than 50% of respondents were under the age of 44. Of note, 7% of the respondents did not indicate their age which could mark a significant difference in the overall range.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics: Demographics of Respondents

Variable	Participants N=185*	%
Age of Respondents		
<= 35	48	25.9
36 - 44	46	24.9
45 - 54	41	22.2
55+	37	20.0
County		
County 1	34	18.4
County 2	116	62.7
County 3	34	18.4
Education Completed		
High School/GED	32	17.3
Undergraduate	71	38.4
Graduate	68	36.8
Other	13	7.0
Gender of Respondents		
Female	145	78.4
Male	39	21.1
Job Level		
Worker/Staff	139	75.1
Supervisor/Manager	31	16.8
Director/Administrator	14	7.6
Race and Ethnicity		
African American/Black (Non-Hispanic/Latino)	63	34.1
Caucasian/White (Non-Hispanic/Latino)	99	53.5
All Other	21	11.4
Remain with the Organization (Years)		
<= 4	47	25.4
5 - 10	62	33.5
11+	22	11.9
Work Status		
Full-time	163	88.1
Part -time	18	9.7

*Number and percentages may not equal 100% due to missing data.

An important fact identified in the table is the overwhelming concentration of respondents (62.7%) working in County 2 of the organization's tri-county area sites. Proportionally these results follow the overall U.S. Census population estimates which indicate that 59% of the population of this tri-county area live in County 2 (Census Bureau, 2015). Only a relatively small number of respondents indicated working in counties 1 and 3 of the NPO's service area (18.4% and 18.4% respectively). In terms of education, 36.8% have graduate degrees. This concentration is not uncommon in a human service organization as supervisors and managers generally have clinical oversight responsibilities for subordinate staff decision-making and practices. A graduate degree may be required for the position and may be a condition or prerequisite of state licensure, e.g., social work or behavioral and mental health services. Females comprised 78.4% of the total population (145), and males were 21.1% of the survey population (39). Overall the gender breakdown of respondents closely follows the national average. Nationally, females dominate the human service occupations by a 3 to 1 margin. The respondents in this organization represent a slightly higher percentage of females (9% >) than the national average (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015).

The largest number of respondents was comprised of individuals in worker or staff jobs (n=139 or 75.1%) followed by supervisors or managers at n=31 or 16.8%. Nationally, the supervisor to worker ratios in the human services can range from 1:5 to 1:15 depending on the program or service expectations. Respondents that identified as Caucasian/White represent the largest number of respondents at 53.5%. Respondents that identified as African American/Black are 34.1% of the population. Full-time work status respondents reflect 88.1% (163), and 9.7% (18) indicated they were part-time.

Survey respondents were also asked to indicate how long they planned to remain employed with the NPO. Of those that participated in the survey, 29.2% (54) did not respond to this question. The number of respondents indicating they planned to remain employed for 4 years or less was 47 (25.4%), for 5 to 10 years was 62 (33.5%), and twenty-two (22) of the survey respondents (11.9%) would remain with the organization for 11 years or more.

Of note in this study is the subgroup of 25.4% that indicated their anticipated tenure with the NPO would be 4 years or less. According to the some of the literature and research cited previously, on average, nonprofit HSOs that provide direct care or services can anticipate an annual 80% retention rate of workers and staff. Put another way, HSOs will need to plan for the recruitment, hiring and training 20% of their line or core workforce each year.

Mean Scores

Overall mean scores are displayed in Table 3. The mean scores are organized in descending order for sub-factors commitment and professional support, organizational and job characteristics, collegial sharing and support, quality of supervision and leadership, and professional commitment that were analyzed in this study. The decision to continue employment (DCE) or the staying factor includes sub-factors commitment and professional support, and organizational and job characteristics, which have the highest mean scores of 2.93 (.69) and 2.76 (.63) respectively. Staying factor survey responses were coded 1=no contribution, 2=weak contribution, 3=moderate contribution, and 4=strong contribution. The organizational work environment (OWE) factor includes sub-factors collegial sharing and support, quality of supervision and leadership, and professional commitment. Professional commitment displays the lowest mean score of all the sub-factor items at 2.62 (.67), which indicates the strongest

disagreement perceptions. Responses for OWE were coded 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=agree, and 4=strongly agree.

