

Administrator's Perspectives on Environmental Factors Facing Cooperative Extension

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Extension is a complex organization with a mission to deliver research from the Land-Grant University to all U.S. communities. Extension administrator perspectives of the environmental factor changes that are facing the organization were investigated in this qualitative study to inform the direction for organization adaptation. Extension needs to respond to: shifts in funding and clientele demographics. Organization adaptation can cause long-term stakeholders to fear loss and therefore can act against the organization. Administrators need to be responsive to traditional stakeholder concerns to reduce shifting focus friction and achieve organization adaptation, and further survival.

Keywords: Adaptive Leadership; Cooperative Extension; Organization Change

Abstract

Extension's organizational environment has experienced changes in public financial support, the new information age, and population demographics have affected the organizational environment. These changes pose significant challenges for Extension. The changing nature of public value was discovered as an emergent theme as a part of a more extensive descriptive qualitative study on Extension's organizational environmental factors. The research question of the larger study was: What environmental factors do Extension administrators perceive as being challenges for their Extension organization? This study is grounded in the theory of adaptive leadership, an approach to assist organizations and individuals in dealing with significant changes in uncertain times when no clear answers are forthcoming. It is an approach predominantly concerned with how leaders can encourage people to adapt to changes, problems, and challenges. It was found through this study that administrators are attuned to many environmental factors, both internal and external. Administrators' attention to these factors reflected the literature's emphasis on racial and ethnic diversity changes, urbanization, the change in public's understanding of the public value and the resulting focus on evaluation and, more importantly, impacts, and that technology changes the way the Extension programming is conducted.

Introduction

Environmental factors are those outside influences that impact an organization's ability to operate (Nadler & Tushman, 1977, 1980; Scott, 2003). Environmental factors together create the environment, a contextual matrix comprised of society's political, historical, geographical, and cultural dimensions that influence an organization's relationships and activities (Lewis, 2006; Weick, 1976).

Recognizing these contextual shifts is essential for Extension to meet its mission of providing access to educational programming that translates science for practical application, to allow people to change their practices, attitudes, behaviors, and thus their lives (Bailey, Wallace, Butterfield, Page, Pinchot, Barnett, & Beard, 1909; Bull, Cote, Warner, McKinne, 2004). The academic literature does not include Extension administrators' perspectives on organizational challenges, and therefore it is uncertain whether the trends in the literature are a result of organizational strategy or from local grassroots initiatives.

Literature Review

The environmental factors cited in the literature include the Extension financial crisis (Bull et al., 2004; Graf, 1993; McDowell, 2004; Morse, 2009), changing funding requirements (Franz, 2013, 2015; Kalambokidis, 2004; West, Drake, & Londo, 2009), and significant population demographic shifts (Erbstein, Moncloa, Olagundoye, Diaz-Carrasco, & Hill, 2017; Henning, Buchholz, Steele, & Ramaswamy, 2014; Hoorman, 2002; Krofta & Panshin, 1989). Each of these factors has contributed to organizational change or calls for change in Extension.

The theorizing on Extension adaptation has offered three distinct responses to the aforementioned large-scale shifts in organization orientation (Hoag, 2005): The first is that Extension is no longer relevant and will—should—become extinct (West, Drake, & Londo, 2009); others state that a change in mission is causing organizational shortcomings because Extension has moved away from its roots in agriculture and lost support from historically significant supporters (Bull, Cote, Warner & McKinnie, 2004); and third, that Extension has not moved away from a focus on agriculture and a resulting lament that this programmatic movement has not yet occurred (McDowell, 2004). The direction for Cooperative Extension adaptation remains unclear.

Theoretical Framework

Adaptive leadership is an approach to assist organizations and individuals in dealing with consequential changes in uncertain times when no clear answers are forthcoming. It is an approach predominantly concerned with how leaders can encourage people to adapt to changes, problems, and challenges. According to Heifetz (1994), leaders need to engage in activities that mobilize, motivate, organize, orient, and focus the attention of others. The behaviors of the leader and the actions they take encourage others to address changes that are central to their lives.

