

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

The Impact of Professional Development on the Public Sector

A graduate project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of Master of Public Administration in Public Sector Management and Leadership

By

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August 2022

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Acknowledgement

I want to thank all my professors in the Master of Public Administration program. I like to pay my respects to my father and extend my gratitude to my mother, the driving force in ensuring the completion of this program. I want to thank my team at work, Kristen, Chris, Anna, Yesika, Ashley, Jordan, Ana, Jackie, Jasmine, Alondra, Chandler, Elizabeth, Jennifer, Jorge, and Hazel; thank you, you all were my inspiration for this thesis. Two of my most supportive friends, motivations, and mentors, Michael and Sharon, I cannot find the words to show you my appreciation. To my family, Pilar, John, and Noah, thank you for allowing me to use your internet and always providing a meal. To my best friends, Adrien, Sharon, Jessica, and Taylor, thank you for being my support system and always encouraging me to continue moving forward. Finally, to my partner, thank you for continuing to support me and calming my nerves when the stress got the best of me. Thank you all; if not for you, I would not have completed this program.

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Abstract

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The focus of this research study is to determine whether participation in professional development, such as training and development to further education and skill set, coaching and mentoring, or other avenues associated with professional development, will positively impact employee satisfaction within the public sector. This research will show the importance of strong professional development within the public sector versus the absence thereof. Throughout the literature review, significant research indicates the need for professional development opportunities within public organizations. The mixed-methods approach is the research design applied in this paper. Administrative assistant employees within two differentiating public sector organizations will be surveyed to understand how employee satisfaction is impacted by the practice of professional development programs. Using quantitative and qualitative methods, one can better understand the importance of a participant's continued participation in professional development opportunities versus the lack thereof.

Keywords: Employee Satisfaction, Professional Development

Section 1: Introduction

This study focuses on the adherence to professional development within the public sector versus the lack of professional development within the public sector. Does professional development positively impact employee satisfaction within the public sector? Professional development in both the Private and Public sectors is a necessary component and overall goal to increase employee satisfaction and retention. (Succession Planning and Management Practices in Washington State Local Public Health Agencies, 2016). Without professional or organizational development, dissatisfaction continues to occur across all facets of the sector, whether in private companies or government agencies (Promoting Training and Professional Development in Government, 2017). Within each sector lies one reachable yet obtainable goal; the ability for an employee to thrive within their role with the proper tools to succeed through concentrated areas such as; training and development for continued education and skill training, conferences to meet like-minded professionals within their current career field, leadership succession, and mentoring and coaching. (Outcomes of Training and Development Measures in Public Sector Bank of India, 2017). There is a strong correlation between professional development and lack thereof. The residual effects can decrease turnover and increase employee satisfaction (Outcomes of Training and Development Measures in Public Sector Bank of India, 2017)

According to Bergeron (2022), it is reported that 68 percent of employees within public organizations would indeed stay if their current employer truly made an effort to provide them with additional skill training. Bergeron's article also showed that 40 percent of workers in these organizations do not see career advancement. Those employees who want to expand their skill set but do not know where to start came in at 49 percent. In comparison, 52 percent of employees feel the need to learn new skills, but 29 percent do not feel this is an obtainable goal and feel that there is no opportunity for training or any acquisition of new skills within their organization.

This study aims to determine whether participation in professional development, such as training and development to further education and skill set, coaching and mentoring, or other avenues associated with professional development, will positively impact employee satisfaction within the public sector. To what extent do public sector employees benefit from the implementation of professional development, or is there no benefit to professional development? (Outcomes of Training and Development Measures in Public Sector Bank of India, 2017). In a study performed by Porter et al. (2000), it was assessed that there was indeed effectiveness related to professional development within the public sector regarding educators. However, without proper development or, better said, investment in the employee, the organization, will not produce the desired outcome.

Section 2: Literature Review

Professional development is often referred to as the organization's continued education through training and development, and mentoring. These programs help advance an employee's career and sharpen their skills. Previous studies have focused on the importance of professional development within the public sector. (Promoting Training and Professional Development in Government, 2017). According to Rushaw & Fisher (2017), professional development plays a vital part in growth areas, such as acquiring new skills, career goals, and new responsibilities, along with better organizational standards. The literature will cover each of the following: Professional Development in the Public Sector, Leadership Development and succession planning, Leadership styles that promote Development, and lastly Promoting employee well-being through Professional Development. This section covers the majority of the research geared towards professional development in the public sector and the positive effect on the employees of these public organizations.

