

volunteers as middle managers

Courtney Schwertz

One Extension agent working directly with youth will reach about 200 4-H members with a reasonably effective program. Working directly with volunteer 4-H leaders at the local 4-H Club level, this same agent could reach about 500-800 4-H members and have about 40 volunteers in the 4-H program.

How is it, then, that some Extension agents reach thousands of youth in their counties or cities? Why do some Extension units have 4-H members and volunteer 4-H leaders who return year after year so the average tenure is 5 or more years per enrollee?

I think the differences of membership numbers, project completion, and turnover rate are related to the recruitment, training, use, recognition, and evaluation of volunteer middle managers.

Volunteer Middle Managers Defined

Although teachers were often the first club leaders, this arrangement was a barrier to a year-round program. Franklin Reck, in the *4-H Story*, wrote that teachers "went off on vacation, leaving boys and girls to carry on their projects with only the supervision the overworked county agent or the state club leaders might be able to give."¹

In the 4-H program, probably the first middle managers were these teacher replacements, the community 4-H Club organizational leaders. As this role has expanded, the person serving in this capacity has the additional responsibility of recruiting other volunteer leaders to help with group activities and teach 4-H members. As project and activity leaders are added, the role of the Extension agent has changed from one in which primary emphasis is placed on teaching youth to a role of teaching adults.

During the past 60 years, growth in the number of projects has been geometric, with states now having more than 100 projects. Extension agents find that if they offer

Courtney Schwertz: Extension Leader, 4-H, Cooperative Extension Service, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University—Blacksburg. Accepted for publication: July, 1978.

this cafeteria list of projects, they don't have the subject-matter expertise to teach each specific field.

This dilemma has created the upper-middle management roles such as the county project chairman, key leader, or resource leader—the volunteer leader who teaches other project leaders in a specific project.

Glenn Barquest, Extension specialist, University of Wisconsin, in a 1970 letter, listed these possible duties:

1. Gain and maintain competence in the area of speciality.
2. Increase project leader competence through group meetings and counseling.
3. Serve as superintendent of project division at fair.
4. Act as chairman of special project events such as tours, trips, and judging and evaluation meetings or contests.
5. Keep up to date on available educational aids in the area of speciality.²

Barquest began meeting with woodworking key leaders in 1965 from 4 counties on a multicounty basis. By 1970, *30 counties in Wisconsin were participating in key leader training meetings*. Before 1965, he'd been meeting with project leaders on a county-by-county basis. However, now the wood-working key leaders were meeting with local club woodworking project leaders as many as three times a year and counseling with individuals up to four times a year.

The *Oklahoma 4-H Leader's Guide* lists a volunteer title as an area 4-H coordinator whose tasks include counseling and training new leaders and serving as an information coordinator to link leaders and community and Extension staff.³

A middle management role for volunteers suggested by V. Milton Boyce is that of a *recruiter-coach*. Volunteers in this role can serve as "right arms" for the salaried staff by recruiting and coaching other volunteers in the 4-H program.⁴

Why Middle Managers

Developing an organizational structure for task accomplishment with middle managers changes the role of the Extension 4-H agent from primarily one as a teacher to an educational systems manager. An analogy as to how the Extension agent with 4-H responsibility can view his managerial role is the way Extension, in general, is organized. The university president delegates the Extension responsibility to the director of Extension. The director of Extension delegates certain responsibility and authority to his associate directors. An associate director delegates responsibilities to a district director who

supervises Extension agents. In most organizational charts, the director of Extension, associate directors, and district directors would be viewed as middle managers.

One can easily see that this type of organizational development means more tasks can be done than if the university president were the only person available for fulfilling the Extension mission of the land-grant university.

What's not as easily understood is that this type of organizational structure provides for a close interaction between two management levels. The intent is that the people interacting between the two management levels should be sharing the same information so that their knowledge and attitudes about "what is" and "what should be" are identical. In management, as in teaching, one must know the "what is" situation of the subordinate or student before one can tackle the "what should be" objective.

As 4-H grows, and if there's an accompanying thrust for improving quality, the need for additional middle managers and upper-middle managers becomes crucial. . . .

Finding Middle Managers

Volunteer middle managers have been secured from both within and outside the traditional volunteer 4-H leader ranks. Barquest, in his 1970 letter, stated that of the 63 woodworking key leaders included in the survey, all also served as local club project or organizational leaders.

Personal experience with volunteer middle managers indicates that some middle managers can be very effective even though they may not have had previous 4-H leadership experience. For example, a local veterinarian was excellent as the dog project chairman.

The trade-off between those with and those without previous experience may be in the amount of in-service education needed for the type of job. Sometimes, it's technical competence versus knowing about the 4-H organization. Other times, it might be time available for volunteering or the personal resources that can be spent in support of leadership development.

Selecting Middle Managers

Selection of middle managers is an individual decision that involves the acceptability of the middle manager to the people whom he/she supervises or to his/her superior. In the first instance, the group may select or nominate. In the latter method, the superior makes the selection. The happy solution is when both agree on an individual.

Two management concepts important in this discussion are job promotion and job enlargement. One of the very significant sources of volunteer middle managers is people who no longer feel fulfilled in their present roles. The manager of a 4-H program can then promote this volunteer to a position where other responsibilities are given or enlarge the present position to include added responsibilities. Care must be taken so that a volunteer's time isn't overcommitted to the point where the person is unable to do good work and receive necessary job-related satisfactions.

In either event, the process shouldn't stop with selection since maintaining the middle management capability is a continuing need. The person selected must be helped to reach his/her fullest capability, given support to fulfill his/her responsibility, and given the attendant authority. The work should be evaluated honestly, openly, and regularly. Recognition must be provided. And, for the position and the system to survive, replacement must be planned.