Heifetz (1994) identified three different types of situational challenges. Those problems are purely technical, or purely adaptive, or a combination of both technical and adaptive. Technical challenges are defined as those problems in the “workplace or community that are clearly defined with known solutions that can be implemented through existing organizational rules and procedures” (Northouse, 2016, p. 261). Adaptive challenges do not have known solutions (Heifetz, 1994). The majority of problems are a combination of both technical and adaptive challenges (Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009). Adaptive leadership is pertinent when adaptive challenges are present in the problem (Yukl & Mahsud, 2010).

The process of adaptive leadership is comprised of four different viewpoints: the systems, biological, service-oriented, and psychotherapy perspectives (Heifetz, 1994). The systems perspective recognizes many problems individuals are confronted with are a part of a complicated interactive system. The biological perspective acknowledges that individuals do respond to both internal and external cues, influences, and environments. There is an assumption that a leader will have a service-oriented perspective and that they will use their expertise and knowledge to diagnose and prescribe solutions to the problem — the psychotherapy perspective. Adaptive leadership is used to explain how and why people accomplish adaptive work. In order to accomplish the objective, people need a supportive, safe, and constructive environment (Northouse, 2016).

Perspective

Adaptive leadership requests that leaders “get on the balcony”—this is the task of reflecting on and observing the entire organization to assess the value and power conflicts that are occurring within the organization. In organizational leadership, the external process of gaining perspective is called *scanning* (Choo, 2001; Daft & Weick, 1984). Heifetz (1994) recognizes that the leader needs to be seeking the challenges to the organization, both internally and externally. The leader’s ability to scan the environment and recognize the challenges they face influences their ability to react and how they react when they do recognize those challenges (Yukl & Mahsud, 2010).

Ecology

Adaptive leadership has a unique term, called the *holding environment* (Heifetz, 1994). It is the safe space created by the leader for everyone involved in the adaptation process to be in while they are addressing difficult issues. This environment is an atmosphere of constructive dialogue and feedback. Beyond creating safe spaces for conversations, adaptive leaders look outward from their organization to recognize the environment that they exist within. Leaders need to ask themselves if there are threats, concerns, or opportunities that the organization needs to be responding to (Segil, 2002).

The Nadler-Tushman Congruence Model for Diagnosing Organizational Behavior

This model views an organization as an open system and, therefore, is influenced by inputs, but also that it shapes its environment (Burke, 2014). In this model, the inputs are viewed as relatively fixed (Burke, 2014). The inputs help influence how the people in the organization behave by serving as constraints or opportunities for action (Burke, 2014). The three inputs that Nadler and Tushman (1977, 1980) identified are the environment, resources, history, which lead to strategy.

Environment

The stability of an organization is determined by the extent to which the environment is relatively stable or if it is dynamic (Burns & Stalker, 2006; Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967). The

environment's stability or instability significantly affects the internal operations, structures, and policies of the organization (Burke, 2014).

Resources

Nadler and Tushman (1977, 1980) identify resources as the assets of the organization, such as the capital, people, technology, and raw materials. Other intangibles are also considered resources, including a logo, company name, or brand, because these may bring public regard or value to the organization (Burke, 2014).

History

An organization's history determines patterns of employee behavior, policy, and the types of people that an organization attracts as employees and as clients (Burke, 2014). Most important for this context, history influences how organizations respond to crises (Nadler & Tushman, 1977). Burke (2014) stressed that history is an important variable in understanding an organization.

Strategy

Environment, resources, and history converge to influence the strategy that is implemented by a leader. Strategy is the "process of determining how the organization's resources are best used within the environment for optimal organizational functioning" (Burke, 2014, p. 210). Strategy is the result of identifying and addressing opportunities in the environment and determining how the organization's resources are adequate to capitalize on the opportunities.

Methods

The changing nature of public value was discovered as an emergent theme as a part of a larger descriptive qualitative study on Extension's organizational environmental factors. The research question of the larger study was: What environmental factors do Extension administrators perceive as being challenges for their Extension organization? The objective of this project is to relay State Extension Directors and 4-H Program Leaders perspectives on the environmental factors facing the Cooperative Extension organization.

