
Working Relationships

HOYT M. WARREN

As adult educators, we constantly work with people, both within and without an organization. Certain basic principles may serve to guide us in some of our relationships within an organization, as we work with each other. The author discusses some of these, maintaining that although there is probably no single perfect guide for all organizations or individuals, the principles offered may serve as a rather stable reference or guide to more effective action for the Extension worker.

WORKING with people is interesting and challenging to an Extension professional, especially those of us directly concerned with bringing about changes in people. As we work with people, we who are educators, teachers, leaders, and technicians must have in mind overall purposes to which our individual efforts are directed. Those purposes provide the basis for developing the organization, its existence, procedures, methods, and techniques. The organization and its many processes represent a means to achieve established objectives. Where the purpose or objective is educational in nature, it involves "working with people" or bringing about change in people.

Effective work with people, then, directly involves two distinctive groups of people: (1) those within the organization and (2) those the organization expects to affect or change. The starting point for any evaluation concerning effective and lasting professional performance must directly involve the organization which is the vehicle or means of change. This paper deals only with the first of these groups, focusing on "working with people" within an organization.

BASIC PRINCIPLES

Certain basic principles may serve to guide us in some of our relationships within an organization. These principles may need modification and certainly will need adaptation as they are applied.

HOYT M. WARREN is Assistant Director, Cooperative Extension Service, Auburn University, Auburn, Alabama.

but over a period of time they should be useful guides to professional educators as they work with each other. The first principle deals with the purpose, direction, or mission of the organization.

1. *The purpose of the organization must be clearly defined and understood by its members.*

Every member must have a working knowledge of what his organization is trying to accomplish, if he is to make a maximum contribution to that effort. Only then can he and the organization accomplish a common end. Only when an organization presents to the public a unified force of purpose can it hope to have maximum impact upon that public and a minimum of misunderstanding by that public. This requires an effort by administrators to clarify and redefine purposes and objectives, and an effort by each member to study and inform himself of this end. Another principle relates to the individual and his relative position within the organization's framework:

2. *Organizational positions must be identified and related to the purposes of the organization.*

Some writers term this "division of work." It means grouping workers within an organization into some structural arrangement that will best serve the purpose of the organization.

Always in the forefront of such considerations are the accessibility of members to the public, and the competence of these members to serve the needs of that public. Location of positions and the structure of an organization directly affect contact we may have with the public. And the particular qualifications associated with each position may help determine the ultimate outcome of these contacts. It is essential then, if we want to effectively "work with people," to make the organization members easily accessible to the public and to place individuals in the structure where their particular competence will be most productive. This is achieved in part by job descriptions, employment requirements, supervision, and allocation of resources. Here we have another fundamental guideline for a successful relationship within an organization:

3. *Effective performance requires that authority and responsibility be specifically designated and clearly defined for each individual or group of individuals in the organization.*

Observance of this rule determines to a great extent an organization's ability to function smoothly and effectively. Each employee must be aware of his responsibilities and the limits of his authority, in dealing with both co-workers and the public. His interpretation of these basic organizational ingredients determines his behavior toward others and shapes the character of his performance.

In this regard, it is not only essential that the individual understand his own responsibilities, but he must also understand the responsibilities and authority of others with whom he is closely associated. Much conflict, discord, and misunderstanding can be avoided if this rule is observed, and a more favorable image may be created for the public we hope to influence. Here again, each administrator has the responsibility to clarify and each employee has a duty to inform himself and others of these basic factors.

Every formal organization has many informal organizations within it. These are groups that form around common interests born of similarities in position, location, background, responsibilities, likes, and dislikes. Here we may identify another principle:

4. *For maximum effectiveness, the formal organization must recognize the presence of informal organizations within its structure and seek compatibility between the formal and informal structures.*

Some have observed that the formal organization provides order and consistency while informal groups provide vitality. This simply means that to better understand and work with fellow employees, it is useful to know them better and get closer to them. This is done largely through informal channels of communication and in informal settings. While these informal contacts are desirable, it is equally important that conditions developing within these informal settings be in harmony with the overall direction and purpose of the formal organization. If the opposite is true, conflict could develop, adversely affecting an organization's output and public image.

