

Are New Models for Local Extension Organization Needed?

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The author reports the results of research carried out to develop models for local Extension organization that will enable Extension to more effectively reach urban clientele and meet their needs. Two county models are presented—the urban and metro. What's your reaction to them?

Generally, the capabilities of the agricultural sector of the United States have been described as having served well the needs of all mankind. From an economic viewpoint, the quality and costs of food and fiber have improved greatly over time. The output per unit and the technological infusion have been greater in agriculture than in other sectors of our economy. If these assumptions are accepted, then the Cooperative Extension Service has been successful in making major contributions to this progress.

However, questions have begun to arise relating the whole environment of social benefit to agriculture generally, and to the Cooperative Extension Service in particular. New dimensions have taken shape. New pressure groups have caused new forces of change. Questions have been raised such as:

“Do displaced rural people add to the problems of urban poor?”

“If millions of dollars can be spent subsidizing agriculture or supporting Cooperative Extension Service, why can't resources be implemented to correct much larger and seemingly more pertinent problems of urban welfare and metropolitan development as they relate to all of society?”

“How can the total resource bases of land-grant institutions be used to provide broader social benefits?”

“Why can't the same success of Extension in rural America be transfused into urban America?”

Thus, if other assumptions were accepted, then the Cooperative Extension Service could be attacked as being less than successful.

Much has been written about Cooperative Extension Service's attempts to improve and change, and the literature indicates several schools of thought as to Extension Service's future generally. These seem to fall at opposite poles. Typical questions posed are:

"Should the Cooperative Extension Service provide technical information that is current and decisive, or should it refuse to take sides on issues?"

"Should it provide leadership in coordination and planning, but delegate action and implementation to others, thereby avoiding criticism, complaint, or risk of failure?"

"In other words, should the Cooperative Extension Service take active risks or should it minimize its exposure, still being careful not to lose its traditional change-oriented image?"

The literature also indicates several schools of thought on the role of the university in social change. Should it take leadership and provide a vocal forum for change but be limited to a level of theoretical dialog? Or should the university become a real social change activist, joining in with pressure groups to move society?

Further paradoxical positions on the role of the university in its urban setting are indicated in the literature. Should a large university stay aloof within its intellectual sphere, or should it acknowledge

that it's an integral part of that local economy financially, sociologically, and politically?

Much extensive literature also exists about future trends in continuing education and the value of general extension organizations. Journals of higher education contain philosophical writings that try to define education and analyze the objectives and benefits of learning. An impending collision has been predicted for the path taken by informal education and the current structure of formal education in the United States.

Land-grant institutions have referred to their charter to serve all mankind, but they're increasingly being challenged to account for their unfulfilled promises.

If these polemic positions are in fact true, if there are rigidities in the traditional education and extension structures that preclude flexibility, if society does demand prompt political action and social reform, and if government programmers do fail to see the benefits and expedencies of using existing organizations, *what's needed is a whole new methodology* to bring the many variables together in a dynamic environment.

Needed—A Whole New Approach

The purpose of the research reported in this article was to develop an organization model to improve the total Extension outreach of The Ohio State University. The university, through its various Extension thrusts and continuing edu-

cation programs, is recognized for its excellence statewide and nationally.

However, organizations caught in dynamic environments have an increasingly difficult time identifying the problems, let alone trying to arrive at feasible solutions. From this vantage point, concepts proven in other disciplines were thought to offer dramatic new insights into anticipating, identifying, analyzing, classifying, and solving the problems of educating man. (Other disciplines offered business management, marketing, behavioral, and systems concepts.)

It was hoped that unorthodox solutions to orthodox problems would become possible through greatly improved capabilities of concerned people in the Extension outreach organizations.

Model's Major Variables

Two of the major variables considered in building the model were the *location* of change and the change agent or *personnel*. These had to be considered at the local, area or regional, state, and national levels of activity.

The Cooperative Extension Service in Ohio was heavily agriculturally oriented and funded, and was staffed largely with traditional problem-solving personnel and capabilities. Therefore, the model to be tested was limited to encompass the best of the past used in the still-applicable areas, but was also sufficiently flexible to allow for the im-

plementation of entirely new concepts.

