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Organizational Values Perceived as Evident Among Ohio State University Extension Personnel

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Organizational Values Perceived as Evident Among Ohio State University Extension Personnel

Abstract

The study reported here sought to determine the perceived evidence of organizational values and compare the perceived organizational values of Ohio State University Extension personnel. It investigated the organizational values according to the levels of perceived "extremely evident" and "extremely valued." The top five values perceived as "extremely evident" were: "unbiased delivery of information," "research-based programs," "honesty/integrity in our work," "an emphasis on excellence in educational programming," and "helping people help themselves" (range: 46.4% - 50.4%). The findings provide direction for OSU Extension to develop strong organizational values and target values not being expressed in the work environment.

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Introduction

Present and future values are of enormous importance in adequately understanding and managing change within the core mission of any organization. Values that are *put into action* set a company or an organization apart from others by clarifying the organization's identity and serving as a guide to a prosperous future. The goal of many organizations is to put its values into practice, evident both within and outside the organization.

OSU Extension's mission is to "help people improve their lives through an educational process using scientific knowledge focused on identified issues and needs" (Ohio State University Extension

Personnel Unit, 2000, p. 2). What started as a collaborative teaching effort for farmers, cooking lessons for women, and corn clubs for boys and girls has expanded into an organization that promotes change, problem solving, and the education of the public and individuals.

The values of an organization define "what the organization stands for and what is important to it as it fulfills its mission and works towards its vision" (Boone, Safrit, & Jones, 2002, p. 100). The enduring nature of values and value systems arises from the reality that they are neither completely stable nor unstable, but rather, are evolving continuously according to our changing physical, social, and emotional surroundings (Safrit, Conklin, & Jones, 2003).

An organization is not able to function without the commitment and loyalty of its workers. Employees are assets with valuable skills, pride, dedication, and needs that require satisfaction in the work place (Haas & Tamarkin, 1982). Personal satisfaction appears when there is congruency between professional beliefs and the values evident within the work environment. According to Hitt (1988), harmony between guiding organizational beliefs and daily actions of organizational members has a significant impact on the total performance of an organization.

Therefore, it is not only important to know an organization's values, but to what extent they are evident in the organization. In addition, a few studies have examined organizational values in state Extension systems: New Mexico (Seevers, 2000), Kansas (Lavergne & Rutherford, 2002), Florida (Williams, 1984), Ohio State (Safrit, Conklin, & Jones, 2001), Minnesota (Barker, 1994) and North Carolina (Safrit, 1990).

Purpose

The purpose of the study reported here was to determine the perceived evidence of organizational values and in comparison to the perceived organizational values of Ohio State University Extension program personnel. The data was based on research by Safrit, Conklin, and Jones (2001) that concentrated on the organizational values of OSU Extension program personnel. Through secondary data analysis, the evidence of perceived values in OSU Extension program personnel was examined according to these research questions.

1. How are OSU Extension organizational values perceived as "extremely evident" in the organization?
2. How do organizational values of OSU Extension compare to the respondents' perceived evidence of such values?

Methods

The Organizational Values Questionnaire was developed by researchers (Safrit, Conklin, & Jones, 2001) to gather data from the target population of all OSU Extension program personnel operating actively at their position as of April 1, 2001. The data was entered and initially analyzed by Boomershine (2001). The census resulted in 595 participants with a 75% response rate.

The survey contained two sets of four-point Likert scales. For each statement, the individual was asked to rank the degree to which he/she valued the statement and to rank the degree to which the value was evident in the organization. Response categories ranged from 1 to 4, with 1 representing "not valued" or "not evident," and 4 representing "extremely valued," or "extremely evident."

A split-half test was conducted to measure and assure the reliability, which indicated a correlation coefficient of .82 in relation to the values within the data. A coefficient of .50 or greater is suitable for instruments that have not been used or tested previously for reliability (Nunnally, 1967). In 2001, a panel of Extension organization experts (the OSU Extension Executive Committee) reviewed the questionnaire and deemed it acceptable for face and content validity (Boomershine, 2001). The committee was composed of male and female individuals who held cabinet positions at the time of the review.

Results

The top and bottom five values perceived as "extremely evident" are given in Table 1. The percentages for organizational values perceived as "extremely evident" ranged from 50.4 % (unbiased delivery of information) to 6.3% (employee participation in educational program in a foreign country). The difference between the top and bottom values perceived as "extremely evident" was 44.1%. Out of 52 values, only one was perceived as "extremely evident" by over 50% of the sample. The "extremely evident" value was selected because it illustrates the differentiation between the values that are most desired in an organization and the values that are the most evident.

Table 1.

