

IDENTIFYING AND CLARIFYING ORGANIZATIONAL VALUES

Brenda S. Seevers, Associate Professor
New Mexico State University

Abstract

The purpose of this descriptive-correlational study was to identify valid organizational values representative of NMCES educators and to investigate possible relationships between organizational values and selected demographics characteristics. The population was a census of all NMCES educators (N= 201). Results indicated that of the 14 values ranked by 75% or more as “extremely valued”, nine were also ranked as “extremely evident” in the policies and procedures of the organization. Significant correlations were found at the .05 level between 5 value statements and selected demographics.

Introduction

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. As the Cooperative Extension System enters into the 21st century, the challenge to provide effective non-formal education to a diverse population continues to remain a priority. The use of proactive planning tools such as strategic planning are commonly utilized to effectively manage organizational change. Many educational and non profit organizations such as the Cooperative Extension System are implementing strategic planning strategies derived from the business industry (Bryson, 1989; Forsman, 1990; Kaufman, 1991; Pfeiffer, 1985; Safrit, 1990; Simmerly, 1987).

Strategic planning is defined as “a process that gives attention to a) designing, b) implementing, and c) 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 mission of the organization.’ (Simmerly, 1987. p. 12). Bryson (1989) defined strategic planning

as “a disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions that shape and guide what an organization (or other entity) is, what it does, and why it does it.” (p. 5).

Most strategic planning models include the process of values clarification. (Bryson, 1989; Kaufman, 1991; Pfeiffer, 1985; Simmerly, 1987). Pfeiffer (1985) identified one component of strategic planning as a “values audit, where the values of members of the organization, the organization’s philosophy of operations and the organization’s culture are all examined.” (p. 11). Identifying organizational values is a critical step since such values influence directly how people behave.

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 organization 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 and what it considers to be important (Hitt, 1988). Conklin, Jones, and Safrit (1992, 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.” Safrit (1990), indicated that before any organization begins to plan strategically for change within the organization, the organizational values held by its members must be identified, clarified and validated.

A sign of a healthy and productive organization is congruence between the organization’s values and the behaviors of members. According to Bennis and Nanus, (1985) all organizations depend on the existence of shared meanings and interpretations of reality which facilitate coordinated action. “We can assume an organization possess a healthy structure

when it has a clear sense of what it is and what it is to do.” (p. 48). As the Cooperative Extension System strives to keep up with the constant change of a rapidly moving society, questions regarding the values held by members must be considered. Previous studies conducted in North Carolina (Safiit, 1990), Ohio (Conklin, Jones, & Safrit, 1992), Florida (Williams, 1984), and Minnesota, (Barker, 1994) with the Cooperative Extension Service have sought to answer these questions. This study will 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 organizational values of New Mexico Cooperative Extension Service (NMCES) educators. The objectives for the study were to:

1. Identify valid organizational values that are representative of NMCES educators,
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 a census

of NMCES educators who were active at their assigned professional responsibilities at the time of the dissemination of the research instrument ($N = 20$). For purposes of this study, an educator was defined as anyone employed by NMCES 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 System. Previous studies (Safrit, 1990; Conklin, 1992; Williams, 1994; & Barker, 1994) on organizational values specific to the Cooperative Extension System served as the foundation for this study. Safrit's 1990 study assessed the organizational values of North Carolina Cooperative Extension employees. In 1992, Conklin, et.al. studied the organizational values of employees of the Ohio Cooperative Extension System. Williams conducted a qualitative analysis of perceived values of Florida Cooperative Extension employees in 1994. Also in 1994, Barker assessed organizational values of Minnesota Extension Service employees. 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 eight experts from Extension Education, Agricultural Education, Ag Industry, and the Cooperative Extension Service, were 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 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. Fifty employees of the Arizona Cooperative Extension System were randomly selected from the 1997 - 1998 County Agents Directory to participate in the pilot study. Twenty (40%) usable responses were returned. Cronbach's Alpha coefficients were calculated for Section 1 as a measure of internal consistency. The first Likert scale pertaining to the extent that the concept or idea was valued had a coefficient of .90. The second Likert scale pertaining to the degree to which it was believed the concept or idea was evident had a coefficient of .93.

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

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1. A clearly defined organizational mission
 2. Our Land-Grant university connection
 3. High standards of excellence in education programing
 4. Quick response to clientele concerns/requests
 5. Diversity among employees
 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 from 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

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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
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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.

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 and percentages were 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

Value statements were ranked according to

the percentage of respondents that rated the statement as "extremely valued." The top organizational values were identified by selecting those values in which 75% or more of the respondents rated the value as "extremely valued." Fourteen top organizational values identified are listed in Table 2. The percentage of respondents listing the values as "extremely valued" ranged from 75% to a high of 92%. Of the top 14 organizational values identified, the percentage of respondents rating the value as "extremely evident" ranged from a low of 27% to a high of 47% (Table 2). Only nine of the top fourteen values 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. Values ranked as the "least valued" were: interdisciplinary program efforts; targeting clientele from urban areas; and employee participation in an educational program in a foreign county. Rankings of evidence for these three values were 52, 42 and 51 respectively.

Correlation analysis using Spearman's rho was used to assess relationships between the values and selected demographic variables. It yielded a few significant but low correlations at the .05 level of significance (Table 3). Significant correlations were found between six values and selected demographics. These correlations include a relationship between value 2, "quick response to clientele needs" and role as a county director; value 9, "credibility with clientele" and age; value

Table 2: Identified organizational values for New Mexico Cooperative Extension Service (NMCES) as perceived by employees.