As we work with people within an organization, it is important to recognize that different people tend to have different goals. These goals may not always be in harmony with those held by others or even those of the organization. Here another principle is evident:

5. *For maximum effectiveness, an organization must recognize the existence of multiple goals as related to individuals, groups, subgroups, and informal organizations and seek to harmonize these goals with those of the formal organization.*

In a large organization there could be quite a variety of interests due to age, values, training, experience, and background. It appears impossible for individuals to divorce themselves from their goals, even if this were desirable. On the other hand, goals in life provide the spark, the motivation, the drive needed for performance and achievement. So organization officials do not generally wish to destroy or suppress these varied goals, but rather attempt to bring them into harmony with the character and purpose of the organization. If and when this is done, each worker usually has a better atti-

tude toward his fellow employees, greater loyalty to his organization, and ultimately is more effective with his public.

When we hear the term "working with others," we often tend to form a mental picture of harmony, cooperation, and coordination. Certainly these are ingredients of any smooth-working organization. The following is another principle to observe:

6. *For maximum effectiveness, coordination must occur both vertically and horizontally within the organization.*

Earlier we mentioned the need to allot responsibilities to individuals by position. Here we stress the need to bring together these separate performances into a concerted action toward common objectives. The coordinating process involves at least three aspects: (1) there must be a plan of behavior for all members of the organization, (2) this plan must be understood by each member involved, (3) each person must be willing to perform according to the plan. This involves cooperation—an essential element in coordination.

Many tools have been used to achieve coordination. Some of the more common ones are committees, conferences, boards, policy statements, workshops, and the more conventional means of communication. Communication is the real key to effective coordination. Coordination, however, is closely related to the extent each member of an organization understands and accepts his own responsibilities and those of others with whom he works.

This leads us to another basic principle in effective organizational behavior—communication. While communication is essential in all human contacts, it is particularly important when and where concerted effort is desired. To get the most from our communication efforts, adequate channels are necessary:

7. *Effective organizational performance requires that adequate channels of communication and procedure for their use be established and maintained.*

Communication must be two-way in nature and run vertically and horizontally throughout the organization. In any organization there will be communication, but if these contacts are to be guided there must be established patterns and procedures for their conduct. It is apparent here that those in leadership positions have a responsibility to establish adequate channels and that all members of the organization have a responsibility to use these channels.

Communication habits established and practiced within the organization have a way of transmitting themselves to our dealings with those outside the organization. Good communication habits practiced by individuals within the organization tend to beget good communication habits practiced with the public.

No organization can long remain unchanged. Change is inevitable. Usually in an organization such as an Extension Service there are changes in size of staff, professional competencies, procedures, and resources, and almost constant change in means of reaching broad overall objectives. This is because we are constantly adapting a means to an end. Here is another important principle:

8. *Most effective organizational performance will result when a particular form of structure is treated as a flexible, modifiable variable, subject to continuous adaptations as conditions warrant.*

Now one may ask, "What does this have to do with working with people?" It has a great deal to do with our effectiveness with the public. If our time and energies are consumed with adjustments necessary within the organization, there is less time and energy available to effect change in people—our primary mission.

It also means that the image of our organization as held by the public will be or should be constantly changing. This pinpoints the very specific responsibility we have of keeping the public's image of us in line with the services we can provide at any given time. This requires constant efforts by all members of an organization. The leadership has a responsibility to effect change at a pace within the abilities of the public and the organization to adjust, and members of the group have a responsibility to expect change and to make constant and concerted adjustments to accommodate this change.

CONCLUSION

In offering these principles as guides to more effective work within an organization, we recognize that there is probably no single perfect or universal guide for all organizations or individuals as they deal with the multiple problems arising from contacts within and without a state Extension Service. We are also increasingly aware of the constant and persistent search by leaders in agriculture, education, and Extension to give definition, direction, purpose, and stability to organizational and individual actions.

Many have recognized that actions, to be effective, consistent, reliable, and lasting, must have origin in basic principles and that adherence to such principles offers a stability not found elsewhere. This truism is basic in all fields but is more apparent as changes are rapid and more pronounced, for it is then that stable points of reference tend to decrease in number, and often the need for guidance increases. Research indicates that the several principles offered here may serve as a rather stable reference or guide to more effective actions for the Extension worker, regardless of the position he holds.