

Principles of County Administration

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"The local Cooperative Extension Service office," according to the Joint USDA/NASULGC Extension Study Committee, "should be a place where the individual citizen can obtain information about the total array of problems and services available from federal, state, and local agencies of government, including those of the land-grant universities and colleges." In addition to this aspect of the increasing complexity of the local Extension office, other recommendations of the Committee provide clues as to the magnitude of the job confronting the administrator of the local Extension office: e.g., (1) area staffing—with continued budget contributions from local sources (including cities as well as counties); (2) more staff specialization at county, area, and state levels; (3) substantial numbers of technicians (subprofessionals) and professionals to be added in an increasingly wide variety of areas of program emphases. The following article enumerates and elaborates briefly the generally accepted guidelines (principles) of administration that relate specifically to the county Extension administrator's responsibility for providing leadership for the local staff and expanded program.—The editor.*

THE ESSENCE of administration is the ability to plan projects, weld together an organization for their accomplishment, keep the organization functioning smoothly and efficiently, and achieve the agreed upon objectives well within the allotment of personnel, time, and resources available—and without the administrator doing all the work himself.

A significant and recent development in Cooperative Extension throughout the United States has been the naming of a member of the county staff to assume administrative responsibilities—to serve as chairman, director, coordinator, or by some similar designation. The person so designated is expected to perform important leader-

* *A People and a Spirit*, A Report of the Joint USDA/NASULGC Extension Study Committee (Fort Collins, Colorado: Printing and Publications Service, Colorado State University, November, 1968), p. 79.

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ship responsibilities with or without previous training or experience to help prepare him for these added duties.

Newman defines administration as "The guidance, leadership and control of the efforts of a group of individuals toward some common goal."¹ Clearly, the good administrator is one who enables the group to achieve its objectives with a minimum expenditure of resources and effort and the least interference with other worthwhile activities.

Responsibilities of the coordinator, chairman, or director of the county staff can be thought of in terms of certain major functions. For example, on the basis of evidence collected in a study of such a position in the Extension Services of California, Puerto Rico, and Michigan,² such responsibilities could be classified under the following types of functions: (1) educational leadership, (2) organization and policy, (3) business management and finance, (4) personnel management, (5) public relations, (6) direction and coordination, (7) planning and programming, and (8) supervision. These functions are listed in order of decreasing importance as identified by the 787 respondents in these three states.

A person occupying such a position is expected to develop an operational adult education program involving the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Land-Grant University, the county governing body, local leaders, and the members of his own staff. These various interests are expected to be welded into one team. In other words, he must provide the leadership whereby his own staff can plan simple and complex programs, assemble needed resources, develop an organization for their accomplishment, and achieve the objectives agreed upon within the allotment of personnel, time, and resources available.

The purpose of this article is to identify and briefly discuss certain generally accepted principles of administration and coordination contained in the professional literature that should serve as guidelines for those Extension agents with administrative responsibilities. Such principles serve to identify what is ideally desirable. They may also help to explain why something went wrong when plans did not materialize as expected. In other words, such theory (commonly referred to as the *science of administration*) serves as guides to action. Putting these theoretical ideas to work operationally consti-

¹ William G. Newman, *Administrative Action: The Techniques of Organization and Management* (New York: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1963), p. 1.

² Robert C. Clark and Fawzi M. Abdullah, "County Chairman Position," *Journal of Cooperative Extension*, II (Fall, 1964), 163-69. Also see University of Wisconsin Agricultural Experiment Station Research Bulletin No. 255, February, 1965.

tutes the *art of administration*. The more effective administrators have mastered both the body of knowledge and the skills required to perform the major functions associated with their leadership assignment.

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From among the many principles set forth by the writers in the field of administration, seven apply most directly to the responsibilities of county administrative agents in Extension. In stating these principles, it is assumed that the chairman, as well as other members of the county staff, can achieve increased efficiency and effectiveness if each of these seven principles are applied in so far as possible.

PRINCIPLE 1. *The type and scope of each person's responsibility and authority are clearly defined and understood by all persons in the organization.* One must know what his job is before he can perform it effectively. It is important to recognize that the scope and nature of one's duties continually change as program emphases shift and as resources are modified. Certainly the duties of the county administrative agent in relation to other members of his staff must be understood by his supervisor, specialists, his staff associates in the county, and by members of his local governing board.

In this principle, *responsibility* means accountability for the performance of duties. Although responsibility can be assigned by one's supervisor, it cannot be delegated. Final responsibility rests with the state director of Extension. It is the duty of the administrative agent to fully understand what is expected of him and to see that it is properly carried out.