Table 3

Mean and Standard Deviations of Variables

Survey Factors	M	SD
Commitment and Professional Support	2.93	0.69
Organizational and Job Characteristics	2.76	0.63
Collegial Sharing and Support	2.76	0.71
Quality of Supervision and Leadership	2.63	0.76
Professional Commitment	2.62	0.67

Of particular importance to this study are the overall mean scores seen on Table 3. They reflect negative perceptions and responses that are related to disagree for OWE sub-factors or a weak contribution for DCE sub-factors. Additionally, there was no marked degree of variability reflected by the standard deviations (SD) among the respondents in terms of their perceptions of and responses to OWE or DCE factors. These results indicate that the research population (respondents) are homogeneous in their views of the questions posed by the researcher. In other words, there is very little difference in the respondents' general perceptions or answers to the research survey questions.

Statistical Analysis

The research survey responses will be explained in the following pages through various statistical analyses and in the context of the research questions and hypotheses.

Research Question 1

RQ1: What is the relationship between perceived supportive supervisory practice and the

retention of staff in human service nonprofits?

Finding: The results of the survey present evidence that the respondents' decisions to remain with the organization are primarily correlated with perceptions of commitment and professional support.

Data Analysis. As stated in Chapter 3, to better understand if there is a relationship between perceived supportive supervisory practice and the retention of staff, descriptive statistics from the survey results were used to summarize the data. The data collected with the survey instrument were analyzed using two organizational work environment (OWE) and three decision to continue employment (DCE) sub-factors.

Table 4 displays the mean scores of these values indicating plans to remain (in years) with the organization in descending order by survey sub-factor. In all response subsets, the DCE factor commitment and professional support had the highest mean score. This is a clear indication that for the NPO's staff, commitment and professional support is the work related factor that would most contribute to their decision to continue employment. Information about the organization's retention and turnover rates was not readily available for inclusion in this study. As stated earlier, literature regarding retention and turnover in the human services generally reflect the national average of 20% annually for the employee job level defined in this study as worker or staff.

Table 4

Plan to Remain with Organization in Years

Survey Factor	<= 4 (Yrs.) N=47		5 - 10 (Yrs.) N=62		11+ (Yrs.) N=22	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Commitment and Professional Support	2.77	0.76	2.97	0.58	3.14	0.77
Collegial Sharing and Support	2.62	0.61	2.97	0.65	2.86	0.64
Organizational and Job Characteristics	2.55	0.69	2.88	0.56	3.09	0.77
Quality of Supervision and Leadership	2.43	0.80	2.89	0.66	2.73	0.64
Professional Commitment	2.38	0.61	2.85	0.62	2.86	0.64

A Pearson Correlation was run to determine the strength and direction of any linear relationships between plan to remain and the five survey factors. The correlation coefficient can range from -1 to +1, with a -1 indicating a perfect negative correlation; conversely a +1 indicates a perfect positive correlation. A zero would signify that there is no correlation. Table 5 displays the correlation values for organizational and job characteristics (.312**), professional commitment (.253**), and professional support (.251**) which suggest that there is a weak linear relationship between these factors and respondents' plan to remain with the organization.

Table 5

Pearson Correlation: Plan to Remain with the Organization

Variable	R	SD
Organizational and Job Characteristics	0.312**	0.000
Professional Commitment	0.253**	0.004
Commitment and Professional Support	0.251**	0.004
Quality of Supervision and Leadership	0.171	0.051
Collegial Sharing and Support	0.131	0.137

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The Model Summary table (Table 6) below shows that the multiple correlation coefficient or R, using all the predictors is .374 with an unadjusted R^2 of .140, and the adjusted R^2 is .105, meaning that 10% of the variance in respondents plans to stay with the organization can be explained by the predictors used in the equation. This indicates that the results are not very meaningful.

Table 6

Plan to Remain with the Organization: Model Summary (Regression)

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.374ª	.140	.105	6.528

a. Predictors: (Constant), Commitment and Professional Support, Professional Commitment, Organizational and Job Characteristics, Quality of Supervision and Leadership, Collegial Sharing and Support

Additional analysis was done to determine how significantly each variable is contributing to the predictability of a respondents plan to remain with the organization when compared to other predictors. The coefficients displayed in Table 7 for this study indicate that of the predictors, professional commitment and organizational and job characteristics displayed the highest significance standardized coefficients .265 and .228 respectively. These figures indicate that with improvements in professional commitment and organizational and job characteristics, the organization would see an increase of six Months' retention.

Table 7

Coefficients[a]

		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
Model		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	-5.359	3.368		-1.591	.114
	Quality of Supervision and Leadership	-.026	1.143	-.003	-.023	.982
	Collegial Sharing and Support	-1.527	1.404	-.150	-1.088	.279
	Professional Commitment	2.769	1.273	.265	2.176	.031
	Organizational and Job Characteristics	2.549	1.166	.228	2.187	.031
	Commitment and Professional Support	.918	1.090	.089	.842	.401

a. Dependent Variable: You plan to remain with the agency/organization for how many more years?