Local Models

One method not defined in the literature, but based on my research and experience, was to restructure the local levels of contact into new definitions. Counties were hypothetically redefined as urban counties, metro counties, and rural counties. Those counties that are of predominantly industrial and urban composition were called metro counties. Primarily agricultural counties were classed as rural counties, and those in between were referred to as urban counties, because, though still primarily agricultural, they contain several growing municipalities. (The *rural county model* requires the least amount of change. Details are too long to include here.)

Urban County Model

The urban county office would be identified in its county seat location, but that county is experiencing considerable change because of land being retired from farming, increasing urban development, transportation expansion, etc. This kind of activity in the traditional setting causes pressures and change that aren't always well anticipated or familiar to local leaders or grass-roots clientele.

An example is Crawford County, Ohio. Located halfway between the state capital, Columbus, and Lake Erie, it includes the county

seat, Bucyrus, two other cities of more than 15,000 inhabitants, plus several villages. Superhighways cut across it in both directions.

There are several large landowners, but most of the farm operations are 80 to 200 acres. These farmers may also work in the factories in the three cities. Their views on unionization, finance, leisure, and economics are different from those of the traditional land laborer.

Thus, the types and complexities of problems, change, etc., are similar in part to, but also quite different from, the traditional county agent's office.

The administrator of the theoretical urban county is pictured as being responsible for planning, organizing, directing, budgeting, and supervising the office. He may have several agents reporting to him, each a specialist in needed fields.

The contemporary agriculture agent, however, may sit in on the zoning committee meeting led by the "other agent" who may be a "development expert." The contemporary home economist may also assist the youth agent on certain youth projects. The youth agent may work with rural youth in one meeting and urban youth in another, so his or her specialty must be dually applicable.

From this brief description of activity it can be seen that the agents must be able to understand the past and respond to those audiences. Still, the agents must be receptive to change and help identify new needs. That office must be able to take appropriate and prompt action even

if it's only to help plan programs for others to carry out. The agents need to be able to call in resource specialists; communicate with administrators, committees, and lay people; and train paraprofessionals. Several benefits appear possible through the urban county office structure.

There is one administrator charged with the responsibility for success of that county office. Success is defined as results of total involvement of the entire office, its agents, its use of resources and people, and the multiplicative use of paraprofessionals and lay people. Planning, organizing, direction, budgeting, supervision, and reporting gain maximum results when one person is charged with these prime responsibilities—to carry through individually or through others.

For example, the important function of reporting is often not fulfilled because: (1) the responsibility isn't fixed to one individual, (2) time and pressures caused by other activities take precedence, or (3) the person closest to the project doesn't see the need or doesn't care to communicate upwardly to administration or outwardly to the public served.

In addition, with one responsible administrator, the rigidities and maturation of individuals that cause obsolescence of people and service can be recognized and bypassed conveniently for the good of the organization and without apparent threat to the person.

Lastly, one agent may not deal with a specific subject. He may be

a local coordinator for periodic special Extension or continuing education programs in veterinary medicine, medicine, administrative science, etc., who sends traveling educational teams into the field from the college.

Metro County Model

At the opposite end of the spectrum of Extension capability is the metro county model. Here is "where the action is" compared to the other two models. Action is defined as bringing all the pressures of social change to face with all the resources and capabilities that can be brought to bear by the university at a given point in time.

The metro county administrator has his agents and tentacles of communication spread throughout the environment to provide a broad network of intelligence. Change direction and velocity can be analyzed and programmed. Unfelt needs can be identified and researched before crises erupt. Coordination with other existing agencies tends to spread influence and build the positive image of the Extension Service as a pivotal group within the social fabric of a changing community and structure.

Figure 1 illustrates the micro model of the metro county office. Agents consist of professional specialists, well educated in their disciplines and experienced in the real world of groups, power, and political issues. Each agent may have several assistants who likewise are seasoned

organizers. The administrator needs to be a dynamic leader, capable always of maximizing the effort for opportunity search and minimizing the risk (not costs).