Participants

Twenty Extension administrators (State Extension Directors (n=7), State 4-H Program Leaders (n=13)) volunteered to be interviewed. Participants represent 15 states and all four APLU administrative regions. The population in this study is small and has a public profile. Therefore data has not been relayed here to ensure anonymity.

Data Collection

Participants completed a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threat (SWOT) Analysis for both Extension and the 4-H program in their state. A SWOT Analysis is a management

assessment tool (Pickton & Wright, 1998). Participants were asked to complete the analysis as a mental exercise before the interview and then to reflect on what they identified. Data were collected through video-based interviews and ranged from 44-114 minutes long.

Data Analysis

Data were prepared and analyzed by transcribing audio recordings verbatim. During data collection and analysis, memoing occurred (Charmaz, 2014). Open-coding with Atlas.ti was conducted, and then themes were developed. Member checking was conducted to support transparency (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Triangulation was supported by using two separate populations to give perspective on the same phenomena (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Results

Administrators recognized key challenges: the nature of financial resources at the federal, state, and local levels; figuring out the appropriate use of technology in conducting Extension work; and the impact that urbanization and then the resulting shrinking rural communities pose for Extension. Additionally, administrators recognize the challenges faced by the increasing diversity in both rural and urban communities. Throughout the discussion of the challenges by administrators, they consistently-to a person saw the importance of remaining focused on delivering agricultural education; however, there was a reframing of agriculture as focusing on not only production but also food, and then in turn health.

Financial Resources

Money is the primary enabling resource for the system. Nancy shared:

...People realize that research costs money, you have to have labs, and [you] need to have students, and you know it costs money. People just think that Extension just happens, that people just go out there and do [it]. [University] administrators don't quite know how to fund it because they can't see how you do that. They just think a person goes out and does an educational event.

Recognition of financial reduction as a crisis was relayed at all levels: federal, state, and county. Each level of financial support—federal, state, county—was influenced by different trends, impacts, and responses for administrators.

Federal. Administrators relayed that Smith-Lever funds have been at flat funding levels. It would be a critical moment because Smith-Lever funds, even at flat funding levels, which translates to shrinking levels due to inflation, provides flexible base support that allows for matching funding from the state, county, and grants. Numerous administrators talked about the expanded opportunities to find federal funding partners across the government. Unanimously, Federal funding is important to state funding and of both to the organization as a whole.

State. Administrators' perspective on their respective states was based on the unique state's economy, politics, and culture. Extension "[is] a hundred variations on a theme." At the

state level, the relationships of administrators to their state legislature are incredibly important because of the significant financial contributions of the state legislature. “We engage [with] our legislature a lot because 42 percent of our funding comes from the legislature; [it’s] the way we fund our program,” stated Nancy. The legislature is also invested in Extension’s programming efforts, and therefore the relationships are important to communicate what the Extension program is doing. The conversation goes in both directions. It is important to communicate outcomes but also to learn what the state legislature is interested in. Regular contact with the legislature was viewed as a way to help monitor concerns and to attempt to grow financial support.

County. Administrators recognized the constant shifting status of financial support from counties. As with states, each county has its own economy, culture, and politics—multiply that by the number of counties in each state, and therefore, relationships with county officials were noted as important. Administrators emphasized that retaining funding at the county level was a constant battle. Joseph shared:

I see an opportunity to get more funds from the counties. Right now, the counties put in about \$6 to \$7 million a year. I truly believe that number could get to \$15 to \$20 million a year if we do it right because they’ll see a need to . . . be more invested in what we do.

Extension is a significant portion of some county government budgets in rural counties. Others see successes that have occurred in receiving funding from urban communities because Extension is a small expenditure. Carolyn relayed both thoughts when she said, “In a small, rural county, Extension might be 15 percent of their budget. Whereas if you look at [an] urban county, it’s not even 1 percent.” The difference in capacity contributes to the constantly shifting financial status of each county and the challenge that county funding provides for the system.

Change in public value. Administrators recognized a societal shift in how the public values Extension through the downward pressure on public funding. Joseph recognized the shift as “the shaking [up] of state budgets, the public’s questioning of the value of higher education in many sectors of the country, has put pressure on the way we do things.” Even organizational strategy may not be enough to respond to that trend.