Professional Development in the Public Sector

According to Rusaw & Fisher (2017), "Professional development plays a considerably important part of the employees' skill acquisition, and applications for job performance, growth in career competencies and responsibilities, contributions to organization health and mission achievement."(p.216) Studies show the need for an increase in professional development opportunities. Rushaw & Fisher (2017) mention in their article that public administration has consistently called for higher education, for example, a master's degree and a high level of competency in performing ones work task, but why not invest in their employees? According to Rushaw & Fisher (2017), key ingredients in government reform include awareness in areas of human relations, adult learning, and organizational change for areas all pointing back to

professional development within the public sector. In addition, Sahoo et al. (2017) mention that capabilities and organizational effectiveness improve employee functionality through aimed training programs. Furthermore, leading to an acquisition of skills and said employees' higher engagement levels would become an investment by the organization.

Organizational change is allowing the means for employee growth, whether through training and development or through coaching an employee and mentoring. Prior to the 1950s, professional development within public organizations was not used reasonably often, if used at all. According to Greiling & Halachimi (2013), "organizational learning in the public sector is very under-researched."(p.387), but not unexplored, there is sufficient research that details that professional development does certainly increase an employee's overall job satisfaction.

(Greiling & Halachimi 2013) Further knowledge of human motivation encouraged organizational development for personal and professional growth. Organizations often use training programs as a momentary fix to address the current concern. According to Schachter (2017), Alternating among the efforts based on objectives implemented by management, organizations will find new methods; meaning that as long as the training is new and relevant, it will be sought out by leadership and employee alike. Sahoo et al. (2017), also mentions that, in hindsight, opportunities such as training decreased high employee turnover and created chances from within the organization. Coaching as a form of professional development which has proven to set a standard for an employee's professional development. According to Seidle et al. (2016), "qualitative evidence has tied coaching to higher compensation, career advancement, and career satisfaction."(p.605). A study and survey by Cummings et al. (2012), made it apparent that not only employees but staff desired additional learning development opportunities. The goal of this survey and study showed the importance of implementing proper changes based on employee

satisfaction; without the appropriate investment, there is no road to change. According to Kennedy (2016), Professional development, also known as PD, generally, reviewers will sort out visible features by similarities and differences; how does a public sector leader identify the right action plan for a designated employee?

Leadership Development, and succession planning

Leadership development, succession planning, coaching and mentoring are focus areas within professional development. Providing employees within the public sector the tools and resources for growth has proven to provide an employee with the motivation needed to thrive. According to Grissom & Viano (2016), an employee is likelier to stay within their role if there are incentives associated with remaining within their roles, such as high salary pay and satisfactory working conditions will reduce turnover. In addition, those employees with advanced skills are less likely to remain within their organization due to high demand from employers. Although age, gender, and race play a role in employee turnover, those factors will not be considered in this study. According to Grissom & Viano (2016), lower turnover can be found in public organizations that offer better support systems, flourishing atmospheres with likeminded colleagues, strong professional development programs, as well as an offering of mentoring and coaching, in addition to more flexibility and allotted time to reach deadlines.

Why is succession planning a key element within professional development? As previously mentioned, when an employee shows attributes of higher skill levels, they become a valued commodity, leading to a stronger desire for employment. Leadership succession planning is a newer view on professional development; it is elementary to understand that a manager or director, per se, will choose an employee with potential for growth within the organization. The manager or director will pick these individuals and prepare them for the next step in their career by placing them in

leadership courses, shadowing, and on-the-job experience. According to Weisman et al. (2016), Succession planning occurs when an organization identifies said employee, develops, all with the goal of long-term retention of the individual. Once the employee is identified, the process begins; in the public health organization, Weisman et al. (2016) study has found that "76%, sent those individuals to technical or management training, 70% identified cross-functional projects, task forces, or team membership; 68% intentionally assigned them to stretch projects/assessment, and 68% exposed them to general organizational management". (p.516) In addition to succession planning, another component of professional development lies with coaching and mentoring the employee to increase job satisfaction. By increasing meetings in the format of 1:1, employees begin to thrive and respond positively. Cummings et al. (2014) state that emotional intelligence which the awareness of one's own emotions and how those react to other's emotions are resonant within leadership. In addition, the managers within the study strongly expressed the need for employee encouragement in order to prevent conflict and instead promote higher employee satisfaction. According to Cummings et al. (2014), "Coaching staff promotes teamwork, empowerment, knowledge sharing, and confidence."(p.205); having the opportunity to coach staff within the public sector not only impacts performance measures but also job satisfaction across the board. Weisman et al. (2016) cultivating and retaining high-performing and high-potential employees can be challenging; however, a solution is to keep recruitment in-house and hire from within the organization. Public organizations providing opportunities to staff to promote from within will indeed promote organizational retention.