The benefits offered by the metro county office model are:

1. The administrator is a professional communicator and manager of people and projects. He has arrived at this position after much experience, which may not include traditional Cooperative Extension Service experience. He knows how to "perceive" people and situations to determine those that will be successful and those that may only be marginal. He must help his people interpret needs into proposals which are channeled strategically and result in funding. He will need to translate special needs of his office up the organization to encourage understanding when nontypical action is called for at the local level.
2. Communication is extremely critical to the success of this model. Straight and open lines can be maintained within the office among the agents as well as between specialists and resource people brought in for project teams.
3. Funding may come from a wide variety of sources. Local office accountability and reporting will be facilitated through close teamwork and administrative reporting.

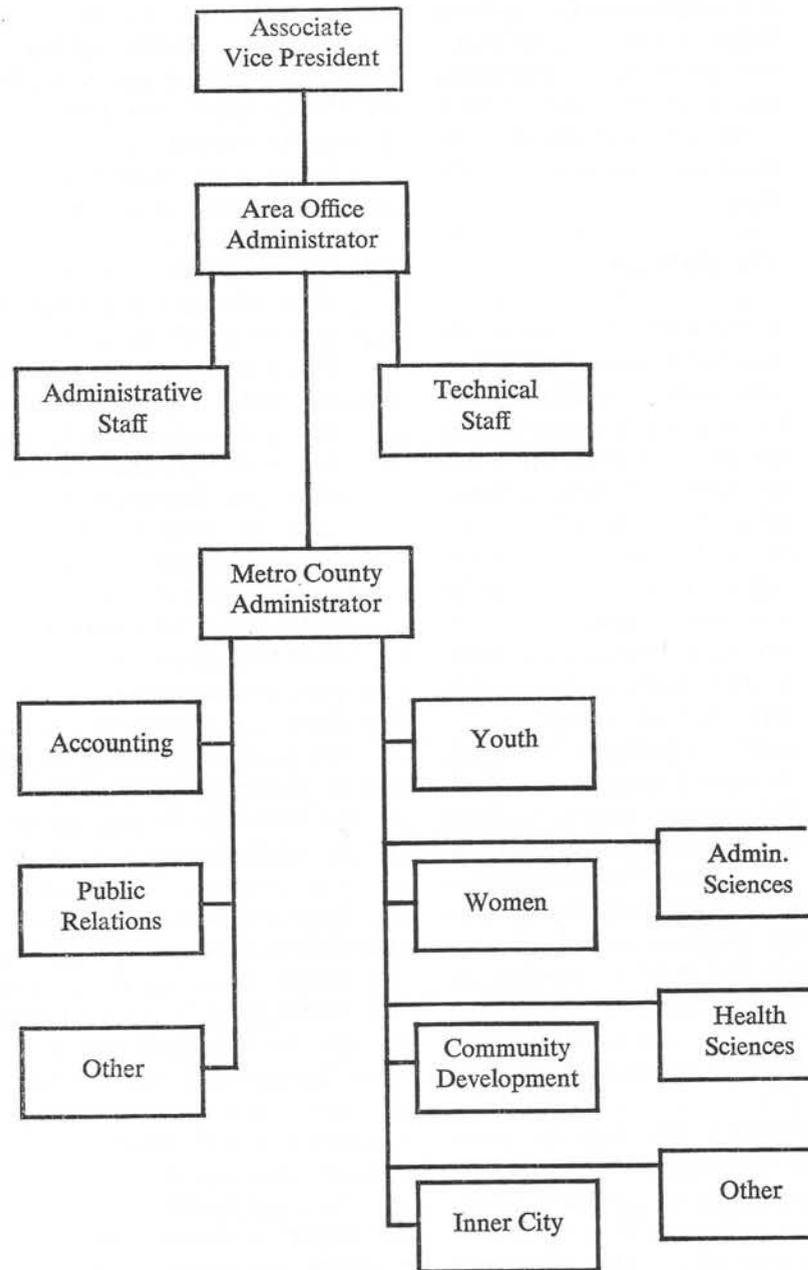


Figure 1. Micro model of metro county office.