Importance of evidence of Extension benefit. The need for evaluation is emphasized due to its connection to financial strings. In recognition of the changing contract between legislatures and public service organizations through the shrinking number of public dollars available, it has always been thought that there is a need to communicate research impacts better. Nancy recognized the need for evaluation and for putting resources behind that initiative:

We invested a number of years ago in program evaluators to really evaluate the work that we’re doing and so that we can talk about . . . [how] our work makes a difference... what were the outcomes...

Nancy elaborates that when they were able to communicate specific impacts and outcomes, then the legislature can be responsive. Outcomes need to be communicated widely to stakeholders so that those messages are shared from multiple directions.

Greater emphasis on grants and contracts. Administrators recognized the use of soft dollars as the new normal and as necessary. The use of grants is recognized as a challenge to remain focused on the organization's mission. Grants are term-limited, which can create a discontinuity of service in communities.

Fees for service. Fees are a strategy to generate financial support for program implementation. Fees do have practical limitations. Susan explained that "the [administration] is trying to pull the program staff off the state lines and move them all onto program fees. But I'm telling [the state director's team] that the budget can't sustain and support that." The ability to generate resources ensured resources for the program. The increase in fees can serve as a barrier to participation by low-income clientele.

Technology

Administrators do embrace the use of technology to do Extension work and have been investing in the use of technology. The two concerns that administrators consistently reported were, first, a concern that with reduced budgets that there would be growing pressure to deliver educational materials online. And second, there was a fear that Extension would be forced to deliver more and more content electronically or digitally and that they are not doing enough to be responsive in the "technology space." While technology is present in work, technology does not have the same effect as personal education, but it is a delivery mode that should be explored.

High tech and high touch. Administrators are seeking a path forward with a model that was "high tech and high touch." Sam emphasized that:

I still think for Extension to work, it's based on relationships, and I still think we need to be sure that we value those one-on-one types of relationships that are built through Cooperative Extension Service, particularly for a youth education program. So, I think there's going to need to be a balance there.

Relationship-based means are having an in-person relationship or connection between the Extension staff and the learner. Sam reiterates what Elizabeth and Joseph were conveying that in-person relationships are imperative to Extension work because virtual education is not the same.

The strongest case for the need for relationships in the local community and with local citizens is the ability to deliver content in the mode that citizens will be able to access it. Recognition that clients may have limited access is not a call to avoid the use of technology. It emphasizes the need to utilize staff who can have both an understanding of the local context on the ground and technology for others.

Urbanization

Rural communities are shrinking, and urban populations continue to increase and concentrate. Carolyn added more context about the urbanization that her state is experiencing, explaining that:

[We have] 80-something counties that are losing population, [and] we have about eight counties that [have] population growth...so that's where the population is. So that's also a threat because as you pack more and more people in there, how do we serve more and more people in those areas?

Urbanization is a recognized threat for Extension administrators across the country from the most rural Western states to the most urbanized East Coast states. Urbanization challenges Extension on many different levels: First, the citizens living in urban areas are disconnected from production agriculture; second, cities are so large that it is hard to make an impact with the level of staffing, and at the same time, there is greater service provider competition. If these challenges weren't enough, the current Extension and employee pipeline might not be prepared to serve these audiences. All of this contributes to a changing political landscape.

Scale. Urban populations are large and hard to penetrate. Carolyn recognized the significant scale of serving entire populations within the county boundaries, which is the current organizational structure of Extension. Carolyn explained the staffing challenge like this:

I think our number of employees in urban areas is really a challenge because, you know, if you have one 4-H agent in a county that has 10,000 people versus one 4-H agent in a county that has 100,000 people, that's a really different scenario.

It is no shock that this level of staffing is inadequate to make significant public contributions, and this ineffectiveness was readily viewed as a significant challenge.

Urban centers have more service provider competition. The level of competition from organizations providing a wide range of specialized educational information was characterized by administrators as a potential threat and also as a potential opportunity. However, it was recognized that in urban communities, there was significant competition likely because of their population and geographic scale. Not only is the program competing with other organizations, but they are also targeting an already diminished pool of money. When Curt said, "there are a lot of dollars that we are competing for," it referred to the level of competition, rather than the volume of dollars available. It is also important to acknowledge that the legislature is supplying funding to other organizations while their own state Extension program provides the same or a similar program.