Leadership Styles that Promote Development

Professional development occurs when a leader participates in the development of their employment; however, is it possible that a particular leadership style may contribute to that adherence? According to Van Wart (2013), "Understanding the lessons of leadership is important so

that those aspiring to leadership may identify their strengths and weaknesses and improve themselves, as well as leadership in their organizations."(p.553) a leader should develop their employees, increase their learning and development of the role, and pave the way towards success by paving the road towards professional development.

Various studies illustrate the need for professional development, but not all leaders agree with this standpoint. Is there a particular form of leadership that mitigates the need and provides a thriving environment for an employee of the public sector? Choudhary et al. (2012), based on a 2012 study on transformational and servant leadership, "transformational leadership has more impact on organizational learning than that of servant leadership" (p. 433). What exactly are transformational leadership and its impact on professional development? According to Choudhary et al. (2012), Promoting stimulation is an ethical component of leadership, a leader must inspire. In the definition of a servant leader, there is an emphasis in serving, meaning a servant as a leader, before the employee has developed their own knowledge and skillset. The difference between transformation and servant leadership boils down to the focus of said leader. According to Choudhary et al. (2012) both styles focus on the followers; servant leaders pay more attention to the service to the followers, otherwise known as the employee. Both leadership styles focus on training and development as a professional development tool. The study behind both leadership styles found that each offers a positive look at professionally developing an employee, transformational emphasizes the need for organizational learning and leads to higher levels of employee engagement and performance.

In contrast, servant leadership promotes learning and development, promoting learning within the organization. Trusting leadership to provide professional development will turn lucrative in performance and employee job satisfaction. As leadership within the public sector begins to transform, according to Getha-Taylor & Morse (2013), "leadership is still mostly taught using the

"great-man theory" although the reality of public leadership today rests on a foundation of "collective" leadership."(p.74) in order to cultivate and inspire to ameliorate leadership within each sector one must innovate training techniques.

Promoting employee well-being through Professional Development

Studies continue to illustrate the need for professional development to ensure skill acquisition and higher performance measures; however, what are the well-being effects on these public sector employees? Are employees finding overall contentment or revitalized enthusiasm in their work environment? According to Sreitzer & Porath (2012), the long-term survival and overall development of these public organizations rely on the employee's well-being. According to Porath et al. (2012), those who learn and those whom are in the process of continuous improvement through learning and development thrive based on the feeling of continued growth. Maslow first presented the idea of needs within his hierarchy, and as such, thriving is a basic need within his pyramid, as mentioned by Taormina et al. (2013).

Historically, an employee's mental health and stability have been tied to job satisfaction and the overall well-being of the public organization, as referenced by Zheng et al. (2015). In order to ensure an employee is finding satisfaction within their role, a manager must show empathy and sympathy alike towards their employee, Zheng et al. (2015); in addition, a manager must look at factors such as employees' work-life balance, family relationships, emotional, mental health, and personal growth, in order to not only show interest in their professional development but in their mental health as well. In turn, doing so may prevent turnover, leave of absence due to burnout, and high-stress levels, and, worst of all, could prevent suicide in worst-case scenarios. According to Leiter et al. (2012), job burnout is "a syndrome of chronic exhaustion, cynicism and inefficiency, an ongoing problem in work life that distresses employees and weakens the financial performance of

organizations." (p.259); in addition, it is critical to identify those who are highly volatile versus those who are in the beginning stages of burnout. Various leadership practices were studied during this study, as well as their experiences in LDI programs. Not only was employee satisfaction measured but manager burnout as well, leading to more incredible data through surveys, focus groups, and interview approaches. The questions and observations included relationships between leaders and staff; the study was geared towards emotional health, well-being, and employee satisfaction.