4. If there's a need for traditional services such as an agriculture agent trained in horticulture or a similar field and these can't be justified economically as part of the metro office services, then that office requests these services from the adjacent county and uses its agriculture agent when needed or on a schedule.
5. Agents serving the metro county office would be skilled in many fields of sociological change. They'd work with youth, the disadvantaged, women, and ghetto businessmen; industrial development, administrative, and health sciences Extension; legal and other continuing education; etc. Special agricultural Extension services could still be supplied.
6. Since a comparatively small number of metro counties would exist (8 in Ohio), the administrators from these offices would serve as a very well-informed council to the central administration for Extension, the university president, and the state governor. These could be very influential positions, and their experience could well guide other programs and policies in the nation.

Critical Organizational Level

As a brief review, the most critical level in the organization model is the local one. The most critical reasons for success or failure

of the county office are the people staffing these offices and their communication network. It's from the local level that change can be identified as needed, organized into wants of the community, and implemented by the desires of that county.

We've identified theoretically three new local office concepts—the urban, the metro, and the rural. An area office may have none, one, or several of each of these types reporting to it. Over time, transition may take place as one county moves from rural to urban to metro characteristics. Metro counties may be bordered by urban or rural counties. Rural counties may surround an urban county.

Viewed in another dimension, the personnel of rural counties will have more in common with personnel in other rural counties, urban with urban, and metro with metro. Area office administrators of metro counties will be more conversant with problems of other area offices with metro counties.

While a formal line organization structure may delineate rather direct communication networks, informally there must be opportunities for units of most commonality to discuss mutual or similar problems to arrive at viable, realistic, multidisciplinary solutions within the same frame of pressure or response.

Also, the formal organization requires that personnel have direct short lines of command, while still enjoying the freedom to have dotted line connection with their counterparts by function at various levels.

For example, the county administrator with an accounting problem or budgeting problem should be able to contact that particular administrative staff person at the area level. If unsolvable at that level for some reason, direct dotted line connection is possible at the state level.

On the technical staff side, a county agent should be able to take his problems or ideas to his counterpart or specialist at the area level, who can go on to the state level as required or desired. All this communication takes place with the full knowledge and approval of the administrator at each level. This is the reason for the dotted line relationships shown in Figure 2, the macro model of the proposed Extension Service for The Ohio State University.

Macro Model of Extension

The macro model was built from the foundation upward. The foundation is made up of the micro county organization structural units, each identified and staffed according to the local markets or audiences it serves. Thus, the macro model reflects the desired flexibility of personnel and programs possible within a solid framework of subsystems and communication networks. The 88 offices would be better able to each individually and collectively meet the challenge of change within their respective environments. The anticipation, perception, and response to revolving and evolving needs would be exposed to the in-

ternal organization as well as the various publics served.

The area office functions as an intensive intelligence center. Administratively, it receives new ideas from several county offices, combines similarities, describes differences, and helps put together new program proposals. Ongoing program reports can be monitored, compared, collaborated, and forwarded. Routine problems can be isolated and corrected at that level. Only the exceptional problem would require top level attention. Resource funding and budgeting at that supervision level encourages accountability in administration.

In a dynamic environment, continuing detailed analysis would be required to prescribe the profile of each office. In other words, it would be impossible to superimpose any one area office profile onto the others without first analyzing existing and potential similarities and differences. This is to say nothing of the personalities involved.

The state level organization only partially resembles the current one. The administrative operations would comprise one major staff organization, while the technical programs staff comprises the other. Note the word "staff" in both because they are both support functions connected by dotted lines to their respective groups at the area and local levels.