Based on the various analyses, the survey data results for RQ1 present evidence that the respondents' decisions to remain with the organization are primarily correlated with perceptions of commitment and professional support.

Research Question 2

RQ 2: What is the relationship between key variables and staff perceptions of supportive supervisory practice?

Findings: The research survey results indicate no significant variations or differences among the three key variables: job level, full-time or part-time work status, and the county where respondents work. Research results confirm a homogeneous population in terms of their perceptions and responses to the research questions.

Data Analysis. The demographic variables were analyzed using T-tests, ANOVA, and Regressions yielding no significant results. Mean and standard deviation tables for RQ2 have been included and explained.

To further understand perceptions of supportive supervision and leadership, the demographic variable job level is analyzed. The mean scores were tabulated and displayed in Table 8. A mean score is derived for the quality of supervision and leadership survey factor based on respondents' job level. The worker and staff is the lowest at 2.56 (.75), supervisors and managers followed with a mean score of 2.84 (73), and the mean score of 2.86 (.77) for director or administrator is the highest. These results indicate that in terms of the OWE, there is general disagreement or negative perceptions of the specific elements that comprise sub-factor quality of supervision and leadership. The sub-factor elements are: (1) supervisors/managers are willing to help them when problems arise; (2) view leadership roles as shared; (3) find that supervisors/managers allow them professional autonomy to make decisions in and about their work; (4) find supervisors/managers make time to mentor new employees; and (5) find that encouragement is provided for those who are furthering their formal education.

Table 8

Mean and Standard Deviation: Quality of Supervision and Leadership

Variable	*W/S*	*N=139*	*S/M*	*N=31*	*D/A*	*N=14*
	M	SD	*M*	*SD*	M	SD
Quality of Supervision and Leadership	2.56	0.75	2.84	0.73	2.86	0.77

W/S = Worker/Staff, S/M= Supervisor/Manager, and D/A=Direct/Administrator

Table 9 displays work status mean scores for all survey sub-factors. Full-time and part-time respondents' highest mean scores were again for OWE sub-factor commitment and professional support. Professional commitment scored the lowest at 2.63 with full-time respondents while quality of supervision and leadership was lowest for part-time respondents (2.39). No significant variations were observed base on respondents' work status.

Table 9

Mean and Standard Deviations: Work Status

Variable	*Full-time*	*N=163*	*Part -time*	*N=18*
	M	SD	M	SD
Commitment and Professional Support	2.93	0.71	2.89	0.58
Organizational and Job Characteristics	2.78	0.63	2.67	0.49
Collegial Sharing and Support	2.78	0.70	2.72	0.67
Quality of Supervision and Leadership	2.67	0.75	2.39	0.70
Professional Commitment	2.63	0.68	2.61	0.50

A review of the county data found in Table 10 reflects mean scores based on the geographic work location of the respondents. The highest mean is reflected in each county for DCE survey sub-factor commitment and professional support being the highest with professional commitment being the lowest for all three counties. Respondents showed no notable differentiation in their perceptions based on the county where the work.

Table 10

Mean and Standard Deviations: County

Variable	County 1 N=34		County 2 N=116		County 3 N=34	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Commitment and Professional Support	2.94	0.66	2.94	0.71	2.88	0.65
Collegial Sharing and Support	2.79	0.73	2.75	0.74	2.76	0.61
Organizational and Job Characteristics	2.76	0.61	2.8	0.66	2.64	0.55
Quality of Supervision and Leadership	2.62	0.85	2.66	0.77	2.53	0.61
Professional Commitment	2.62	0.65	2.64	0.72	2.53	0.51

Summary

The data collected from the survey instrument provide evidence that for the human service nonprofit organization studied there is a relationship, albeit weak, between respondents' plans to remain with the organization and the following three variables (sub-factors): organizational and job characteristics, professional commitment, and commitment and professional support. These sub-factors represent survey questions related to the degree of supervisory or organizational leadership mentoring and support, the degree of commitment to the field of work, interpersonal relationships with colleagues, and the quality of mentoring and professional support by supervisors and organizational leadership. Each of these questions relate specifically to components of supportive supervisory practice.