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

12, “helping people to help themselves” and numbers of years employed and age; and finally value 14, “New Mexico Cooperative Extension System as an integral part of New Mexico State University” and the demographic variables of job position and highest degree achieved.

Conclusions and Recommendations

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.

It is recommended that the administrative leadership of NMCES incorporate values clarification processes into all future strategic planning efforts. An analysis of the data showed that substantial differences were found between what New Mexico Cooperative Extension Service

Table 3 : Correlations between identified New Mexico Cooperative Extension Service (NMCES) organizational values and selected demographics variables.

Selected Demographic Variable	Identified Organizational Value (By Rank Number +)						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	r-values						
Program Area	-.1023	-.1221	-.0401	-.1512	-.0512	.0047	-.0379
Job Position	.0961	-.0449	.0744	.0559	-.0836	-.0003	-.0012
Co. Director	-.0247	-.2010*	-.0987	.0746	.0720	.0253	.0342
Yrs. w/NMCES	.0639	.1168	.1122	-.1201	-.0778	-.0441	-.0825
Highest Degree	.0465	-.0239	.0404	.1166	-.0856	.0048	-.0003
Ethnicity	-.1904	-.1052	-.1265	-.1166	.0252	-.0936	.1444
Gender	.0026	-.1564	.0321	.0484	.1091	.0565	.0408
Age	-.0466	.0082	.0264	-.0842	-.0895	-.1021	-.1405

Selected Demographic Variable	Identified Organizational Value (By Rank Number +) (continued)						
	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
	r-values						
Program Area	-.0672	-.0745	.0040	-.0694	.0067	-.1210	-.0748
Job Position	-.0712	-.0185	-.0901	.0868	-.0346	-.0184	.1632*
Co. Director	-.0330	.0377	-.0466	-.0108	.1047	.0091	-.0816
Yrs. w/NMCES	-.0101	-.1208	-.1318	-.0239	-.2066*	-.0814	.0148
Highest Degree	-.0431	.0704	-.0132	.1068	-.0431	.0330	.2014*
Ethnicity	.1489	-.0872	-.0857	.0135	.0090	-.0199	-.1280
Gender	.0335	-.0173	.0907	-.1091	.0474	.0309	-.1188
Age	.0283	-.1663*	.0803	-.0391	-.1930*	-.0633	-.0460

*Significant at the .05 level

+Ranked Organization Values

(table continues)

Rankings:

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 Univ.
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employees valued and their perceptions of evidence of those values in the policies, procedures and activities of the organization.

Specifically four of the top 14 values (High standards of excellence in educational programming (33), teamwork among co-workers (36), quick response to clientele concerns/requests (30), and recognition that our employees are our organization's greatest resource (32) were ranked 30 or lower (out of 52) in perceived evidence. It is encouraged that those values identified as having the greatest differences between beliefs and practices be reviewed and recommendations for action be implemented. Conklin, et al. (1992) suggested that a method for moving from the abstract to the concrete in this area is to identify "critical success factors" for each identified value.

Hitt (1988) defines a "critical success factor" as any action identified by an organization that is necessary for daily behavior to reflect the organization's values. For example, possible critical success factors for the value teamwork might be to a) provide incentives for teamwork, and b) recognize teamwork as a performance appraisal and/or promotion and tenure criteria.

Quick response to clientele needs should be a high priority for all employees. Yet, this value was ranked in the lower fifty percentile in terms of evidence. Administrators should be encouraged to further investigate reasons why employees feel this is not being achieved and take appropriate action to correct. For example, if the slow response to clientele is related to lack of knowledge, appropriate in-service training programs should be provided. If it is related to perceived accessibility to technical expertise, then procedural changes might be required.

Some areas of change might necessitate policy or procedural changes such as providing monetary incentives or use in promotion and tenure situation. Other changes such as increasing standards of excellence in programming might be addressed through procedures such as performance appraisal criteria and staff development and inservice training opportunities.

This study is similar to previous studies conducted in North Carolina, Ohio and Minnesota. State Cooperative Extension Systems planning to initiate a strategic plan in the near future should consider replicating this study or utilizing some other values clarification method as

recommended in the strategic planning process. Due to the uniqueness of each state Cooperative Extension System, caution is urged in transferring the results of this study to any other state.

The findings of this values assessment should be compared to the existing vision and mission statements of the NMCES. Any discrepancies found should be addressed. It is also recommended that a follow-up study be conducted with the New Mexico State Cooperative Extension Service within 3-5 years to determine if value priorities have shifted and to assess the extent employees perceive that any discrepancies between perceived values and organizational practices have lessened.

Correlation analysis was used to assess the possible overall relationships between identified organizational values and selected demographic variables. Six statistically significant correlations were found at the .05 level of significance. Caution needs to be urged however, that although statistically significant correlations were found for these identified organizational values, they have limited practical significance. These findings are consistent with previous research by Safrit (1990), Conklin, et. al (1992), and Barker (1994).

Results of this study have been shared with the New Mexico Cooperative Extension Service administrative cabinet. Results of this study can be used by NMCES to address differences between values and behavior through staff development, policy reviews and procedural changes. Decisions for action and implementation must be made by those within the organizational structure.

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