Section 3: Background

According to Rushaw & Fisher (2017), Professional development occurs incrementally and through various stages of growth. Does professional development positively impact employee satisfaction within the public sector? The organizations being studied will be UCLA and the Veterans Affairs office, within three months' proximity, in West Los Angeles and Westwood, California.

UCLA employees have a high demand for professional development. The university offers various formats for employee development. These programs were created based on satisfaction surveys; specifically, the 2017 Waggl employee satisfaction survey was utilized to find primary findings. Of those selected, 71% saw improvement in career development stemming from courses offered within the university, such as CORE, Campus Human Resources, also known as CHR training within the human resources department, and selection to participate in conferences. CORE, Center for Readiness and Education, offers classes geared toward emotional intelligence, crucial conversations, dealing with complex patient situations, and a leadership series aiding in the leadership succession planning stage. CHR similarly offers training, such as manager training courses, resume building workshops, Staff Enrichment Program, Professional Development Program, interviewing workshops, and many more. Employees are encouraged to attend the free courses and are provided departmental stipends for those that require a small fee. The continued support from leadership throughout the university ensures the staff receives a form of professional development in order to prevent high turnover and employee dissatisfaction and promote well-being.

Veterans Association does not offer a professional development program. According to OPM.gov, also known as Office of Personnel Management, a federal employee viewpoint survey

indicated in a 2020 employee engagement, the score of 70 was higher than the previous year of 65.3; however, with the workforce being more extensive, it is still ranked one of the worst government agencies to work for as they have continued to add tremendous workloads due to the Covid-19 pandemic by opening up their once veterans only clinic to non-veterans. As a public agency, they, too, lack funds compared to the private sector and have twice the number of patients as privately owned centers. Although the employee satisfaction rates went up by 4.7, the numbers still leave much to be researched. According to va.gov/employeeeducation, the VA offers patient-centered education to provide high-quality care as an employee of the Veterans Affairs office. Although stated that their leadership invests in their employees by educating and creating an environment that protects them during a crisis, internal professional development is not mentioned. Could the lower employee satisfaction rates and overall satisfaction correlate with the absence of professional development, such as training not patient-centered but instead geared towards the professional development of their employees?

The proposed study focuses on understanding the impact of professional development on the public sector; is there a correlation between professional development and employee satisfaction? This study hopes to emphasize separate public organizations, one offering professional development and the other being absent. The researcher will either disprove the hypothesis or provide substantial evidence for the need for professional development within the public sector.

Section 4: Methodology

This research is designed to examine the impact of professional development on the public sector's employees and overall job satisfaction. The investigation's primary purpose is to determine whether professional development will positively impact employee satisfaction within the public sector. This investigation will use a mixed-methods approach, including a survey questionnaire. According to O'Brien et al. (2020), survey distribution and mixed methods hold promise to take advantage of each method's strengths, and as they build on those strengths are promising to future research.

A descriptive research design is essential as it will identify specific conditions within the public sector that will determine whether there is indeed a need for professional development amongst employees within the public sector (Siedlecki, S.L., 2020). Additionally, Siedlecki (2020) claims the methodology will allow the researcher to understand and determine without manipulating variables, such as fear of retaliation or further consequences from employers. A mixed-methods approach will help the researcher view all angles of the problem. The questionnaire will provide unbiased and measurable data, while semi-answered questions will highlight any underlying organizational problems. Using these research methods will allow for a better understanding of professional development's effects on public sector employees.

The quantitative approach will target the public sector employees within the UCLA campus, as this is a state-run organization within the public sector, which currently offers professional development opportunities to its employees versus the Veterans Affairs office, also known as the VA, with low employee satisfaction grades and lack of professional development opportunities. Therefore, the population of interest will be administrative assistants from the UCLA campus and the Veterans Affairs office. The independent variable is professional development within the public sector. The

independent variable will be measured within the first survey delivered to the previous employees of both public sectors. It will ask direct closed-ended questions regarding professional development opportunities within their previous roles. In addition, the second semi-structured interview with open-ended questions will be answered by current public sector employees, which will target questions related to their current roles. The primary dependent variable of this study is perceived employee satisfaction of the administrative assistant through the practice of professional development. The dependent variable will be measured using self-reported data about the participant's overall satisfaction after participation in a professional development program and those who lack professional development program participation. As previously stated within the independent variable, the dependent variable will also be measured using the first survey delivered to the previous employees of both public sectors. The second semi-structured interview with open-ended questions will be answered by current public sector employees, which will target questions related to their current roles. Furthermore, the researcher will assess the utilization of professional development within work practices to determine if a relationship exists between employee job satisfaction and the independent variable of professional development within the public sector workplace. Only employees within the Veterans office and UCLA campus' administrative assistants who have recently retired, been promoted to a new role, or have been released from their current duties will be selected as eligible participants; this is a total of 200 possible participants. For the semi-structured interview, only current administrative assistants within the Veterans office and UCLA campus' will be eligible; this will be a total 40 participants.