Perhaps the most significant finding to come from the data analysis is the strong homogeneity of the survey population. It was surprising that the overall research survey results indicated no significant variations or differences among the respondents' perceptions or intentions. It made little difference on the significance of the research results that a cross-section of all employees was represented in the survey.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The primary purpose of this study was to determine if there was a correlation between supportive supervisory practice and the retention of workers at a mid-Atlantic region human service nonprofit organization. It was theorized by the researcher that supportive supervisory practices could be shown to be an important factor when workers make decisions to stay employed with the organization. This was examined using key-work related factors that might contribute to a worker's decision to continue employment with the organization. These factors were categorized as decision to continue employment (DCE) and included commitment and professional support, and organizational and job characteristics. Organizational work environment (OWE) factors were also taken into account specifically attributed to collegial sharing and support, the quality of supervision, and professional commitment as the predictors of improved retention. Additionally, this study sought to determine the relationship of supportive supervision when examined thought the lens of three specific demographic factors within the human service nonprofit (job level, full or part-time employment, and the county where respondents perform their job).

Summary

Research reviewed for this study has linked staff retention or worker decisions to stay with an organization to the degree of support they receive from their immediate supervisors and the organization. The lack of access to and support from supervisors has been cited as having a more significant effect on worker turnover across work sectors (Ellett et al., 2003; Jacquet et al., 2007; Landsman, 2007; Lapierre & Allen, 2006; Maertz et al., 2007).

In terms of the nonprofit sector and worker retention, there is a need by leadership to recognize that managing retention using supportive supervision as operating principle can have a positive impact on retention and recruitment (Hannay & Northam, 2000). Supportive shifts in supervisory expectations have been identified as powerful counterbalances to lower salaries which are common in many NPOs, and highlighted as fostering retention (Ewalt, 1991). Much of the literature reviewed for this study points to staff feeling supported by supervisors and managers and empowerment to make professional decisions as major factors that make retention less of a concern for nonprofits (Kim & Lee, 2007; The Nonprofit Times, 2012).

The population for this study was comprised of employees (n=1,032) at all levels of responsibility and accountability in a mid-Atlantic region human service agency. This population was distributed throughout a tri-county area and was categorized as full-time or part-time staff. They were comprised of staff and workers that provided direct care or services, supervisors or managers that directly led and or managed staff or workers, and directors or administrators in the organization that evaluated supervisors or managers.

This study sought to contribute to the empirical research concerning perceptions of supportive supervision and retention in human service nonprofit organizations. Due to the lack of information about the nonprofit sector, no comparable studies had been found by the researcher during the literature review regarding the relationship between supportive supervisory practices and worker retention (Salamon & Sokolowski, 2005). Further, there has been no relatable research that measured the relationship of key demographic variables and perceptions of supportive supervision within the human service nonprofit sector. Results highlighted in Chapter 4 are discussed in this chapter, including an analysis of the research findings by research question. In addition, this chapter will also discuss the overall implications and

recommendations, address limitations, present areas for future research, and summarize the study.

Findings and Conclusions

Overall mean score results displayed the decision to continue employment (DCE) or the staying factors as having the highest mean scores of 2.93 (.69) and 2.76 (.63), respectively. The organizational work environment (OWE) factors professional commitment as having the lowest mean score of all the tested items at 2.62 (.67). Overall, the study results indicated broad disagreement with the OWE or weak contributions by DCE work-related factors on respondents' decisions to remain with the organization.

In addition to reflecting consistently negative perceptions and responses, Table 3 also shows that there is no marked degree of variability reflected by the standard deviations (SD) among the respondents in terms of their perceptions of and responses to OWE or DCE factors. These results indicate that the research population is homogeneous in their views of the questions posed by the researcher. There is very little difference in the respondents' general perceptions or answers to the research survey questions.

Research Question 1

What is the relationship between perceived supportive supervisory practice and the retention of staff in a human service nonprofit?

This research question was used to determine if there was a direct correlation between a worker's perceptions of supportive supervisory practices (SSP) and their intentions to remain employed with the organization. Table 4 displayed the mean and standard deviation score results for values indicating plans to remain (in years) with the organization. In all response subsets, the

DCE factor commitment and professional support had the highest mean scores. This is a clear indication that for those that participated in the study, commitment and professional support was the work related factor that would most contribute to their decision to continue employment.

To further explore research finding other analyses were used. A Pearson-*r* analysis was computed with the results (Table 5) showing plans to remain with the organization was weakly associated with organizational and job characteristics ($r = .312$, $p < .01$), professional commitment ($r = .253$, $p < .01$), and commitment and professional support ($r = .251$, $p < .01$).