Conclusions

Experience, research, and logic indicate that *if* the Cooperative

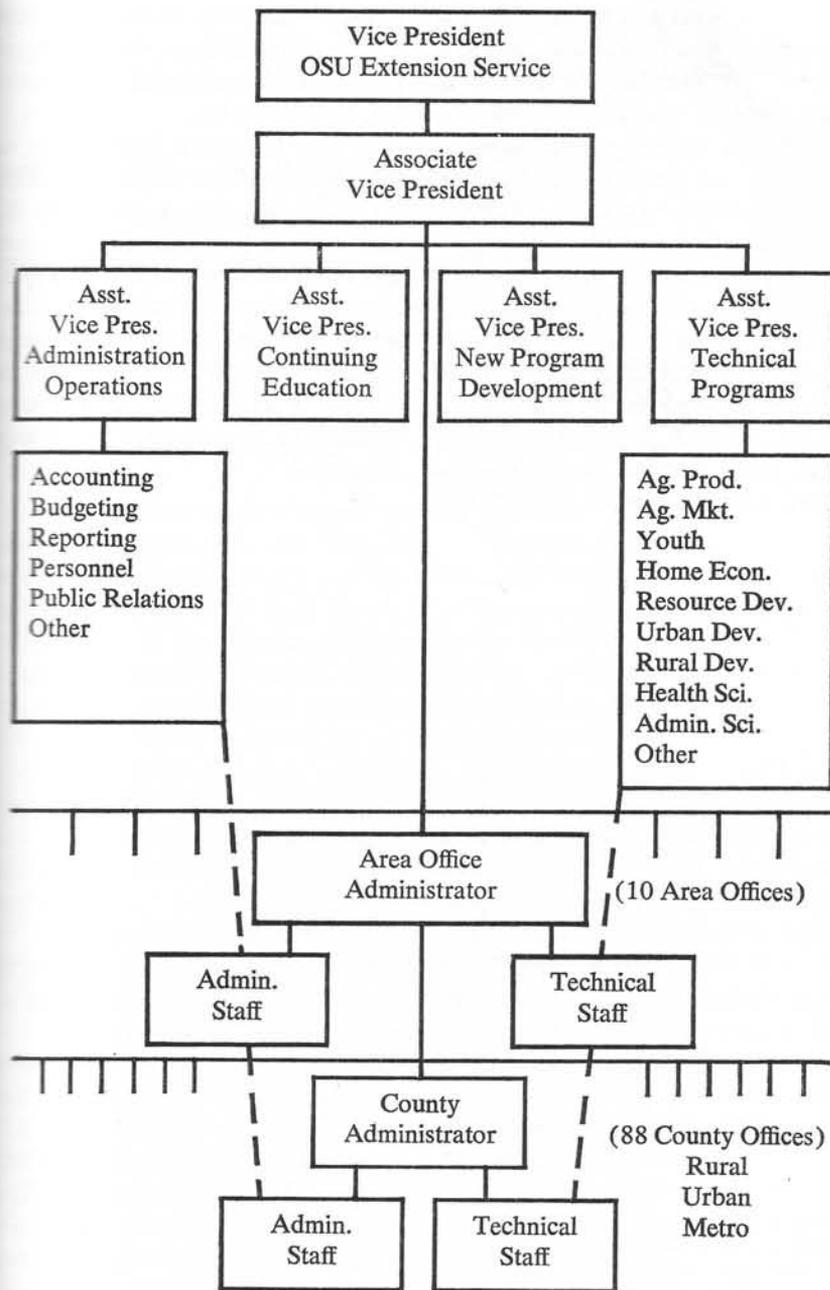


Figure 2. Macro model — proposed Extension Service.

Extension Service is to have the organization and be present on location where huge programs need to be transfused into local conditions, then organizational restructuring is necessary for Extension to function most effectively in today's social environment.

Reorganization must remove the rigidities so that change, within a stable but flexible structure will place personnel and transferrable capability at the proper place at the proper time. It is then, and only then, that Extension can resolve the traditional dialogues as to dual

roles, community leadership, motivation of supervisors, faculty status, and political and social understanding, to name a few.

The Extension Service can no longer be content with the wonderful job it has done in the past. It's in a new ball game—the environment has changed and is changing faster than ever before. In fact, unless Extension moves to continue its offensive thrust, it may well be placed in an unrelenting defensive position . . . some say it has already happened.