

Increasing 4-H Impact

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In today's changing society, organizations must constantly shift and allocate resources to become more effective and efficient. As a viable organization, 4-H must also adapt to the changing environment and find ways to reach a larger clientele and increase membership. The author discusses the decision-making or problem-solving process which an organization can use to adapt to a changing environment, analyzes the changes occurring and their implications for Extension, and suggests alternative strategies that might be adapted to increase the impact of 4-H.

ALL ORGANIZATIONS in our society face the problem of constantly shifting and allocating their resources to most effectively fit into the environment in which they operate. Adapting to a changing society is especially important for the 4-H organization, which was originally founded to serve the farm youths who now comprise a small proportion of all youths. Because 4-H is a viable organization with access to basic knowledge resources in the University, it is imperative that we search for strategies by which to reach a large clientele. While other national youth organizations are generally increasing in membership, 4-H has been rather static. If this condition is allowed to persist, it will have unfavorable consequences for morale within the organization and for support from without.

The objectives of this paper are: (1) to identify the decision-making process by which the organization can adapt to this changing environment; (2) to analyze the changes taking place in the environment and the meaning these changes have for the organization; and (3) to analyze alternative strategies for adaptation. It is easy to get agreement on the need for a more effective and efficient organization. Effect means the ultimate influence of the program on a target group. Effectiveness refers not to the final results, but to the ability of the program to be carried out successfully. Efficiency pertains not only to how well and at what cost the program was con-

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ducted, but also the ratio of the cost to other possible ways of arriving at a similar effect. Efficiency then refers to an input-output ratio. Since we are dealing with finite resources, we need to be concerned not only with effectiveness, but also efficiency.

PROBLEM-SOLVING PROCESS

What is the mental process best suited to solving the problem of organizational change? The decision maker first has to identify the problem. A problem exists only if the situation is at some variance with what is expected. In other words, each of us has certain aspirations and goals. If there is some discrepancy between what now exists and what we aspire to, then a problem exists. We need to analyze this problem so as to figure out the causes. Diagnosis precedes treatment. If the major problem is to expand the 4-H program and consequent enrollment, we must first fully understand why the enrollment has not increased to meet our expectations. This step means understanding the youth we want to reach and the purpose of our program.

Then we search for alternative actions to increase enrollment. We can list several ideas: (1) change the membership criteria, perhaps lowering the age so as to make eligible for recruitment many more youth in the age range most susceptible to youth programs; (2) link with other sponsoring groups in the community; (3) change the program offerings and increase the activities that are more appealing to modern youth; (4) retrain the present staff or add additional staff better equipped to offer the type of program which attracts boys and girls; (5) change the organizational structure at the state or local level to better serve youth; (6) increase financial support; (7) use more efficient methods of teaching and reaching youth, such as television; (8) develop a better plan of leader and member recruitment; (9) change the image of the organization to make it more appealing to nonfarm youth.

We operate with "bounded rationality," which means we never know all there is to know about a particular problem. Therefore, we constantly arrive at a finite number of alternatives to solving the problem. We also operate in a state of uncertainty with respect to most of these alternatives, not knowing, with certainty, what the results will be nor what these changes will cost in terms of resources.

However, to these various strategies we attach a utility function. We give each of them a weight or value, maybe nothing more than a subjective order of priority. We consider not only the cost of im-

plementing each alternative but also the unanticipated consequences or side effects. We always relate the alternatives for solving the problem to some goal or goals we have in mind. For example, what are the goals for increasing membership in 4-H? Accompanying this increase-in-membership goal are the educational goals in terms of the target youth. It is helpful to think in terms of immediate goals as well as long-range goals. Immediate goals are operationalized, and serve as guidelines for everyday teaching. Long-range goals are phrased as: leadership, citizenship, cooperativeness, vocational skills, family competencies, etc. These general goals apply to any youth organization, and do not give specific direction to projects or programs. The more immediate goals, such as teaching boys auto mechanics or teaching girls sewing, ultimately contribute to the long-range goals.

Hence, these steps are involved in problem solving: observe and analyze the situation, diagnose what the problem is and identify causes, develop alternative strategies for action, apply weights or values to these strategies, select the optimum strategy, implement this strategy and evaluate the results.