The administrative assistant employees from the UCLA campus and the Veterans Affairs office will be surveyed due to their past roles within their public organizations. The questionnaires

will be submitted electronically to each administrative assistant within the eligible guidelines via email, using Qualtrics, a survey distribution software. Administrative assistants are the front-line workers within each organization; they assist in all facets; whether assisting patients, students, veterans, physicians, and other leadership groups. Therefore, there are no specifications such as gender, religion, age, or ethnicity; while distributing the survey. However, there will be a voluntary request for a name, although job title and organization are required.

Additionally, this study will require a qualitative approach to better interpret the data. Strunk et al. (2016) states that qualitative data offers additional ways of viewing, organizing, and fully understanding the research. For this study, additional data will be required; for this, a qualitative approach will be taken as such 20 semi-structured interviews will be conducted at random with current employees within each organization. UCLA campus administrative employees have been exposed to professional development programs; however, administrative employees within the Veterans Affairs office have not received any professional development opportunities. The first round of surveys will assist by understanding their knowledge regarding professional development, whether they have received opportunities for professional development, such as training or mentoring while in their role, or whether they lack professional development within their organization. Interviews will take place via Microsoft teams as each institution has provided free-of-cost accounts to all its employees. All interviews will be recorded and made for reference purposes.

A qualitative understanding of the 20 current administrative assistants from each organization will assist with an understanding of whether professional development is a needed resource. The semi-structured survey can also provide an insight as to whether there is no need for professional development. A qualitative approach is necessary to understand all aspects of the

data provided by previous administrative assistants, while semi-structured interviews will assist in providing insight into current work conditions; this will allow for focused and flexible questions and answers that will prevent the interviewee from anticipating future questions.

The survey will feature a questionnaire containing unbiased questions regarding professional development within their organizations. It will be administered using Rensis Likerts' Likert scale; according to Batterton et al. (2017), Rensis' Likert scale is described as a powerful method to construct an attitude scale, summing of answers resulting in measurable results. The participants will answer ten questions, with specific responses required from employees who have undergone a professional development program and those who have no understanding of a program geared towards professional development. The survey questionnaire will ask the study participants about their knowledge, lack of knowledge, leadership involvement, and advancement in their current or past organizational roles. Based on the responses, employees will be able to rate their level of satisfaction. Finally, it must be noted that all questions will be close-ended and presented in the matrix format based on a Likert Scale of Strongly Agree (5) to Strongly Disagree (1). The semi-structured questionnaire will be delivered using open-ended questions, allowing current Veterans Affairs and UCLA administrative assistant employees to voice their opinions regarding the current or non-existing professional development programs and opportunities.

Ethical Considerations

The questionnaire participants will be selected based on their past roles as administrative assistants within each public sector organization; UCLA campus, in Westwood, California, and the Veteran's Affairs office, in West Los Angeles, California. There are no other considerations such as time in the role; however, they must be past employees of the organization within the administrative assistant role.

The human resources department has provided a list of the current administrative assistants within each public sector organization from the UCLA campus and the Veterans Affairs office. They will be viable candidates for the semi-structured interviews. The researcher has obtained the required permission from each public sector organization and may proceed with the disbursement of surveys and may complete interviews of current staff.

Qualtrics is an internet-based surveying platform that will be used to disseminate the former administrative assistants' questionnaires. The questionnaires will require consent; each questionnaire will have a linked consent form that each participant must complete prior to initiating the survey. The survey will not populate without the consent of the participant.

Consent forms will also be necessary in order to proceed with the semi-structured interviews. To avoid potential deterrents, an email consent form will be sent out 15 days prior to the interview to each of the current administrative assistants within both organizations. Fifteen days will provide sufficient time to provide a signed consent form before the interview.

