

10-1-2003

A Longitudinal Study of the Evolution of Organizational Values of Ohio State University Extension Educators

R Dale Safrit

North Carolina State University, dale_safrit@ncsu.edu

Nikki L. Conklin

The Ohio State University, conklin.1@osu.edu

Jo M. Jones

The Ohio State University, jones.20@osu.edu



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

Recommended Citation

Safrit, R., Conklin, N. L., & Jones, J. M. (2003). A Longitudinal Study of the Evolution of Organizational Values of Ohio State University Extension Educators. *The Journal of Extension*, 41(5), Article 8. <https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/joe/vol41/iss5/8>

This Research in Brief is brought to you for free and open access by the Conferences at TigerPrints. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Journal of Extension by an authorized editor of TigerPrints. For more information, please contact kokeefe@clemson.edu.



October 2003 // Volume 41 // Number 5 // Research in Brief // 5RIB1



PREVIOUS
ARTICLE



ISSUE
CONTENTS



NEXT
ARTICLE

A Longitudinal Study of the Evolution of Organizational Values of Ohio State University Extension Educators

Abstract

A 2001 replication of a 1991 study investigated the evolution of OSU Extension organizational values. For almost a decade, the 1991 values were used by administrators for decision making and policy development. The authors used a census and Values Questionnaire to collect data. The authors identified 10 of the 12 original organizational values as current OSU Extension organizational values. The strength and stability of its organizational values may be both a source of continuity for OSU Extension during times of rapid social and fiscal change, as well as a source of frustration for leaders seeking to reshape the organization's culture.

R. Dale Safrit

Associate Professor and Extension Specialist
Department of 4-H Youth Development
North Carolina State University
Raleigh, North Carolina
Internet Address: dale_safrit@ncsu.edu

Nikki L. Conklin

Associate Director, Programs and Associate Professor
Department of Extension
The Ohio State University
Columbus, Ohio
Internet Address: conklin.1@osu.edu

Jo M. Jones

Associate Professor Emeritus,
Department of Extension
The Ohio State University
Columbus, Ohio
Internet Address: jones.20@osu.edu

Introduction

The mission of Ohio State University (OSU) Extension is "To help people improve their lives through an educational process using scientific knowledge focused on identified issues and needs" (O.S.U. Extension Annual Report, 1995, n.p.). County-based professionals conduct educational programs in agriculture and natural resources, community development, family and consumer sciences, and 4-H youth development.

The last decade of the 20th century has proven both transformational and turbulent for the Cooperative Extension system. As Cooperative Extension entered the 21st century, Jimmerson (1989, p. 16) suggested that "meeting the challenges of the information age will require attention to the values and beliefs that guide us as we work to provide our clients with information and help them solve problems."

A value is "an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence" (Rokeach, 1973, p. 5). Values play important roles in determining how we function as individuals, family members, and members of work teams, and are a product of our individual experiences. The enduring nature of values and value systems arises from the fact that they are neither completely stable nor unstable, but rather, are evolving continuously according to our

changing physical, social, and emotional surroundings.

Hitt (1988) suggested that every profession or work organization is guided by certain beliefs or values. "These values communicate 'what we stand for' and 'what is important to us'...values are the soul of the organization" (p. 86). One sign of a healthy, productive organization is agreement between the organization's values and the daily behaviors of its members. Vaill (1990, p. 59) emphasized "how management and leadership in organizational contexts may be viewed as a process of ongoing values clarification. That *is* the most important business. That *is* the key job that needs doing, and that *is* the job whose significance we keep underestimating." Barker (1994) concluded that "a thorough knowledge of the values held by the Minnesota Extension Service will facilitate the building of a foundation which will then enhance . . . the organization as a whole" (p. 8).

Although each of us may have unique personal value systems, we function best within organizations and professions where we share values with our colleagues. "An organizational value is any concept or idea that is held in high esteem by the members of an organization and that shapes the organization's philosophy, processes, and goals" (Jones, Safrit, & Conklin, 1991, p.1). Research conducted in 1991 with OSU Extension program personnel (Safrit, Jones, & Conklin, 1995) identified 12 organizational values (Table 1).

