ORGANIZATIONAL VALUES OF NEW MEXICO COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE EMPLOYEES

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INTRODUCTION

We live in a rapidly changing society. Change, planned and unplanned abounds. Organizations striving to remain viable and effective amidst constant change must be willing to assess and adjust organizational philosophy, goals, objectives and processes to meet these changes. The use of proactive planning tools such as strategic planning are commonly utilized to effectively manage organizational change.

Strategic planning is defined as “a process that gives attention to 1) designing, 2) implementing, and 3) monitoring plans for improving decision making.” The result of the strategic planning process is usually a ‘written document that allows members to comprehend, analyze, and critique the goals, objectives, and strategies that are being used to achieve the organizations mission.” (Simmerly, 1987, p.12). Most strategic planning models include as an early step the process of values clarification. Identifying organizational values is a critical step since such values influence directly how people behave.

All organizations are comprised of individuals with unique ideas, beliefs, attitudes and perceptions which collectively comprise the members’ values. Rokeach (1973, p.5) defines a value as:

“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. A value system is an enduring organizations of beliefs concerning preferable modes of conduct or end-states among a continuum of relative importance.”

Values are enduring because they are neither completely stable or unstable, but rather change in accordance to the changing physical, social, and spiritual environments of the individuals and groups that embrace them. Like all beliefs, organizational values have cognitive, affective and behavioral components which continually interact and are exhibited in the actions and behaviors of the members of an organization (Rokeach, 1973). Every profession and every organization is guided by a set of beliefs and values. It is these “organizational values” that communicate what an organization believes in and what they considered to be important (Hitt, 1988). Conklin, Jones, and Safrit (1991, p. 1) wrote that 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.” The values held by the members of an organization determine the organizational culture, which according to Simmerly (1987) is the most powerful internal force affecting any organization. Simmerly (1987, p. 15) states that “organizational culture defines expectations about behavior, how work is done, how decisions are made, how social interactions are structured and how people communicate.”

A sign of healthy and productive organization is congruence between the organization’s values and the behaviors of its’ members. As the cooperative Extension Service strives to keep up with the constant change of a rapidly moving society, questions regarding the values held by it’s members must be considered. Two previous studies conducted in North Carolina (Safrit, 1990) and in Ohio (Conklin, Jones, & Safrit, 1991) with the Cooperative Extension Service have sought to answer these questions. This study will attempt to address some of the same questions. What are the organizational values for the New Mexico Cooperative Extension
Service? Are values identified consistent with the current mission/goals and philosophies of NMCES? To what extent do employees perceive that identified organizational values are evident in the philosophies, processes and goals of the NMCES organization? And finally, are interventions necessary to provide for congruence between the organizational mission and the identified member values?

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study was to investigate the organizational values of New Mexico Cooperative Extension Service (NMCES) educators. Specific objectives for the study were to:

1. identify valid organizational values that are representative of NMCES educators;

and

2. investigate possible relationships between organizational values of NMCES educators and their age, gender, ethnicity, job tenure, level of formal education, whether or not respondent was a county director, program area of responsibility and position within the organization.

METHODOLOGY

The population for this study was NMCES educators who were active at their assigned professional responsibilities at the time of the dissemination of the research instrument (N = 201). For purposes of this study an educator was defined as any one employed by NMSES with educational program responsibilities including CES administration, state specialists, county agents, program assistants and nutrition educators. An up-to-date list of employees was obtained from the College of Agriculture and Home Economics Personnel Office. Permission to conduct the research study was granted by the Director of the New Mexico Cooperative Extension Service.
The dependent variables were the identified organizational values of the NMCES educators. The independent variables used in the study included age, gender, ethnicity, highest level of formal education, job tenure with NMCES, whether or not the respondent was a county director, major program area of responsibility, and the position within the organization.

A search of the literature found minimal references specific to organizational values of the Cooperative Extension Service. Two previous studies (Safrit, 1990; and Conklin, 1991) on organizational values specific to the Cooperative Extension Service served as the foundation for this study. Safrit’s 1990 study assessed the organizational values of North Carolina Cooperative Extension employees. In 1991, Conklin, et.al. studied the organizational values of employees of the Ohio Cooperative Extension Service. The suggested values from the Ohio Cooperative Extension Service study and input from the New Mexico Cooperative Extension Service (NMCES) administrative cabinet identified 53 organizational values for NMCES.