Power shifts. Shifts in population and population needs will inevitably result in changing political alliances and power. With the population shifts, administrators recognized that potential funding and support changes would result from an increase in the number of urban legislators. As potential funding and programming shifts to serve a growing urban population, stress will be placed on the historical relationships with organizations who work to secure support for Extension as well as with the program's historical clients. The state legislature is a significant source of financial support for Extension. There is a need to have an educational strategy for legislators who may not have experiential knowledge of the Extension program, either as a client or 4-H member. Additionally, it is a call for administrators to be in dialogue with the legislature to be responsive to the needs that the legislators are identifying in their communities.

Long-standing organizational relationships. Extension has long-standing relationships with agriculture and rural organizations. These relationships are important for political reasons but also as working educational partnerships, with commodity groups relaying feedback about programming. In the context of urbanization, these strong relationships may not consider the need for changing programming into urban settings. Even if they do consider the need for Extension to expand, they do not want their clientele to lose services. The organizations still have political power and can mobilize their clientele for or against Extension.

Stakeholders are fearful of loss. Stakeholders are fearful of losing opportunities and resources. As David said, “Sometimes when you try to move in new directions, you find opposition from current audiences. The current audiences of rural and agricultural organizations are concerned about their status. Sarah captured that Extension’s clients are:

. . . really passionate folks, that really come to the table to rally; they really value Extension and want to make sure that the things they know and love about Extension [continue]; and again, some of this goes back to 4-H, so they are pretty loud, loud and clear.

These historic audiences are not just agriculture commodity groups, but also 4-H parents, volunteers, and Master Gardeners, and the list of stakeholders goes on. The stakeholders’ passion for the organization is rooted in what the organization provides them, and they care deeply about the positive benefits that they have experienced or see others receiving. Thus, from that passion, those same stakeholders who will “rally for a budget cut at the state legislature” can be loud when they perceive that the organization is shifting away from their “special interests.”

Opportunities in the urban landscape. While urbanization is a significant threat to many factors, urban populations are always viewed as "opportunities." Robert shared this:

Saying that we need to increase that urban presence and look at how we approach those audiences differently is not saying that we’re doing things wrong in other aspects. [Urban communities] are really where [the] opportunities are.

Additionally, Curt saw the opportunity to bring the historic strength of agricultural education to the urban context. He emphasized that when he said, "I think there’s phenomenal opportunity in this urban interface of folks who are concerned about where their food comes from." He showcased the need for continued agricultural and environmental literacy, which emphasized Extension’s historic strength and matched it with citizens’ interest in “food.” In order to serve urban populations, administrators have turned to municipalities to provide funding for staff. Administrators relayed success with having county administrators fund more paraprofessionals to deliver the content in more communities. This was highlighted as a fairly “easy” sell because an Extension budget request is tiny compared to the entirety of a large urban county budget.

Shrinking Rural Communities

Since Extension was founded as an agricultural improvement organization that has focused on rural community and human capacity development, it is understandable that rural people, spaces,

and economies have been its strength. Urbanization has resulted in shrinking rural communities, with a reduction in economic vibrancy and viability, as young people have moved away. While at first glance, these certainly are opportunities for Extension, they have also become threats. As the need for Extension's programming is increasing in rural communities, the ability for rural counties to fund Extension is decreasing.

With brain drain (Carr & Kefalas, 2009), a challenge has emerged for Extension: how to replace retiring county-based staff in rural communities. Carolyn shared that it has been challenging to find qualified extension professional candidates in rural communities. She said, "we really struggle to find strong applicant pools for agents in... rural areas." The barrier to recruitment was not salary but the availability of qualified individuals who would be willing to stay and work in those communities.

As land-grant universities seek higher rankings, they have sought more competitive applicant pools, and therefore it has become increasingly challenging for rural youth to gain entry to land-grant universities. Because it is harder to get into the state's land-grant university, administrators cited there were fewer qualified individuals who want to "return home" to their rural communities.