For almost a decade, these identified values have been used by OSU Extension administrators as an important basis for both managerial decision making and organizational policy development. Furthermore, three potential organizational values, "Racial/ethnic diversity among employees," "Racial/ethnic diversity among clientele," and "OSU Extension as a leader in overall outreach and engagement at OSU" were not valued by a majority of study respondents (47%, 46%, and 58%, respectively.) Subsequently, OSU Extension administrators invested enormous resources into the organization to provide training and continuing professional education opportunities that emphasized the concepts within OSU Extension's mission.

Table 1.
A Comparison of Ohio State University Extension Organizational Values
Identified in 1991 and 2001

Valued Concept	% Respondents "Strongly Valued"	
	1991	2001
Honesty/integrity in our work	93	91
Credibility with clientele	92	91
Programs that help people solve problems	87	81
Useful/practical programs	85	86
An emphasis on excellence in educational programming	85	86
Helping people help themselves	82	82
Unbiased delivery of information	82	82
Quick response to clientele concerns	81	82
Good fringe benefits for employees	81	80
Adequate resources to perform job responsibilities	80	82

Financial support from the local level	80	77
Teamwork among immediate coworkers	79	77
Flexibility/adaptability in local programming	77	81

Purpose and Methodology

The research described here replicated the authors' 1991 study in order to investigate the evolution of OSU Extension organizational values a decade later. The study used a census of 797 OSU Extension program personnel who were active at their assigned professional responsibilities as of April 1, 2001.

The researchers utilized a modified version of the 62-item Values Questionnaire used in the 1991 study, organized into two sections. Section 1 contained 52 items using a Likert-type response scale to obtain information on the respondents' organizational values. Response choices ranged from 1 to 5, with 1 representing "not valued" and 5 representing "extremely valued." In Section 2, respondents provided basic background information used to categorize them including: year of birth (i.e., age), marital status, gender, race, job tenure within OSU Extension, job tenure within other Cooperative Extension Services, job classification, major program area responsibility, highest level of formal education, and area of most advanced degree.

The researchers established face validity of the instrument with OSU Extension Administrative Cabinet members; a Cronbach's alpha of .87 was computed for Section 1 as a measure of internal validity and indicator of reliability. The final response rate was 75%. Organizational values for OSU Extension were identified by comparing the calculated frequencies of defined groupings of item responses with a predetermined 79% level of agreement that defined an item's acceptance as an organizational value. This was the same procedure used in the 1991 study.

Findings and Conclusions

The researchers identified 10 of the 12 original organizational values (identified in the 1991 study) as current OSU Extension organizational values (Table 1). One additional organizational value was identified in 2001 that was not included in 1991: "Flexibility/ adaptability in local programming" (81%). "Teamwork among immediate coworkers" and "Financial support from the local level" had been identified in the 1991 study (79% and 80%, respectively) but were not among the "highly valued" concepts in the 2001 study (77% and 77%, respectively).

Furthermore, neither of the three potential values identified for emphasis by administrators in 1991 increased significantly in their 2001 rankings: "Racial/ethnic diversity among employees" (41% in 2001; increased from 34% in 1991); "Racial/ethnic diversity among clientele" (46% in both 1991 and 2001); and "OSU Extension as a leader in overall outreach and engagement at OSU" (58% in both 1991 and 2001).

Although surprising (and somewhat disappointing) to the researchers, these findings are congruent with emerging thoughts in the field of organizational management (Dahler-Larsen, 1998; Siehl & Martin, 1990). The researchers offer three possible explanations.

Not Enough Time

Ten years is not adequate time for an organization's values to change. For example, efforts to enhance OSU Extension's commitment to outreach and engagement through partnerships with a broader range of academic units on campus may be resulting in building broader university commitment to the land grant mission. However, these efforts are not yet a common norm of operation to achieve change in the culture across the holistic Extension organization.