The Top and Bottom Five Values Perceived as "Extremely Evident" by OSU Extension Program Personnel (* = top five ~ = bottom five)

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Perceived Organizational Value	Extremely Evident Rank	Extremely Evident %	N
*Working with groups of clients	1	50.4	292
*Unbiased delivery of information	2	49.7	290
*Credibility with clientele	3	47.9	279
*Helping people help themselves	4	47.8	279
*Research-based programs	5	46.4	271
~The effective flow of communications through all organizational levels	48	14.4	84
~The equitable distribution of resources among program areas	49	14.4	83
~Loyalty to the Extension organization	50	11.4	65
~The use of organizational dollars to market our organization	51	9.7	56
~Employee participation in an educational program in a foreign country	52	6.3	36

Table 2 compares the top 10 perceived organizational values as either "extremely evident" or "extremely valued" based each on their percentage rank. Findings show the "unbiased delivery of information" was the highest ranked "extremely evident" value (50.4%), whereas it was ranked seventh for "extremely valued" at (81.8%) with a difference of 31.4%.

The two highest organizational values ranked "extremely valued" were "honestly/integrity in our work" (91.2%) and "credibility with clientele" (91.0%). However, when compared to "extremely evident," the same values were perceived at 47.9% and 42.6% respectively. As a result, 43.3% was the difference in the "extremely valued" to "extremely evident" comparison for "honesty/integrity in our work" and 48.4% for "credibility with clientele."

Table 2.

A Comparison of the Top 10 Organizational Values Perceived "Extremely Evident" to the Value and Percentage Rank of Each Organizational Value That Was "Extremely Valued"

Perceived Organizational Value	Extremely Evident Rank	Extremely Evident %	Extremely Valued Rank	Extremely Valued %
Unbiased delivery of information	1	50.4	7	81.8
Research-based programs	2	49.7	23	68.5
Honesty/integrity in our work	3	47.9	1	91.2
An emphasis on excellence in educational programming	4	47.8	3	86.3
Helping people help themselves	5	46.4	8	81.8
Extension financial support from the local level	6	44.9	15	76.9
Our connection to the land-grant university system	7	44.6	31	60.4
A clearly-defined organizational mission	8	43.7	36	56.9
Opportunities for professional development	9	42.9	25	68.2
Credibility with clientele	10	42.6	2	91.0

Discussion and Conclusions

The findings of this investigation can be examined in relation to two other statewide studies, one in Kansas (Lavergne & Rutherford, 2002) the other New Mexico (SeEVERS, 2000). The top 10 "extremely evident" values in Kansas were compared to the same top 10 values "extremely evident" in the Ohio State study. The highest item for Kansas State, "maintaining the credibility of

our organization," was established at 31.4%, whereas the highest percent valid for Ohio State, "unbiased delivery of information," was 50.4%. The lowest ranked value for Ohio State in its top 10, "credibility with clientele," was 42.6%, which is greater than any of the values for the top 10 in the Kansas state study.

In an investigation at New Mexico State University (Seevers, 2000) similar results were found. Their data was also presented in the "extremely evident" category, and the same top 10 organizational values were utilized. For the value "honesty/integrity in our work," NMSU employees ranked this organizational value first, but the ranking in perceived evidence was fourth, with 46.8%. According to data presented in the "extremely evident" category, the same organizational value ranks first, but the ranking in actual evidence of the value was third, with a 47.9% difference.

The evidence of values in an organization plays an intricate role in the overall formation and function of individuals within the structure of an organization. As an organization thrives on the current personnel structure, it is necessary to advance individuals to further increase the similarity of between "extremely valued" to "extremely evident" values. It continues to be important to compare the respondents' perceived evidence of values to the actual organizational values possessed by OSU Extension personnel. The perceived evidence explains what is truly happening within an organization or institution.

Knowing an organizational shortcoming is a daunting task. Organizational values affect the personal outlook of individuals within the organization, as well as organizational entities and their capability to attain specified group objectives. As a result of this investigation, recommendations include:

1. Continue to enhance the actual evidence of OSU Extension values, not only by its employees, but its' clients and stakeholders as well.
2. Compare the findings to the current vision and mission statement of OSU Extension. The discrepancies found between "values" and the "perceived evident values" should each be addressed separately and reviewed to develop strategies for closing the gap in the discrepancies.
3. Identify what steps and processes are necessary for values in OSU Extension to reach desired levels of "extremely evident" values.

Values are important to all organizations, groups, and individuals. It was critical to accurately understand, comprehend, and utilize the *evidence* of each value in order to gain the full knowledge and use of organizational values. While many individuals invest certain items with a strong conviction, not all perceived evidence demonstrates that we are doing what we say we value and *walking the talk*.

It is necessary to compare "what is valued" and "the evidence of these values" in order to keep an organization operating at the highest standards. The findings in this research provide a sense of direction for organizations to investigate and develop a strong, meaningful list of organizational values that are expressed and displayed in the work environment. The behavior and actions of individuals within an organization establish the foundation that will leave a lasting impression.

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