But responsibility cannot be fulfilled unless *authority* is delegated. Authority can be defined as the power to make decisions which guide the actions of others. When an official has no power or authority to choose among alternative courses of action, he cannot be held responsible because he has not been allowed to exercise any choice in solving problems he may face.

PRINCIPLE 2. *The authority assigned to an individual is commensurate with his responsibility.* In every organization there must be a final authority to make decisions and to announce plans and policies that concern the entire operation. Such a person has the final coordinating power within the organization. Also, he is held fully responsible for the actions of each member of his staff.

There are many sources of authority which the county administrative agent has to draw upon, including: (1) legislation (federal,

state, and county); (2) administratively approved rules and regulations; (3) knowledge about the job and how to exercise effective administrative behavior (this source is often referred to as the "authority of know-how" or the "authority of leadership"); (4) the position which one occupies and the title associated with it; and (5) the situation in which the individual readily adapts himself, making a significant contribution.

The administrative agent must know the limits of his authority, recognizing the basic difference between power and authority. Authority is the right to make decisions and to direct the efforts of others. Power is the ability which the individual possesses—as the result of his knowledge, leadership, and tact—to influence the decisions that are made.

PRINCIPLE 3. *Authority should be delegated as far down the line as possible.* As has been stated previously, with the assigning of responsibility must go the delegation of authority and freedom to act. The administrator who delegates must be prepared to support the decisions of his subordinates even though he may not always be in full agreement. If the person to whom responsibility is delegated is an able person no serious problems are likely to arise. If, on the other hand, he is ill-equipped by training, experience, and personal attitude, delegation may work poorly, if at all. This means that competent personnel are required at all levels in Extension.

This principle is based on the proposition that the authority for decision making should be assigned as close as possible to the point where the problem occurs and where action is required. Perhaps one of the most difficult tasks of an administrator is to press for what some have called the "downward thrust" in order to help counteract the tendency for many problems and decisions to come to the top. The effective administrative agent will delegate much of his authority to others on the staff in order that they can take the lead in bringing about desired decisions and behavioral changes.

PRINCIPLE 4. *The specific function of administration is to develop and regulate the decision-making process in the most effective manner possible.* Propositions by Daniel E. Griffiths³ emphasize that "decision making is becoming generally recognized as the heart of organization and one of the principle processes of administration. The making of decisions is at the very center of the process." Two specific propositions are: (1) "If the administrator confines his behavior to making decisions on the decision-making process rather than making terminal decisions for the organization, his behavior

³Daniel E. Griffiths, *Administrative Theory* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1959), pp. 71-77.

will be more acceptable to his subordinates.” (2) “If the administrator perceives himself as the controller of the decision-making process rather than the maker of the organization’s decisions, the decisions will be more effective.”

PRINCIPLE 5. *Two-way channels of communication are maintained—both vertically and horizontally.* Communication, in its various forms, is a process whereby ideas, facts, and decisions are transmitted from one member of an organization to another. Without effective communication there cannot be an efficient organization.

Pfiffner and Presthus emphasize that communication is inseparably linked with coordination—the process by which the multiplying of skills, attitudes, and interest are bound together. It binds an organization together by insuring common understanding. “Employees want to know what is going on,” they say. “Without a broad sharing of information and purpose, staff morale will be low and the agency’s task will be more difficult.”⁴

Informing workers directly and promptly of established personnel procedures, changes in the program, and modification of policies has a definite therapeutic effect. It is also a means of letting the individual know where he stands and helps greatly to dispell rumors which reflect uncertainty.

PRINCIPLE 6. *Informal organization is more important than formal organization in developing and maintaining staff morale.* It is very important to each of us to know where we fit in the scheme of things, our source(s) of instructions, support, and approval. We are all concerned about how well we are doing in the judgment of our superiors, co-workers, and the clientele we serve. Most people also welcome counsel and advice as to how they can improve upon their ability to do what is expected.

There are many factors, in addition to pay and job status, that influence morale. One important factor is the development of personal ties with colleagues. Much of the feeling of group belongingness and pride in an organization comes through the more informal associations rather than through the formal organization.

PRINCIPLE 7. *The organization should be flexible so that it can be adjusted to changing conditions.* If any organization, and particularly the Extension Service, it to continue a dynamic and aggressive, forward-looking educational program, it must continue to change; no organization can exist for long if it remains fixed or static. Changes in basic objectives, changes in staff, in standards of profes-

⁴ John M. Pfiffner and R. Vance Presthus, *Public Administration* (New York: The Ronald Press Co., 1967), p. 119.

sional competency required, adjustments in program content and emphasis, and changes in the nature of institutional relationships are bound to occur. Consequently, there is a continued need for long-range as well as short-range planning of programs, personnel, and finances. Such changes require adjustments in the administrative organization at the county, area, and state levels.