The participants will not benefit monetarily or directly through participating in this study. Participation in this study is voluntary; participants have the right to discontinue the study at any time. All responses within the questionnaire and the semi-structured interview are voluntary, and participants have the right to refuse to answer any of the questions. The researcher will be the only individual with access to the collected information from the study. All responses will be confidential to ensure the organizations do not gain access. The researcher understands the importance of keeping all private data confidential to protect the study's participants.

Participation will not be traceable; the information identifying each participant will be kept separate from data gathered, findings, and reports. Name, organization name, and job title are

identifiable information that will be separated from the collected data. All data from this study will be stored electronically within the researcher's private computer. The computer is password protected and will be placed in a locked room. Identifying information will be removed electronically from all gathered information and placed on a separate password-controlled computer which will be located within the human resources office of the Department of Healthcare Education, located in Los Angeles, California. Once the investigation has concluded, and the data serves its purpose, all gathered information will be disposed of and eliminated.

Section 5: Conclusion

The current study will provide insight into the positive impact on public sector employee satisfaction through professional development. The focus will be on administrative assistant employees within two differentiating public sector organizations. The target of this study is the public sector employees within the UCLA campus, as this is a state-run organization within the public sector, which currently offers professional development opportunities to its employees versus the Veterans Affairs office, with low employee satisfaction grades and lack of professional development programs. The findings in this study should provide greater insight into whether professional development induces higher employee satisfaction through professional development programs such as training and development to further education and skill set, coaching and mentoring, or other associated avenues with professional development. This paper will determine whether professional development will positively impact employee satisfaction within the public sector. In the future, there will be a more significant collection of studies that will focus on overall positive employee satisfaction through the practice of receiving professional development programs versus those who are not offered the same opportunities within their public sector organization. Finally, the current research will help leadership within these public sector organizations implement professional development programs within their organizations.

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Appendix A: Survey Questionnaire

Survey Questionnaire

Organization Name (required): _____

Participant Name (optional): _____

Date: _____

Job Title (required): _____

Years in present position? Please circle the most relevant (0-1) (2-3) (4-5+)

PLEASE READ INSTRUCTIONS CAREFULLY AND COMPLETELY

Please circle your response to the items. Rate your responses aspects on a 1 to 5 scale:

1 = “Strongly disagree,” or the lowest, most negative impression

2 = “Disagree”

3 = “Neither agree nor disagree,” or an adequate impression

4 = “Agree”

5 = “Strongly agree,” or the highest, most positive impression

Choose N/A if an item is not appropriate or if you do not wish to answer the question. Your feedback is sincerely appreciated. Thank you.

QUESTIONS (Circle your response to each item.) 1=Strongly Disagree 2=Disagree 3=Neither Agree nor Disagree 4=Agree 5=Strongly Agree N/A=Not applicable

1. I am familiar with Professional Development.

1 2 3 4 5 N/A

2. My direct supervisor has discussed Professional Development opportunities with me.

1 2 3 4 5 N/A

3. I am interested in furthering my career.

1 2 3 4 5 N/A

4. I do not have plans to remain within my current organization

1 2 3 4 5 N/A

5. I am aware that Professional Development includes: Training and Development, Coaching and Mentoring, Leadership Succession Planning.

1 2 3 4 5 N/A

6. I have participated in a Professional Development program within my organization.

1 2 3 4 5 N/A

7. I feel that my organization creates a culture that inspires professional growth.

1 2 3 4 5 N/A

8. I feel that I am thriving in my role within my organization.

1 2 3 4 5 N/A

9. I have set 1:1 meeting with my current supervisor.

1 2 3 4 5 N/A

10. I receive feedback on a consistent basis within my organization.

1 2 3 4 5 N/A

Appendix B: Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Questions below will be used in a semi-structured interview with current UCLA campus and Veterans Affairs office administrative assistants. Those selected at random will provide an overview of the current understanding of their knowledge regarding professional development, whether they have received opportunities for professional development, or whether they lack professional development within their organization.

1. How has your career shaped your time within the organization?
2. Do you feel you have been provided an opportunity to thrive within your role as an administrative assistant?
3. Do you receive adequate resources and support from your current leadership?
4. Do you meet with your current supervisor for 1:1 meetings regarding your professional development?
5. When training is available for skill advancement have you participated?
6. Have you been invited to attend a conference or a meeting of likeminded professionals?
7. Do you feel supported by your current leadership?
8. Have you applied to a promotion within the last year?
9. Do you feel adequately prepared for the next step in your career?
10. Any additional comments?