Presenters:

Jerold R. Thomas
District Director and Co-Interim Program Leader, Comm. Development
Ohio State University Extension
1219 West Main Cross
Findlay, OH 44820 USA
Ph: 419.422.6106
Fax: 419.422.7595
thomas.69@osu.edu

Dr. Thomas has worked as an extension educator, district specialist, district director and is currently providing statewide program leadership in community development. His background in geography and demography has been used to develop high impact educational programs in community economic development and as a resource to other educators.

Dr. Thomas has been highly effective as a university administrator, providing leadership to a 22 county district and over 200 educators and staff. He serves on the leadership team of OSU Extension and helps determine programmatic and administrative direction of the organization.

Daney Jackson
Associate Director, Penn State Cooperative Extension
217 Ag Administration Building
University Park, PA 16802 USA
Ph: 814.863.3438
dgj3@psu.edu

Dr. Jackson has worked as an extension educator, district director, statewide personnel leader and associate director of extension. He has 10 years of experience in leadership roles ranging from providing leadership to nearly 200 educators and staff in a district to managing the day to day operations of a 1500 employee organization.

His leadership contributions include leadership and organizational development. He provides strategic leadership to Penn State Cooperative Extension with the Extension Leadership Team. His scholarly interests include organizational behavior and development, leadership development, and futuring of outreach organizations.

Title of Presentation: Leadership Challenges Facing Extension Organizations in an Era of Globalization

Presentation Category: Practical (Applied) Blues

Presentation Format: Workshop

Description

This presentation explores trends forcing a restructuring of Extension Systems and the challenges faced by its leaders. In order for Extension Systems to be viable, leaders will need to encourage more local engagement and information. Serving as a router of centralized information is no longer a feasible option.

Learning Objectives:

Explore an organization facing significant change and the roles of its leaders.

Provide ideas and suggestions to leaders who are or will be facing organizational transformation.

Provide practical application of leadership of transformation and change for leadership educators and academics.

Introduction

Extension efforts based at land grant institutions have long discussed the efficacy of moving toward a university wide systems versus a system based on a handful of traditional agriculturally related colleges. Many land grant institutions have also recently started to tout outreach and engagement missions. We argue that Extension services are no longer simply a delivery system for a specific land grant institution, but rather engage with local clientele, conduct applied research, and find resources and information from a wide geographic scope of sources.

The challenges faced by leaders of extension organizations today are greater than at any point in the organizations history. Today's extension leaders must not only focus on administering the organization but shifting to a scholarly focus to compete and build standing within the university, while balancing the need to support traditional and new audiences for programs.

Theoretical Base

Key societal trends are driving changes in the U.S. Cooperative Extension System. Long seen as an information providing service that "brought the University to the people", Extension now finds itself coping with life in the information age. In an age where data becomes a cheap commodity, people have an increased number of choices on where to go to get data and information. Data in general refers to the "raw" facts that are available. Information infers some

value added to the data – a level of interpretation or advice is added to the data. For example, yield information from a test plot is data until someone adds value to it by interpreting the numbers or providing implications and recommendations.

A move to a New Economy

This refers to a restructuring of the economy around technology, reorganization of the workplace, and globalization. All help to exert structural changes in the economy and limit inflationary pressure. Technology, more so than globalization, also forces a restructuring of the workforce.

While many futurists have noted this phenomenon and its effect on manufacturing industries (a downsizing of the amount of labor needed, an increase in the capital and amount of information that goes into the product, and an increase in production), this has been occurring in agriculture for some time. Agriculture can make a solid argument for being the original information intensive industry. Total numbers of actual production farmers continue to drop in the U.S. while production volume has increased. This has led to an interesting dilemma. While there are fewer production farm clientele for Extension to work with, the demands for research and information have continued to rise.

Technological Changes

Changes in technology – specifically the use of computers and the transformation to the Internet and the World Wide Web – have greatly altered how information and data are shared and distributed. This has led to a choice society where people are given more choices and opportunities about where they may obtain information.

A gap has existed in where and how the Internet and other communication sources may be used. This has shrunk recently, and newer wireless technologies will continue to shrink the divide. However, access to data and information is critical and provides those that can access it power and opportunity over those that do not.

Organizational Changes

Because of changes in technology and economics, organizations have changed their structures and how they organize themselves. New technologies and economic realities have led organizations to become flatter, continuing to cut away at levels of management. It has also facilitated the use of outsourcing and finding suppliers who specialize in needed products.

Technology also facilitates the decentralization of organizations. Data and information flow more freely and can be shared and accessed with little regard to geography. Bar coding, instant messaging, web searches and other advances are now taken for granted, but have revolutionized the retrieval of information.

Organizational changes and a reduction in the friction of distance have also changed how organizations can locate facilities and employees. Especially in informational organizations,

facilities can be located independent of products or end users. Hence the recent moves of telephone call centers to various parts of the English speaking world, or the contracting of science related projects to former East Block countries. Economically, data has become commoditized and has become cheaper.

These trends drive much of what happens in information organizations. Extension Services have often viewed themselves as information sharing organizations. A common phrase is that local agents obtain or link people to information. This still occurs, but the roles of the agent are changing.

Leadership Challenges and Recommendations

Disintermediation

Disintermediation refers to the continued reduction of “middle-men” in society.

Devolution

Devolution refers to the pushing down of government responsibilities to local levels without consummate funding.

Value Added

For the Extension system to continue to exist, it must provide a value to society beyond supplying information.

Local engagement

Working with and for local audiences and communities – local engagement – is a strong asset of most Extension Services.

Broaden the scholarship of Extension

This will continue to validate Extension and contribute to the vitality of the profession.

Develop a portfolio of partnerships and resources

A central land grant university simply cannot be the only source of information or resources for an Extension Service.

Educator first

Extension professionals must first be educators, the original goal of the system.

A specialist with generalist understandings

Given the current drive towards more and more specialized knowledge and information, Extension Educators will need to specialize in some academic area. Concurrently, they will need to have a base level of generalist process skills.

Conclusion

Leadership challenges include helping the organization adapt to changes in technology, organizational dynamics, and other issues. Extension services can no longer simply serve as information providers. Extension educators have always added value to clientele by interpreting information and customizing it to local needs. Leaders will have to encourage educators to do even more local engagement, as clientele can turn to numerous sources for information. The value added locally comes from a greater involvement and participation with clientele. Appropriate information can then be obtained from numerous resources.