

# **Leadership Development: Changing Organizational Culture**

Sue Buck, UW-Extension

## **Introduction**

Outreach education institutions continue to evolve to meet the needs of a changing society on local, state, national and global arenas. Meeting these changing needs means the institutions need to change as well. Change can lead to loss of trust and conflict as well as not being flexible in meeting societal needs through transformational education. This session will focus on:

How a statewide institution, the University of Wisconsin – Extension, developed two leadership programs to help change organizational culture and why the institution saw this as a need;

The development of these two programs and the rationale behind the content and process of delivering them;

And the current outcomes – how the institution culture has changed and what is planned for the future.

## **Background**

The University of Wisconsin – Extension, as other outreach education institutions, continues to address change within the institution and in the environment in which it works. This includes budget constraints, governmental oversight, retirements due to the baby boomer bubble, changing community needs, etc. In the last year, UW-Extension also had an administrative integration with the University of Wisconsin Colleges, the 13 freshman/sophomore campuses. These stresses have led Extension and Colleges colleagues to become hesitant of the future and wondering how previous and new partnerships will continue. Using two leadership development programs to address these stresses were initiated to help change the internal culture and to be resilient in a changing environment. The two programs are the Extension Administrative Leadership Program/The Leadership Academy and The Responsibility Based Culture Initiative. The first focuses on the larger institution of UW-Extension and UW Colleges. The second is an initiative of UW-Extension, Cooperative Extension.

## **How it Works**

The University of Wisconsin – Extension has the philosophy that everyone in the organization is a leader wherever they work. The Extension Administrative Leadership Program in Wisconsin has been in existence since 1990. There have been eight graduating classes of the two-year program. The EALP focused on developing leadership skills and helping participants from the four divisions of UW-Extension (Cooperative Extension, Broadcasting and Media Innovations, Continuing Education, Outreach and E-Learning, and Business and Manufacturing Extension) learn more about each of the divisions. When UW-Extension administratively merged with UW Colleges, the program

evolved to include Colleges participants and thus became The Leadership Academy in 2007. The main purposes of the program continued – ongoing leadership assessments, developing leadership skills, and participating in a voluntary mentoring program. These three key elements come from the work of Linkages, Inc. research on quality leadership development programs.

With the increase in retirements, funding stresses, and changing program initiatives, it was determined by the leadership of the UW-Extension, Cooperative Extension that the institution needed to increase the strong organizational culture already in place, develop self-directed leadership in its employees and help with succession planning. The result was a partnership with Integro Leadership Institute to develop the Leadership Development Process for the almost 1000 employees of Cooperative Extension called the Responsibility Based Culture Initiative. It is an 18 month, five module, train the trainer model where approximately 150 team leaders participated in the five in-services and in turn, provided in-services for their colleagues, either their office team or their program team. Twenty-five Cooperative Extension colleagues representing geographic, gender, ethnic and positional roles in the organization were provided in-depth professional development to become RBC Developers to conduct the five module in-services. The five modules are: Building Trust, Coaching and Counseling; Valuing Differences; Building High Performance Teams; and Shared Leadership.

### **Results To Date**

The outcomes of EALP/Leadership Academy are focused on retention of employees, developing future organizational leadership, and building relationships between the divisions and institutions. In 2006, a survey of approximately 150 graduates of EALP showed that 113 people were still employed with UW-Extension. The 113 people have had either promotions and/or other leadership responsibilities in the years since they graduated. Seventy-five percent of the respondents said they wanted to continue their leadership learning. The first EALP Alumni seminar was held in 2006 with nearly half of the graduates participating. Discussions have lead to exploring the idea of an international alumni seminar.

The outcomes of the Responsibility Based Culture Initiative were to strengthen the leadership and trust-building abilities of all Cooperative Extension colleagues, enable teams in all areas redesign processes, systems and structures of Cooperative Extension to build greater trust, and continue to build high performing teams to meet the mission of the organization of providing transformational education. Baseline data was gathered in 2005 to benchmark Cooperative Extension's current organizational culture and trust levels. A second survey will be taken in 2008. Through team and individual success stories, increased transformational education programs have been documented. The Employee Assistant Program counselors have noted less contact from Cooperative Extension employees about colleague conflict issues. Partner organizations have seen the change in the working relationship in county offices and program teams. They have requested Extension help their employees learn more about Responsibility Based Culture.

Both of these programs are ongoing. The Leadership Academy is working to be inclusive of the needs and understanding of UW Colleges. This work has led to such previous and current collaborations such as distance education opportunities, co-sharing of facilities, serving on executive search committees, joint community programming, etc. The Responsibility Based Culture Initiative is also on going – not ending at the end of the five training modules. This initiative is included in New Colleague Orientation for Cooperative Extension faculty and academic staff as well as state and county classified staff. Systems changes have occurred such as changing the Civil Rights Review process and the development of a Classified Staff Advisory Council.

### **Conclusions/Recommendations**

Change is continuous. Helping colleagues face change through developing their leadership, trust-building and partnership skills has many benefits for the individual and the institution. Leadership development helps both individuals and the institutions to stay relevant, engaged and positive in an evolving society. The two models, the Extension Administrative Leadership Program/The Leadership Academy and the Responsibility Based Culture Initiative, can be replicated and modified for other outreach institutions to meet their changing organizational cultures.