The results of the regression analysis displayed on Table 6 showed that the multiple correlation coefficient or R, using all the predictors is .374 with an unadjusted R^2 of .140, and the adjusted R^2 is .105, meaning that 10% of the variance in respondents plans to stay with the organization can be explained by the predictors used in the equation. The researcher determined that these results are not very meaningful. Further, the coefficients displayed on Table 7 indicated that of the predictors, professional commitment, and organizational and job characteristics displayed the highest significance standardized coefficients .265 and .228 respectively. These results indicated to the researcher that if the organization realized improvements in professional commitment, and organizational and job characteristics, they would see an increase of approximately six months in retention.

The researcher believed that supportive supervisory practices as framed by Duffield et al. (2010), Loi et al. (2006), and Marquez and Kean (2002), would be significantly correlated to workers' intentions to remain employed with the organization. However, the results of this study led the researcher to conclude that based the responses of the 185 study participants, there was only a weak correlation found for three variables. No other substantive relationships were found in the RQ1 results.

Research Question 2

What is the relationship between key demographic variables and perceptions of supportive supervisory practice?

The three demographic variables for RQ2 were analyzed using T-tests, ANOVA, and regressions yielding no significant results for the study population. Mean and standard deviation tables are analyzed and explained.

The mean and standard deviation scores for the first demographic variable, job level were displayed in Table 8. Mean scores were derived for the quality of supervision and leadership survey factor based on respondents' job level. The worker and staff is the lowest at 2.56 (.75), supervisors and managers followed with a mean score of 2.84 (73), and the mean score of 2.86 (.77) for director or administrator is the highest. These results indicate that in terms of the OWE, there is general disagreement or there are consistently negative perceptions of the specific quality of supervision and leadership questions posed by the researcher in the survey instrument. The quality of supervision questions related specifically to supervisors' willingness to help when problems arise, view leadership roles as shared, find supervisors allow professional autonomy to make decisions about their work, find supervisors make time to mentor new employees, and find that encouragement is provided for those who are furthering their formal education.

The researcher had anticipated that at a minimum, the responses from supervisory or leadership level respondents would have been more significant in terms of their agreement with the existing quality of supervision and leadership in the organization. The fact that the mean and standard deviation results fall closely in line with the workers is troubling since this relates

directly to supervisory and leadership perceptions of their peers and how they perceive their own roles within the organization.

Work status was the second key demographic variable examined for RQ2. The mean scores for full-time and part-time respondents' showed the highest mean scores were again for OWE sub-factor commitment and professional support. Professional commitment scored the lowest at 2.63 with full-time respondents while quality of supervision and leadership was lowest for part-time respondents (2.39). There were no observed significant variations based on respondents' work status.

Lastly, the third variable examined was the county data which reflected mean and standard deviation scores based on the geographic work location of the respondents. The highest mean score for counties 1 (2.94), 2 (2.94), and 3 (2.88) were for DCE survey sub-factor commitment and professional support with professional commitment being the lowest for all three counties. Respondents showed no notable differentiation in their perceptions based on the county where the work.

The research survey results for RQ2 indicate no significant variations or differences among the three key variables: job level, full-time or part-time work status, and the county where respondents work. Research results confirm a homogeneous population in terms of their perceptions and responses to the research questions.

Implications and Applications

Although this study did not find a significant correlation between supportive supervisory practices and the retention of staff at this HS nonprofit organization, there are several relevant implications to the human service nonprofit sector. This study establishes a baseline platform for further research and discussion around human service nonprofit management or the role of

supervisors in these organizations. The study also expands existing knowledge about the impact of supervisory practices on worker retention. In addition, the necessity to further review existing supervisor development and training curriculum and training programs is highlighted.

Recommendations

Based on the researcher's experience and the results of this study, two recommendations will be outlined for the mid-Atlantic nonprofit organization that is the subject of this study. First and foremost, it would be beneficial to conduct a comprehensive review of existing supervisor training and development programs, objectives, and processes. This would establish a solid baseline for the organization and highlight their strengths as well as any weaknesses that may need attention. Supervisors and managers should be part of this process.

It is important to engage supervisors in this effort so they are made to feel supported and part of the solution, and are able to knowledgeably translate these efforts for their workers. As Shanock and Eisenberger (2006) found in their study, supervisors who feel supported by the organization will in turn be more supportive of their workers. This will benefit the organization with improved retention of workers as stated by Jacquet et al. (2007) and Messmer, (2006), who argue that retention challenges are minimized when employees feel valued, engaged, and supported would be helpful to establish a baseline for possible improvements.