Possible Alienation of Personnel

In emphasizing targeted organizational values that were not valued by a majority, administrators may actually have alienated program personnel; Dahler-Larsen refers to this counter-intentional phenomenon in organizations. The organization has emphasized the commitment to diversity for more than 10 years without significant changes in the attitudes or demographics of our personnel. Grant programs often have funded new initiatives with diverse clientele, but then falter during times of financial stress when grants end.

Does this result in the professionals not taking the commitment to these values seriously? In active dialogue with personnel statewide, the assumption that non-minority personnel cannot work effectively with diverse audiences has been questioned. Yet the personnel profile for our organization does not yet mirror the diversity of Ohio's population.

Long-Standing, Dominant Culture

By default, an organization's culture may reflect long-standing core values that historically have defined the image of the organization. Although OSU Extension experiences a 20% turnover rate for paraprofessional roles, overall turnover of personnel averages 7%, with a 5% rate for agents (Kutilek, 2000). Though paraprofessionals reflect a more diverse group than the overall base of personnel, their transitional makeup with a higher turnover rate may limit their impact on changing the organizational culture.

In addition, many people applying for or being hired in agent roles are attracted to the organization based upon the existing dominant culture, thus proliferating "what is" rather than "what should be." What does this mean in recruiting professionals for the future who do reflect the rapidly changing demographic profile of the state?

The true importance of organizational values may lie not in an organization-wide philosophical position, but rather from each individual determining what shared values really mean through their day-to-day practice. For OSU Extension, the strength and stability of its organizational values may be both a source of continuity and stability during times of rapid social and fiscal change, as well as a source of frustration for administrators and leaders seeking to reshape the organization's culture.

References

- Barker, W. A. (1994). *The identification of organizational values in the Minnesota Extension Service*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Minnesota, Duluth.
- Dahler-Larsen, P. (1998). What 18 case studies of organizational culture tell us about counter-intentional effects of attempts to establish shared values in organizations. In M.A. Rahim, R.T. Golembiewski, & C.C. Lundberg (Eds.), *Current topics in management* (Volume 3) (pp. 151-173).
- Hitt, W.D. (1988). *The leader-manager: Guidelines for action*. Columbus, Ohio: Battelle Press.
- Jimmerson, R. M. (1989). What values will guide Extension's future? *Journal of Extension*, [On-line], 27(3). Available at: <http://www.joe.org/joe/1989fall/a5.html>
- Jones, J.M., Safrit, R.D., & Conklin, N.L. (1991, October). *Organizational values of Ohio Cooperative Extension Service employees*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Evaluation Association, Chicago.
- Kutilek, L. (2000). Learning from those who leave. *Journal of Extension* [On-line], 38(3). Available at <http://www.joe.org/joe/2000june/iw2.html>
- Ohio State University Extension. (1995). *Annual report*. Columbus: Author.
- Rokeach, M. (1973). *The nature of human values*. New York: The Free Press.
- Safrit, R. D., Conklin, N. L., & Jones, J. M. (1995). Extension's values: A bridge across turbulent times. *Journal of Extension* [On-line], 33(1). Available at <http://www.joe.org/joe/1995february/a1.html>
- Siehl, C., & Martin, J. (1990). Organizational culture: A key to financial performance? In B. Schneider (Ed.), *Organizational climate and culture* (pp. 241-281). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Vaill, P. B. (1990). *Managing as a performing art*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Copyright © by Extension Journal, Inc. ISSN 1077-5315. Articles appearing in the Journal become the property of the Journal. Single copies of articles may be reproduced in electronic or print form for use in educational or training activities. Inclusion of articles in other publications, electronic sources, or systematic large-scale distribution may be done only with prior electronic or written permission of the [Journal Editorial Office, joe-ed@joe.org](mailto:joe-ed@joe.org).

If you have difficulties viewing or printing this page, please contact [JOE Technical Support](#)