A pilot instrument based on the 53 values was then constructed. A panel of experts was asked to assess the value statements for face and content validity. Based on this input, minor wording changes were made and one value item was dropped from the list. A 62 item Values Questionnaire was developed. Section 1 contained 52 value statements used to obtain information on the respondents’ organizational values as educators of the NMCES (Table 1). Two four point Likert-type scales were included for each statement. For each statement, the respondent was asked to rate the degree to which he/she valued the statement, and to rate the degree to which the value was evident in the organizational policies and procedures. Response categories ranged from 1-to 4, with 1 representing “not valued,” or “not evident;” and 4 representing “extremely valued,” or “extremely evident.” Section 2 of the instrument provided background information on the respondents. Information collected included: major program
area of responsibility, job classification, whether or not the respondent was a county director, tenure within the NMCES, job tenure with other CES programs, highest level of formal education, academic major in highest degree area, ethnicity, gender and age. Reliability of the instrument was assessed using a pilot test. Employees of the Arizona Cooperative Extension Service were randomly selected from the 1997-98 County Agents Directory to participate in the pilot study. Conbach’s Alpha coefficients were calculated for Section 1 as a measure of internal consistency. The first Likert-type scale pertaining to the extent that the concept or idea was valued had a coefficient of .90. The second Likert-type scale pertaining to the degree to which it was believed the concept or idea was evident had a coefficient of .93.

The population of the study was a census of all (N =201) New Mexico Cooperative Extension Service employees in an educator role (included state and district administrators, state and district specialists, county agents, programs assistants, and nutrition educators). Data were collected in May and June 1998. Subjects were sent a package containing a cover letter, questionnaire, and postage paid, self-addressed envelope. Subjects on main campus were provided a return envelope but were requested to use the campus mail system. The cover letter was signed by the Extension Director to encourage participation in the study. Dillman’s (1978) procedures for administration of a mail questionnaire was used. The questionnaire was presented in booklet form and contained a code number for follow-up purposes.

Table 1: Identified organizational values for New Mexico Cooperative Extension Service (NMCES).

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>A clearly defined organizational mission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Our land-grant university connection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>High standards of excellence in education programming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Quick response to clientele concerns/requests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Diversity among employees</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6. Proactive educational programs
7. Our role in bringing about change in people’s lives
8. Extension programs that help solve problems
9. Extension programs based on needs identified at the local level
10. Extension financial support form the state level
11. People-centered programs
12. Unbiased delivery of information
13. Direct client involvement in program planning
14. Shared organizational leadership among administrators, faculty/staff and clientele
15. Freedom/independence in programming
16. Extension financial support from the local level
17. Flexibility/adaptability in programming
18. Administrators who demonstrate sensitivity to personal and family responsibilities of employees
19. Good fringe benefits to employees
20. The federal, state, and local Extension partnership
21. Recruitment and screening of prospective employees resulting in hiring qualified people
22. Teamwork among co-workers
23. Networking/coalition building with other agencies/organizations
24. The use of emerging technologies in daily operations
25. Interdisciplinary programming efforts
26. Recognition of excellence in performance
27. A commitment to making programs available to all New Mexicans
28. Diversity among clientele
29. Credibility with clientele
30. The recognition that our employees are our organization’s greatest resource
31. Honesty/integrity in our work
32. The equitable distribution of resources among program areas
33. The involvement of volunteers to multiply our educational outreach
34. Targeting clientele from rural areas
35. Faith in the ability to bring about a better future
36. Loyalty to the organization
37. Balance between rural and urban programs
38. The distribution of resources among program areas based on numbers of potential clientele
39. Helping people to help themselves
40. Opportunities for professional development
41. A well-marketed organizational image
42. Research-based programs
43. Extension financial support from the federal level
44. Useful/practical programs
45. Innovation/creativity in programming
46. Effective flow of communications through all organizational levels
47. Employee participation in an educational program in a foreign country
48. New Mexico CES as an integral part of New Mexico State University
49. A general awareness of global issues
50. Equal opportunities for male and female employees
51. Targeting clientele from urban areas
52. Preserving a rural way of life

After follow-up efforts (an e-mail reminder, a second package, and a second e-mail reminder), a response rate of 72 percent (n=146) was achieved. To address non-response error, early respondents were compared to late respondents (Miller & Smith, 1983). No
significant differences were found to exist between the early and late respondents thus allowing
generalizing to the population (Miller & Smith, 1983). Data were analyzed using SAS
(Version 6.08). Frequency distribution analysis was used to report descriptive statistics and
rank expressed organizational values with the greatest agreement among respondents.
Spearman Rho r-values between identified organizational values and selected demographic
variables were calculated.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

Value statements were ranked according to the percentage of respondents that rated
the statement as “extremely valued.” The top organizational values of the New Mexico
Cooperative Extension Service were identified by selecting those values in which 75% of more
or the respondents rated the value as “extremely valued.” Fourteen top organizational values
identified are listed in Table 2. Overall percentages of respondents listing the values as
“extremely valued” ranged from 75 percent to a high of 92 percent. Of the top fourteen
organizational values identified, the percentages of respondents rating the values as “extremely
evident” ranged from a low of 27 percent to a high of 47 percent (Table 2). Of the top
fourteen values ranked, only nine were ranked fourteen or higher as “extremely evident.” The
remaining four values were ranked as 30, 32, 33 and 36 in terms of evidence in the
organization’s philosophy, processes and goals.