Secondly, conducting an organizational or employee climate assessment at least biennially would be beneficial to help review progress on improvements or new initiatives, or to understand the health of the organizational culture. These assessments are generally designed to provide a picture of an organization's needs or progress. The assessment or survey can also be used to solicit employee feedback on a variety of issues such as the organization's success in

communicating its mission to employees, or local issues such as quality of the working environment. The best way to assess the effectiveness of leadership in relation to how it impacts their workers or staff is to understand it from their perspective and not from leader self-evaluation (Elpers & Westhuis, 2008).

Limitations

This study is limited by several factors. First, it was only conducted in one type of human service nonprofit organization. The organizational selection was limited to the mid-Atlantic region. The results may not be generalized or be cited as representative of all human service nonprofits. In 2009, the IRS recorded that the U.S. had over 512,000 NPOs (Sherlock & Gravelle, 2009). Second, elements of the study design and survey instrument were limiting. As a cross-sectional research design, this study is limited in its ability to demonstrate causation by the researchers' ability to control for confounding variables (de Vaus, 2010). Variables such as staff reluctance to participate in the survey or other factors outside the control of the researcher (e.g., the working environment or organizational culture) may have contributed to the limitations.

Future Research

Additional research opportunities may take several forms. The following are a few possibilities: (a) conduct a national study of human service nonprofits. Consult and collaborate with state, regional, and national nonprofit advocacy organizations like The Child Welfare League of America or the Delaware Alliance for Nonprofit Advancement. (b) Repeat the current study and broaden the scope to include several human service NPOs in the mid-Atlantic region. (c) Use a mixed-methods research design that would include client or customer input related to their interactions with supervisors and workers. (d) Conduct a longitudinal study that

incorporates a supervisory training and development intervention. (e) Finally, study nonprofit supervisors' and managers' perceptions of leadership and supervision, and its relationship to worker retention.

Summary

The purpose of this quantitative exploratory cross-sectional analysis was to determine if there was a correlation between supportive supervisory practices, retention, and three key demographic factors. Adapted Georgia Child Welfare Survey factors (DCE & OWE) were used to structure the research instrument and collect the data for analysis.

The results of this study did not yield any significant relationships. There was a weak relationship between supervisors' supportive engagement with staff and retention. This study indicated that elements of supportive supervisory practice embedded in the survey rated higher in helping to determine a worker's intention to remain with the organization. Also, this study supports previous findings that highlight the importance of supervisors in positive staff perceptions.

The homogeneity of the population could be the explanation for the lack of any significant relationships in the research results. However, the results did create additional questions regarding the need to further examine supervisory practices in the human service nonprofit organization. There was significance in the fact that the population, regardless of their demographic identification, aligned in their overall negative perceptions.

Final Thoughts

Staff retention should not be an issue that is treated lightly, particularly when some human service nonprofits are specialized. This means that the potential employee pool is smaller and onboarding costs may increase due to the likelihood that the organization will need to hire individuals new to their mission. If staff retention is a problem based on worker perceptions of supervisors, managers, and the organization as a whole, it has to be addressed holistically. This means that everyone becomes part of the solution or fix.

This should be a particular concern for nonprofits that do not have cash reserves or endowments but rely primarily on donations, on grant and contract funding. The trouble with retention issues is that word of mouth travels quickly and if there are chronic negative perceptions of the management of the organization, their reliability and relevance may be called into question. It is a necessity for nonprofits, particularly those that provide human services, to be critical of themselves, encourage thoughtful feedback, and to be responsive to the needs of their staff at all levels as well as their clients and customers. It is my hope that this study will provide a starting point for further research and the development of best practices for supportive supervision and management to mitigate retention losses by nonprofits.

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Appendix A

Survey Introduction

August 20, 2015

Dear Agency Employee,

I am a doctoral candidate at Wilmington University studying one aspect of the relationship between non-profit social service organizations' supervisors/managers and their workers/staff or direct reports. Your participation in this research will assist in determining the importance and impact that this relationship has on a large non-profit human service organization like (organization name). Your thoughtful and honest participation is important to creating a benchmark for the overall study and determining areas requiring further study.

Below, you will find a link to the survey which will be accessible from any computer that is internet enabled until **Friday, August 28th at 11:45 p.m.** Please complete the survey at your earliest convenience before then.

https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/SS-SRSurvey

Type or copy and paste the link above in your web browser address bar to open the survey. It will take approximately 15 to 20 minutes to accomplish. Be sure to read the instructions before selecting your responses. Your computer address and survey answers will not be linked, *your answers will be encrypted and listed anonymously* to protect your identity. Additionally, you will be accessing the survey through SurveyMonkey© data servers.