Diversity in Our Communities

Each administrator expressed the need for Extension to serve the entire public. Administrators expressed specific considerations on inclusion efforts for Hispanic/Latino populations, ESL individuals, African Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans, refugee populations, and LGBTQ+ individuals.

All twenty of the study participants expressed a need to continue work toward representative parity between state demographics and clientele. Sam candidly shared this about his state:

When I run the demographics for [my state], we still disproportionately have more Caucasian white, you know, white folks, and... if you compare that to our state demographics and we do very well on the Hispanic, but [this state] is primarily a majority Hispanic population... We are still falling short on [serving] our tribal native American [youth]

Each state is at different levels of response to changing ethnic and racial demographics; however, the consistent response indicated a need to systematize their response and to be intentional. One regularly suggested institutional response was for there to be more diversity in staff.

Need for a diverse staff pipeline. The need for racial and ethnic diversity in staffing was recognized as a barrier to participation. Benefits associated with diversifying the workforce ranged from improving gatekeeper status, bilingual skills, and cultural competency to creating the potential for individuals to associate and bond with similar others, also known as *homophily* (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, Cook, 2001).

Administrators recognized their staff populations as being primarily white. Ryan succinctly stated: “We do not have a diverse staff at all. We only have two people of color . . . out of all of our 80 plus educators.” Additionally, some—not all—agents do not have the cultural knowledge to access diverse populations, but they also do not want to. Some current staff fear a *shifting focus*. Administrators recognized that there were intentional forces against inclusion within their organizations, which lead to slow progress when there is a lack of intentionality, which most administrators identified.

At the same time, all the administrators saw glimpses of effort toward demographically representative service. The intentionality of effort was recognized as being essential for forward progress. Using in-organization individuals/families of underserved populations to speak about their experiences allows for a little bit of that support to be done by people who allow the target population to say, “Those individuals look like me, talk like me, and are in my communities.” It is powerful to note that Rhonda recognizes this approach has been done historically to serve white rural youth and now needs to be done for all other youth. It is important to engage families in a dialogue to understand how they want to experience Extension.

The Mission Remains Agriculture

Extension administrators are committed to continuing agricultural educational programming for adult agriculture producers, youth through 4-H, and community members through Master Gardeners. Callie framed the task for Extension to remain committed to agriculture programming:

I think it's very important to provide agricultural programming, from the standpoint of healthy living and nutrition, from the standpoint of a community food security, [; [and] from the standpoint of agriculture production here in the U. S., I think it really is. It's important that we grow our food locally. So, yeah, I think it's very important because . . . it's also our roots . . . If we deviate from what we are because we're trying to stay relevant and cool and hip, [we may experience mission creep]. Thankfully there's a lot of ways to make agriculture cool and hip nowadays, which is also who we are . . . what we're founded [on], but it can't be the only thing we do.

This commitment is predicated on the idea that agriculture is a primary industry for the states because it's the organization's historic work in this area, as well as because of an inborn commitment that leaders have to the agriculture industry. Administrators see opportunities to expand agricultural literacy through programs that are framed around food, nutrition, and health, and they see an opportunity to make significant impacts on communities and to make Extension more relevant to the broader society by framing their work as "health" rather than simply agricultural production.

Shifting Focus Friction: Barrier to Adaptation

Discussed above are a wide range of environmental factors that administrators recognized for the Extension system as a whole. There are many, and they are complex. Administrators raised the idea of *shifting focus friction*. Shifting focus friction is the backlash from important stakeholders

to organizational changes when there is either an actual loss or a perceived loss of resources to another focus. The individuals causing this friction are experiencing real stress from the real or perceived loss. Administrators recognized that this shifting focus friction is generated from a deep appreciation for the services that they have experienced from Extension. This appreciation is paired with a lack of understanding about the entire organization's mission, which makes them focused on preserving the services that they utilize and appreciate.