Delegation Issues

In a volunteer system, as in an organization where everyone's salaried, delegation involves assigning work, granting authority, and creating an obligation to perform.

Delegation involves developing a hierarchy of authority. As work is divided, horizontal growth appears. As limitations in human resource accomplishments appear, work is delegated and vertical growth in the organization begins. This, then, involves the span of management. How many people can one person supervise?

Most management theorists suggest that individual differences among managers account for whether the span of management is wide or narrow. In a study of the Sears Roebuck Company, managers of stores who practiced a narrow span of management were transferred to stores where a wider span had been practiced before their arrival. On assuming their new position, they reorganized to the narrow span they'd practiced previously. The same phenomenon occurred with managers transferring from wide-span to narrow-span stores.

The researcher in this study concluded that the personalities of the managers were the issue. Managers who created narrow spans of management were more pessimistic about the abilities of people. Managers who delegate widely usually rely on self-direction, self-coordination, and self-control.⁵

The single difference between salaried and volunteer middle managers is the amount of time the individual can commit to the organization. We normally think of a salaried position as providing about 40 hours of work a week. The

volunteer, in contrast, will often, but not always, have less time to give. Thus, we need to think in terms of hours rather than individuals when considering how wide or narrow our span of management style will be as we work with them.

Departmentation

Creating a structure involves looking at the tasks that need doing. How well am I attending to the local 4-H Club organizational leaders? How many educational opportunities have I provided for project and activity leaders? Am I pleased with my monthly newsletter? Do all local 4-H Clubs have a good yearly plan of work? Are there young people who'd like to start a 4-H Club? How well are the 4-H events planned, organized, and evaluated? Does our county have input into decisions made at the state 4-H leaders' meeting?

Following this kind of exercise, are we willing to delegate the responsibility and authority to someone who may do the job differently than we? The answers to such questions will give an indication of how one might departmentalize a 4-H program and what types of middle managers to select.

For example, if the need is to have more time spent with organizational leaders, the county could be divided into regions. Each region might select an area leader. The area leaders then might select the head area leader with whom the Extension 4-H agent would work directly.

Working with Middle Managers

Working with volunteer middle managers isn't much different from working with salaried staff. Herzberg suggests that job satisfaction is related to achievement, recognition for accomplishment, challenging work, increased responsibility, and individual growth and development.⁶

One of the most crucial tasks the manager of volunteer middle managers has is to keep communication lines open by regular meetings as a group and individually. There's a great need for sharing information. While withholding information is a source of power, sharing information is the source of good will and getting the job done.

Using a framework such as management by objectives appears to be a useful notion in working with volunteer middle managers. There are usually many roads that lead from "what is" to "what should be." The manager, particularly the one who designs a fairly wide span of management, isn't as interested in the minute supervisory tasks or particularly how the task is going to be done, but is interested in whether it is done.

How wide is too wide a span of management? A rule of thumb would be related to the amount of time spent with

the upper-middle managers. If you can't find an average of at least one hour per week with your middle managers, then your span is too broad.

Where To Start

Start with one or several middle managers who might relate to community or school 4-H Club organizational leaders. Or begin with a recruiter-coach. Appoint or elect a project chairman or two the first year, add some the following year, and then have that group elect or the Extension 4-H agent appoint a coordinator or project chairmen.

Rather than give away jobs that you don't like, it's probably best to give away a job you like best. In that manner, you're able to give better supervision to the person because you usually know most about the tasks you like to do. The person who receives good supervision will usually find many job satisfactions and do a good job. And the manager's satisfaction is seeing that the organization is meeting its objectives—in the private business area, making a profit. An Extension agent's "profit" is the healthy life skills development in 4-H members and volunteers.

There's a great need for sharing information. While withholding information is a source of power, sharing information is the source of good will and getting the job done.

Summary

Although the 4-H program at the county or city level has had volunteer middle managers for many years, recognition of these middle managers as volunteers with additional supervisory needs has been overlooked.

As 4-H grows, and if there's an accompanying thrust for improving quality, the need for additional middle managers and upper-middle managers becomes crucial. Upper-middle managers can perform the same tasks as Extension agents provided they receive continual in-service education, agree on objectives, are given authority with responsibility, evaluated regularly, and given recognition.

Sources of middle managers are usually at the fingertips of the Extension agent. Promotion and job enlargement are techniques to involve volunteers in the current 4-H program. Not to be overlooked as potential middle managers are competent and willing people in the local community not now affiliated with the program.

Creating a management scheme in the 4-H program that uses volunteer upper-middle managers needs to be done thoughtfully. The demonstration process as used in the adoption

of improved farm and homemaking practices has a lot to offer as an Extension office adds an additional dimension to its delivery system.

Footnotes

1. Franklin M. Reck, *A History of 4-H Club Work* (Chicago: National 4-H Service Committee, 1951), p. 143.
2. Glenn Barquest, Department of Agricultural Engineering, University Extension, University of Wisconsin-Madison. Letter to Western District 4-H and Youth Agents, November 11, 1970.
3. *Oklahoma 4-H Leader's Guide* (Stillwater: Oklahoma State University, Cooperative Extension Service, 1977), p. 21.
4. V. Milton Boyce, *A Systematic Approach to Leadership Development* (Washington, D.C.: Extension Service, USDA, 1971), Appendix A.
5. William F. Whyte, *Man and Organization* (Homewood, Ill.: Richard D. Irwin, Inc., 1959), p. 13.
6. Frederick Herzberg, Bernard Mausner, and Barbara Snyderman, *The Motivation to Work* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1960).