As an incentive, *three* gift cards each worth $25.00 will be randomly awarded to 3 individuals from the pool of those that complete the survey and opt in by entering their office address information on the last page of the survey. Your information *will not* be saved or filed and will not be associated with your responses to the survey. The gift cards will be hand-delivered to the office addresses at a later date.

Thank you in advance for your time and attention.

Sincerely,

Jorge Velázquez, MPA
Doctoral Candidate
Wilmington University, Delaware
jvela01445@wildcats.wilmu.edu

Appendix B

Survey Instrument

Supportive Supervision/Staff Retention

Part I - Demographic Variables

1. Select the county in which you perform you primary duties/work.

☐ County 1

☐ County 2

☐ County 3

2. Which of the following best describes your current job level?

○ Worker/Staff *(Is defined here as anyone (professional/paraprofessional) that provides direct care or services to clients and customers. This also includes clerical and administrative staff that do not supervise or manage other staff.)*

○ Supervisor/Manager *(Is defined here as anyone that directly leads and or manages workers/staff on a daily basis.)*

○ Director/Administrator *(Is defined here as anyone in the organizational leadership that directly leads and or evaluates supervisors/managers on a daily basis.)*

3. Select your current work status.

○ Full-time

○ Part -time

○ Other

4. What is your gender?

○ Female

○ Male

5. What is your age?

```
[                                    ]
```

6. Which of the following best describes your race/ethnicity?

⬭ African American/Black (Non-Hispanic/Latino)

⬭ Caucasian/White (Non-Hispanic/Latino)

⬭ Hispanic/Latino

⬭ Other

7. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

⬭ High School/GED

⬭ Undergraduate

⬭ Graduate

⬭ Other

8. You plan to remain with the agency/organization for how many more years?

```
[                                    ]
```

9. How many times each week do you meet with your direct supervisor/manager/rater? (NOTE: If you are a Worker/Staff go to Part II after responding to this question. If you are a Director/Administrator skip to question 14 after responding to this question.)

⬭ 1

⬭ 2

⬭ 3

⬭ 4

⬭ 5

10. If you are Supervisor/Manager: how many workers/staff do you supervise?

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[                                    ]
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11. If you are a Supervisor/Manager: how many years of experience do you have leading/managing workers/staff?

[   ]

12. If you are a supervisor/manager, are you familiar with supportive supervisory/management practices?

⬜ Yes

◯ No

⬜ Not sure

13. If you are a supervisor/manager do you believe that you employ supportive supervisory/management practices with the workers/staff you supervise? (NOTE: Skip question 14.)

⬜ Always

⬜ Most of the time

⬜ Sometimes

⬜ Rarely

⬜ I am not familiar with "supportive supervisory/management practices".

14. If you are a Director/Administrator: how many managers/supervisors do you lead/evaluate?

[   ]

Supportive Supervision/Staff Retention

Part II - Organizational Work Environment

This part of the survey asks YOU to make judgments about how YOU see the staff in your organizational work environment. **<u>Instructions:</u>** Fill in the option that best reflects the extent to

which YOU personally agree or disagree with each statement. Each statement is preceded by **"In this agency/organization, workers and staff..."**

15. ...find that their supervisors/managers are willing to help them when problems arise.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
☐	○	○	☐

16. ...believe that they have a positive impact on the lives of most of their clients.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
○	○	○	○

17. ...cooperatively participate with supervisors/managers and organizational leadership to improve programs.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
☐	○	○	☐

18. ...cooperatively participate with supervisors/managers and organizational leadership to improve policies.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
☐	○	○	☐

19. ...are willing to provide support and assist one another when problems arise.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
☐	○	○	☐

20. ...view leadership roles as shared by staff/workers, supervisors/managers, and directors/administrators.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
☐	○	○	☐

21. ...find that supervisors/managers allow them professional autonomy to make decisions in and about their work.

Strongly Disagree   Disagree   Agree   Strongly Agree
○   ○   ○   ○

22. ...find that supervisors/managers and organizational leadership provide visible, ongoing support for creativity and ideas.

Strongly Disagree   Disagree   Agree   Strongly Agree
☐   ○   ○   ☐

23. ...find supervisors/managers make time to mentor new employees.

Strongly Disagree   Disagree   Agree   Strongly Agree
☐   ○   ○   ☐

24. ...feel comfortable with the assistance they receive from colleagues to enhance the quality of their work.