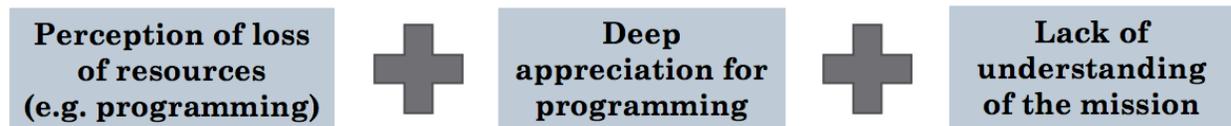


Figure 1. Shifting Focus Friction

Historic stakeholders such as long-term volunteers - or agricultural organizations- will be the ones who will demonstrate behaviors intended to prevent organizational change. Extension audiences with political power will use their relationships and connections to try and ensure that shifts in the organization's mission do not take place unless their special interest is maintained. Examples of responses administrators relayed, included: social media campaigns, personal attacks on administrators, campaigns toward legislators, and communicating with university administrators. Individuals within the organization who are non-adopters of the program because they do not agree with the changes contribute to shifting focus friction.

Discussion and Implications

It was found through this study that administrators are attuned to many environmental factors, both internal and external. Administrators' attention to these factors reflected the literature's emphasis on racial and ethnic diversity changes, urbanization, the change in public's understanding of the public value and the resulting emphasis on evaluation and, more importantly, impacts; and, that technology changes the way the Extension programming is conducted. In addition to the above environmental factors, they also highlighted other factors, including 1) that the mission should be reframed toward health, 2) that there is still a need for Extension in rural communities, and 3) that the Extension employee pipeline needs attention. Administrators recognized that the organization's response to the above environmental factors had produced shifting focus friction.

Extension is Relevant and will Remain focused on agriculture. Despite the debate in the literature about the future of Extension (Hoag, 2005; West et al., 2009) or the relevance of Extension as an agriculture organization (Bull et al., 2004), administrators resoundingly rebuked Extension's extinction (West et al., 2009) and were committed to Extension as an organization that has and will remain rooted as an agriculture organization.

The change in the public's understanding of public value has to lead to the contract now is: What is the value that is being received for the dollar invested. What is the return on investment? And, should the public dollar be invested in this program compared to any other given program. Evidence will continue to grow in importance.

Extension has an opportunity to reframe as a health organization. Extension must remain committed to agricultural programming. They suggested the need to reframe agriculture programming to be a continuum of agriculture as food, as health, and even as a community. This is not new as Extension has been providing programming on agriculture production and food since its inception (Rogers, 1988). Administrators specifically focused on how to support healthy production, how to ensure healthy food, and how to ensure healthy people in mind and body—all of which they saw as ways to achieve healthy communities.

Smith-Lever Capacity Grant Funds that are administered through USDA-NIFA's Federal budget are stagnant. Unified efforts to increase Smith-Lever Capacity Grant Funds in order to ensure future organizational stability were strongly recommended by administrators. The effort needs to be a concerted campaign of the land-grant university systems and their partners to communicate the organizational value and their mission to federal, state, and local legislators and government agencies. Additionally, Extension is no longer solely a rural community education program and therefore, should seek partnerships across the federal government.

Developing strong relationships with legislators and being armed with relevant outcome data were recognized as the two aspects that could help stabilize state and county budgets. It is interesting to note that the administrators' ability to have two-way conversations with legislators and county-commissioners was considered important so that programming could be responsive to the needs of the representatives and thus could be on the mind of funders when there was a funding initiative.

County-level budgets will continue to become increasingly disparate, with rural communities experiencing downward pressures on both legislatively appropriated or direct tax-levied budgets as rural communities shrink. In order to continue to be relevant in Extension's historically strong programming communities and areas, there will need to be pressure to increase urban funding to allow for other state or federal funds to be used in shrinking communities.

Rural communities are having a growing need for Extension services. Administrators recognized the flip side of urbanization was the shrinking and aging rural communities that are left behind (Carr & Kefalas, 2009; Henderson & Akers, 2009). As the needs increase in rural communities, the local capacity to fund the organization shrinks. This creates a unique pressure on Extension to urbanize. However, Extension has a long-term relationship and a commitment to rural communities (Rogers, 1988; Wessel & Wessel, 1982); therefore, it's imperative to sustain service in rural communities and increase funding in urban communities in order to continue to serve both traditional and expand new audiences.