TWO DIMENSIONS OF THE PROBLEM

An organization always reacts to its environment. We must consider (1) what changes are taking place in the environment, and (2) what the implications are for the Extension organization and program. It has been well documented that our society is fast becoming urbanized, and people are taking on attitudes, values, and behaviors of an urban culture. About two-thirds of our people live in metropolitan areas and this proportion will increase to four-fifths by 1980. Many people who live outside cities are oriented to urban occupations and an urban style of life. The rural nonfarm youth is probably more similar to the urban youth in his interests and behavior than to farm youths. Only one in ten farm youths can expect to make an adequate living on farms. There is a tremendous out-migration of rural youth from rural areas toward urban areas.¹

In general, these rural youths are disadvantaged on almost any criteria we can think of when comparing them with the urban youth.² Most do not have the skills and competencies to successfully

¹Lee G. Burchinal (ed.), *Rural Youth in Crisis* (Washington: U.S. Dept. of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1965), ch. 19.

²*Ibid.*, especially ch. 2 and 11. There is evidence the gap between rural and urban youth is narrowing; for example, see Table 6, p. 127, which shows a higher percentage of rural than urban youth 16 and 17 years old enrolled in school in 1960 in the North Central region, in contrast to the 1950 situation.

compete in the job market with the urban youth. The education the rural youth has been getting is inferior to that of the city youth. Rural people do not have as many years of schooling as urban people do, hence the aspiration level for advanced education is lower in the rural areas. Counseling services and preparation for urban vocations are inferior in the rural areas. It may really be a disservice to teach some farm youth about agriculture when we should be preparing them for urban jobs. Many farm children will remain in the community in which they now live, but their income will generally be lower than in the cities. With urbanization we can expect more specialization, more complex organizations, and greater industrialization.

THE ORGANIZATION

The Extension Service is a social system in which the 4-H organization is one part of the total organization, together with the home economics and the agricultural adult programs. All phases are interrelated and changes in one will also have consequences on the others. Hence the organization has certain kinds of built-in constraints which retard changes. For example, the organization has an ideology or set of values—these largely accrue from the clientele with whom we work. If we begin to work with low-income people, we become more sympathetic toward the needs of these people. Another constraint is the kind of training the staff have had, primarily agriculture and home economics. Decisions made in the past have a constraint in terms of what we can do in the future. History and tradition exert controls. Local, state, and national groups who have developed vested interests in Extension may retard initiation of organizational changes. Another constraint is lack of total access to the University for some resources. The Federal Extension Service has not been in a position to provide strong leadership nationally.

At the same time, the organization has tremendous assets which facilitate orienting the program to a broader clientele. The public financial support is a luxury no other youth organization has. Being a part of the University is a big asset (although a few people have raised the question of divorcing 4-H from the University). Goodwill has been built up over years. Large numbers of people have supported and continue to provide leadership on a volunteer basis. The educational resources have been developed and tested over many years. Hence the organization not only has constraints, but also assets which facilitate adaptation.

Organizations have a tendency to persist without innovations.

Day-to-day routines take precedence over new or experimental tasks. Extension has major investments in present staff, methods, materials, and political support groups. Innovations require risk money in that we are not certain of the consequences. As a result, administrators often emphasize the methods or means rather than the ends or objectives—education of individuals and groups. For most organizations, the stimuli to innovation are external.

Changes within the environment tend to make existing organizational procedures unsatisfactory. Factors which affect the propensity to engage in innovative activities are: having some type of time pressure imposed on us, having a greater clarification of goals, and allocating resources to the goals requiring nonprogrammed activity, e.g., pilot counties which serve as a research and development unit.

ALTERNATIVE STRATEGIES

The following are some alternatives for increasing the impact of the 4-H organization and program:

1. Goals and policies should be clarified. The staff members concerned with planning and carrying out a program need to have at least a minimum level of consensus with respect to priorities about the clientele they are attempting to reach, the objectives they are trying to accomplish, and the methods and means by which these objectives are to be attained. In my opinion, confusion exists among 4-H staff with respect to goals and policies of the youth program.