Strongly Disagree   Disagree   Agree   Strongly Agree
☐   ○   ○   ☐

25. ...find that encouragement is provided for those who are furthering their formal education.

Strongly Disagree   Disagree   Agree   Strongly Agree
☐   ○   ○   ☐

26. ...find that encouragement is provided for those involved in professional development activities.

Strongly Disagree   Disagree   Agree   Strongly Agree
☐   ○   ○   ☐

27. ... are encouraged to professionally share and learn from one another.

Strongly Disagree   Disagree   Agree   Strongly Agree
☐   ○   ○   ☐

28. ...are encouraged by supervisors/managers and organizational leadership to be the best that they can be in their assigned positions.

Strongly Disagree   Disagree   Agree   Strongly Agree

| ☐ | ○ | ○ | ☐ |

29. …believe that supervisors/managers and organizational leadership show a genuine concern for them as professionals in their work.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
○	○	○	○

30. ...are proud to work for this organization.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
☐	○	○	☐

31. ...clearly understand the organization's program and service vision.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
☐	○	○	☐

32. ...are encouraged by supervisors/managers and organizational leadership to provide leadership for new projects.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
☐	○	○	☐

33. ...value the need for support from their colleagues.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
☐	○	○	☐

34. ...encourage one another to exercise professional judgment when making decisions.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
☐	○	○	☐

35. ...find that supervisors/managers and organizational leadership are empathetic with work-related problems and difficulties.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
☐	○	○	☐

36. ...use findings from child welfare/social service research in their work with clients.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
☐	○	○	☐

37. ...spend time in professional reflection and assessment of the quality of their work.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
☐	○	○	☐

38. ...share work experiences with one another to improve the effectiveness of client services.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
☐	○	○	☐

39. ...are committed to continuous professional development.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
☐	○	○	☐

40. ...receive the assistance needed from supervisors/managers and organizational leadership to enhance the quality of decision-making regarding services to clients.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
○	○	○	○

41. ...believe that interpersonal relationships among staff/workers are positive.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
☐	○	○	☐

Supportive Supervision/Staff Retention

Part III - Decision to Continue Employment

This final part of the survey lists key work-related factors that might contribute to *YOUR* decision to continue employment with the organization. **Instructions:** Select the option that best reflects the extent to which each work-related factor **would contribute to *YOUR* decision** to continue employment with the organization.

42. Degree of work challenge and difficulty.

No Contribution	Weak Contribution	Moderate Contribution	Strong Contribution

	○	○	
🔲	○	○	🔲

43. Degree of professional organizational culture.

No Contribution	Weak Contribution	Moderate Contribution	Strong Contribution
🔲	○	○	🔲

44. Degree of supervisor/manager and organizational leadership mentoring and support.

No Contribution	Weak Contribution	Moderate Contribution	Strong Contribution
🔲	○	○	🔲

45. Degree of commitment to the profession /field of work.

No Contribution	Weak Contribution	Moderate Contribution	Strong Contribution.
🔲	○	○	🔲

46. Degree of bureaucratic structure, policies, and procedures.

No Contribution	Weak Contribution	Moderate Contribution	Strong Contribution
🔲	○	○	🔲

47. Degree of job satisfaction.

No Contribution	Weak Contribution	Moderate Contribution	Strong Contribution
🔲	○	○	🔲

48. Salary (Pay)

No Contribution	Weak Contribution	Moderate Contribution	Strong Contribution
🔲	○	○	🔲

49. Financial Incentives (e.g., Overtime, Mileage Reimbursement, Tuition Assistance).

No Contribution	Weak Contribution	Moderate Contribution	Strong Contribution
🔲	○	○	🔲

50. Job benefits (e.g., Health Insurance, Life insurance, Medical Plan, Paid Vacation)

No Contribution	Weak Contribution	Moderate Contribution	Strong Contribution.
🔲	○	○	🔲

51. Nature/characteristics of clients served.

No Contribution	Weak Contribution	Moderate Contribution	Strong Contribution
☐	○	○	☐

52. Career goals.

No Contribution	Weak Contribution	Moderate Contribution	Strong Contribution
☐	○	○	☐

53. Interpersonal relationships with colleagues.

No Contribution	Weak Contribution	Moderate Contribution	Strong Contribution
☐	○	○	☐

54. Quality of mentoring /professional support provided by supervisors/managers and organizational leadership.

No Contribution	Weak Contribution	Moderate Contribution	Strong Contribution
☐	○	○	☐

55. Promotional/career advancement opportunities.

No Contribution	Weak Contribution	Moderate Contribution	Strong Contribution
○	○	○	○