Urbanization is recognized by administrators as *the* challenge for Extension: the tension between shrinking rural communities where they have a strong base of support and large-population communities that are unknown territory (Fehlis, 1992). In urban communities Extension administrators recognized a high concentration of competition not only for financial resources but also for clientele. Additionally, administrators consistently recognized that the county unit scale is daunting for servicing urban communities.

Shrinking rural communities will erode political support for rural-only organizations, and serving all people is part of their public service mission. Urban counties and municipalities have stronger tax bases. The implications for Extension working in urban environments is that Extension will need to market themselves in order to gain market traction at the same level that Extension has earned over a century of providing services in rural communities. The staffing scale needs to reflect the community integration levels that can be achieved in rural communities.

Technology is not a panacea as there are significant barriers for clients to be able to use and access the tools (Seger, 2011). Administrators experienced the tension between using technology, which could result in devaluing the effectiveness of programming and using technology to enhance programming reach. Additionally, there was a strong commitment to the idea that Extension's value is the closeness to communities and the deep knowledge of the community that only that face-to-face connections can produce. Joseph used the terms "high tech and high touch" to capture an Extension strategy that uses technology. Technology costs money and takes investments to maintain the technology infrastructure. In tight budgets, administrators are faced with spending money on technology or people. The decisions do not have to be either-or; rather it needs to be a mix of both approaches.

Administrators recognized their mission mandate to serve the representative populations in their state. There was still significant work to be done to serve diverse audiences in both urban and rural communities. There needs to be an intentional effort to develop programs that target underserved populations. Efforts to modify existing curriculum for diverse communities were acknowledged (e.g., translating curriculum).

The importance of staff was emphasized by administrators. Staffing levels need to be increased. Logically, the downward trend in staffing levels (Astroth, 2007) is linked to the downward pressure of funding because the majority of the Extension budget is in human resources. A strategy needs to be developed to increase both numbers of community-based agents. The other challenge of staffing was that the current employees were predominantly white and did not have insider knowledge of the growing number of ethnic populations: their cultural norms, language, religion, or networks (Vega et al., 2016). The low-level of system-wide employee diversity is a limitation for serving all populations.

Organization Environmental Change

The Nadler-Tushman Congruence Model for diagnosing organizational behavior.

This model views an organization as an open system and, therefore, is influenced by inputs, but also that it shapes its environment (Burke, 2014). In this model, the inputs are viewed as relatively fixed (Burke, 2014). The inputs help influence how the people in the organization behave by serving as constraints or opportunities for action (Burke, 2014). The three inputs that Nadler and Tushman (1977, 1980) identified are the environment, resources, history, which lead to strategy.

Environment. Extension's environment has continued to become more complex, with changing funding streams, bigger communities, more diverse target populations, and more breadth in programming. As Burns and Stalker (2006) discuss, the organizational environment's

stability or instability significantly affects the internal operations, structures, and policies of the organization. For extension, the complexity and the greater amount of environmental instability and complexity has threatened the Extension system, yet, administrators are identifying the issues and trying to create change.

Extension has a deep-history that has determined patterns of employee behavior, policy, and the types of people that an organization attracts as clients. The organizational environment, the resources available, and history converge to influence the strategy that is implemented by a leader (Burke, 2014). It is imperative Extension administrators recognize the need to be responsive to historic stakeholders and prepare them for significant organization adaptation needs to maintain and grow available resources.

Leadership implications. *Shifting focus friction* is a result of a failure of Extension leadership to prepare their clientele for organizational change. To prepare clientele for change, administrators emphasized the need for relationship building. Constant communication and relationship-building help advance efforts to bring clientele into the bigger mission of the organization -create a *shared* vision (Heifetz, 1999)- and when there is constant communication, the administrator creates a *holding environment* (Heifetz, 1999)- which can lead to successful organizational adaptation. If a state's Extension program is experiencing shifting focus friction, administrators are not creating a shared vision or ensured a shared commitment to the future of the organization, thus reducing fear of loss of programming. Adaptive leadership (Heifetz, 1999) gives a prescriptive approach to build consensus to allow for the organization to make the adaptation.

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