2. The image of 4-H should be expanded so that it has more appeal to nonfarm youth.³ An image which is generally seen as animals, dresses, farms, and country fairs is lacking in the symbols which will have a dynamic appeal to nonfarm youth. Perhaps the image could be expanded so as to capitalize on the relationship of 4-H to the total University, since the knowledge center is a glamour business in our society today. We do not need to be an iconoclast, that is, an image destroyer, but rather one that expands and builds on the image that now exists. In doing this, we need to agree on the nature of the image that we want to project. Image includes both the factual and the value content. Thus, people can change their knowledge level with respect to an image, without having the necessary attitudinal change.

³Patrick G. Boyle and Emory J. Brown, "Adapting 4-H to Urban Situations," *Journal of Cooperative Extension*, II (Spring, 1964), 35.

3. There should be more linkage with local organizations and sponsoring groups. Change in clientele would necessitate change in linkage or hookup with various kinds of sponsoring organizations and groups, such as the Scouts have. This will require attachments to organizations which do not have an agricultural orientation or goal. Perhaps a more complex and specialized set of sponsoring groups and leaders is needed in 4-H. In more urbanized areas, local leader councils can be strategically located on a geographic basis; advisory groups can have more specialized functions. We need to consider the optimum strategy for maximizing the relationship of 4-H to the formal school program.

Having access to the power structure is an important organizational technique. We have been successful in working with the power structure of agriculture, but in most areas today we do not have access to, nor do we know very well, the power figures in the community other than those in agriculture.

4. The program and methods need to be scrutinized to see if they are the most efficient and effective. Maybe there should be a wide range of activities, such as sports and auto mechanics, which have more appeal to boys. Requirements of the project seem to be ill adapted to the youth outside of agriculture. There is no question about a need for different kinds of projects which fit the needs and interests of the urban boy and girl.⁴ The projects should be more geared to the skills which fit into urban work opportunities. The county fair exhibits could be more symbolic of "science." The youth program could include an extra-organizational approach in which there is direct educational contact with clientele. This approach would be essentially interest-area or problem centered and would attempt to reach all pertinent youth through mass media, public meetings, special interest sessions, etc.

→ 5. More emphasis should be placed on a multiphased program. No one type of program will serve all youth. Perhaps it needs to be age graded and also adapted to different types of social classes.

6. All youth organizations have a problem of recruiting adequate local leadership of a volunteer nature. We need to establish a systematic method of recruiting and training leaders. Leadership will no doubt be more and more specialized. Also, these leaders will likely have shorter tenure than in the past. New methods of

⁴ Cf. Emory J. Brown and Patrick G. Boyle, *4-H in Urban Areas* (Washington National 4-H Club Foundation, 1964).

training need to be considered, such as use of the correspondence course or programmed instruction. Experimentation in paying selected leaders for certain responsibilities is warranted.

7. There is a need to explore means of gaining greater access to the knowledge center at the University. Many states are finding that staff members in colleges of the University other than agriculture and home economics are willing to assist with the youth program by providing teaching materials or assisting with research and experimentation. Being a part of the University, the youth program is in a strategic position to allocate more resources in experimenting with new methods and programs which can then be transferred to other youth organizations in our society. Combining Extension services of a University into one organization should facilitate access to assistance of specialists throughout the University. How 4-H can best fit into a combined Extension organization is yet to be determined.

8. The role of the professional agent will no doubt also undergo a considerable amount of change. This professional will likely have little contact with the members themselves. Perhaps in the future this person will be even less a trainer of local leaders and will be more an organizer, the collator of resources in the community. More time will likely be given to planning and experimenting. This person will also need to be acquainted with other youth-serving agencies and organizations in the area and with the professional people in these organizations. The consultant role would be given more emphasis.

SUMMARY

All 4-H professionals are challenged to think through the program strengths and weaknesses, what changes are needed to fit the environment, and how to most effectively and efficiently serve the needs of youth in the target population. No doubt there are fundamentals in our organization and program which we want to retain, while there are other activities and parts of our program which we feel are no longer necessary. We can then add innovations in the program and organization in order to better meet the needs of modern youth.