Correlation analysis using Spearman’s rho was used to assess possible overall
relationships between the fourteen identified organizational values and selected demographic
variables. The correlation analysis yielded a few significant but very low correlations at the .05
level of significance (Table 3). Significant correlations were found between five identified
values and selected demographics.
Table 2: Identified organizational values for New Mexico Cooperative Extension Service (NMCESJ) as perceived by employees.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank (Valued)</th>
<th>Identified Organizational Value</th>
<th>Valid % Extremely Valued</th>
<th>Valid % Extremely Evident</th>
<th>Rank (Evident)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Honesty/integrity in our work</td>
<td>92.3</td>
<td>45.5</td>
<td>(4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Credibility with clientele</td>
<td>86.0</td>
<td>39.6</td>
<td>(13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Helping people to help themselves</td>
<td>81.3</td>
<td>47.2</td>
<td>(2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>High standards of excellence in educational prog.</td>
<td>81.3</td>
<td>28.4</td>
<td>(33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Useful/practical programs</td>
<td>81.1</td>
<td>41.0</td>
<td>(9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>NMCES as an integral part of New Mexico State U.</td>
<td>81.0</td>
<td>42.7</td>
<td>(8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Teamwork among co-workers</td>
<td>79.9</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>(36)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Administrators who demonstrate sensitivity to personal and family responsibilities of employees</td>
<td>79.6</td>
<td>44.3</td>
<td>(5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Good fringe benefits to employees</td>
<td>78.3</td>
<td>46.1</td>
<td>(3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Quick response to clientele concerns/requests</td>
<td>77.3</td>
<td>31.4</td>
<td>(30)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Flexibility/adaptability in programming</td>
<td>77.1</td>
<td>39.6</td>
<td>(14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>A commitment to making all programs available to all New Mexicans</td>
<td>76.4</td>
<td>44.1</td>
<td>(6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Recognition that our employees are our organization’s greatest resource</td>
<td>75.5</td>
<td>28.7</td>
<td>(32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>People centered programs</td>
<td>75.4</td>
<td>43.1</td>
<td>(7)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These correlations include a relationship between value 1-“high stand of excellence in educational programming” and ethnicity; value 2-“quick response to clientele needs” and role as a county director; value 9-“credibility with clientele” and age; value 12- “helping people to help themselves” and numbers of years employed and age; and finally value 14- “New Mexico Cooperative Extension Service as an integral part of New Mexico State University” and the
demographic variable of job position and highest degree achieved. Caution needs to be urged that although some statistically significant correlation were found, they have limited practical significance.

EDUCATIONAL IMPORTANCE

A sign of a healthy and productive organization is congruence between the organization’s values and the behaviors of its members. A values audit is an important first step in clarifying the values perceived by members. An audit also provides critical information necessary to examine current organizational philosophies and processes and determine congruence with existing behaviors and practices. As an initial step in the strategic planning process, a values audit provides the basis for decision making regarding the current and future direction of the organization. Results from this study have been shared with the New Mexico Cooperative Extension Service administrative cabinet. It is encouraged that those values identified as having the greatest differences between beliefs and practices be reviewed and recommendations for action be implemented. Some areas of change might necessitate policy or procedural changes while others might be addressed through staff development and inservice training opportunities.
Table 3: Correlations between identified New Mexico Cooperative Extension Service (NMCES) organizational values and selected demographics variables.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Selected Demographic Variable</th>
<th>Identified organizational Value (By Rank Number +)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>r-values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Area</td>
<td>-.1023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Position</td>
<td>.0961</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co. Director</td>
<td>-.0247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yrs. w/NMCES</td>
<td>.0639</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest Degree</td>
<td>.0465</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>-.1904</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.0026</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-.0466</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Significant at the = .05 level
+Ranked Organization Values

1. High Standards of excellence in educational/programming
2. Quick response to clientele concerns/requests
3. People-centered programs
4. Flexibility/adaptability in programming
5. Administrators who demonstrate sensitivity to personal and family responsibilities of employees
6. Good fringe benefits to employees
7. Teamwork among co-workers
8. A commitment to making programs available to all New Mexicans
9. Credibility with clientele
10. The recognition that our employees are our organization’s greatest resource
11. Honesty/integrity in our work
12. Helping people to help themselves
13. Useful/practical programs
14. New Mexico CES as an integral part of New Mexico State University
REFERENCES


The purpose of this research was to investigate the organizational values of New Mexico Cooperative Extension Service Educators. A population of 201 was surveyed to collect the data necessary to achieve the objectives of the study.

This study was well conceived and the paper clearly and concisely written. The objectives were clearly defined. The theoretical framework of the study was presented and as thorough as can be expected in a limited size paper. The methodology of this study is sound. The researcher developed an instrument that was pilot tested for content validity. Its reliability was commendably high. Appropriate follow-up procedures were used.

The results of this study are clearly presented. However, they are somewhat too concise. Perhaps additional discussion would provide more meaning to the paper. The paper seems to lack conclusions that are clearly stated. Program recommendations and recommendations for further study are also lacking in this paper.

This study provides you with some information that can be used for decision making purposes. What are some uses you will make of the data? What immediate decisions might be made that will impact your organization?