The administrative agent must be a leader of justifiable change. He must anticipate the direction of change and provide positive leadership for it. He must be in a position where he can accept changes that are occurring at a broader level than his own field of operation. The county Extension agent has sometimes been called a "change agent." If this description is at all accurate, then it is of paramount importance that the administrative agent and his staff set the tone and pace for change that is deemed essential to increase the effectiveness of the county Extension program.

Coordinating People Through Organization

One of the most difficult and yet important tasks of the county Extension administrator is to facilitate coordination of many available federal, state, local, and staff resources in such manner that needed educational competencies are brought to bear on problems faced by individuals and groups in our society. Effective coordination is accomplished with and through people, both individually and as they are associated in various informal groupings and formal organizations. What can the administrator learn from the literature on administration and organization that might assist him in performing this complex function?

All large-scale or complicated enterprises require men to carry them forward. Best results are obtained when there is a division of work. Work division is the foundation and reason for organization. Organization, then, has to do with the planning and structuring of coordination imposed upon the work division unit of an enterprise.

"We divide work," according to Gulick, "because men differ in nature, capacity and skill; because the same man cannot be in two places at the same time; and because the range of skill and knowledge is so great that one man cannot know more than one small fraction of the whole. Division of work makes possible better utilization of the various skills and aptitudes and eliminates wasted time."⁵

⁵ Luther H. Gulick (ed.), "Notes on the Theory of Organization," *Papers on the Science of Administration* (New York: The Institute of Public Administration, from the University, 1937), p. 3.

Four principles have been identified that relate to coordination of people through organizations:

1. *The basic strength of any organization rests in the professional competence of its staff.* The amount of coordination required of any administrative officer is inversely related to the basic competence and training of personnel with whom he is working. If staff members are competent in their specialized fields, if they possess a genuine appreciation for the talents of their co-workers and are willing to seek their advice, and if they understand how their work is related to the broad objective of the organization, coordination is greatly facilitated. Many problems of coordination are solved by initially selecting the right people for major staff positions and to correct errors in judgment as positions become vacant.

2. *Administrative staff in key positions must be cooperative and enjoy mutual respect for each other.* The policies, procedures, and practices concerning coordination are generally established by top administration through their philosophies and actions in the performance of day-to-day duties. The practice followed by administrators and supervisors in communicating with each other, seeking counsel, holding each other in mutual respect (both personally and professionally), and creating "a sense of unity" or "one-team" philosophy, becomes contagious with the rest of the staff. The reverse situation is also true.

Mutual confidence and respect is built on a foundation of comparable professional training and ability, a willingness to examine, in an objective manner, a given problem and the facts associated with it, a recognition and acceptance of honest difference of opinion, and a "give-and-take" philosophy.

3. *Channels of communication must be kept open.* One may say that coordination is a product of effective communication. Not only is communication absolutely essential in any organization but the application of particular techniques will largely determine the process of decision making. No step in the administrative process is more generally ignored or more poorly performed than the task of communicating decisions to those concerned with executing them. No task is more important for the administrative agent than that of making sure he is communicating fully with his staff and they in turn feel free to communicate with him.

4. *Field staff must feel they are important members of the organization team.* The Extension Service is known to the public at large more through the efforts of the county personnel than any other unit in the organization. Everything possible should be done by central administration to help the county staff feel an integral part

of the university team. Achieving this requires special attention to seeking counsel of the field staff concerning problems and possible solutions; also keeping field workers informed of new policies and programs.

Conclusion

There are two major dimensions of effective administrative leadership: (1) a concern for people and (2) initiating plans and procedures for programs and organization. Both of these dimensions are essential for a volunteer adult education program such as Extension. However, primary emphasis in this article has been placed on the county administrator's responsibility for building effective relationships among members of the staff rather than on need for and formation of formal organizational structures.

Coordination cannot be forced upon individuals. It is a process that must take place willingly. It is a personal obedience to the unenforceable. Consequently, coordination and how to bring it about must be an important concern of administrative agents in Extension since they work with so many different organizations and agencies.

"ONE OF THE FIRST THINGS I am tempted to do when I get into the office of an executive," a friend says, "is to note how clean his desk is. The larger the man's salary the less he seems to have on his desk. To look at his desk you would think that he had nothing to do. I have spent a good deal of time trying to discover the secret. I have not yet succeeded." I have also thought about this, and at one time my conclusion was expressed in a short paragraph, as "When the boss keeps his desk clean, it's a sign that an assistant is doing the work." On another occasion I remember I wrote this line: "Some fellows manage to keep their desks clean by stuffing the drawers with unfinished business." Wiscracks aside, there probably is a relationship between a good executive and a clean desk. A first-class man has the ability to develop first-class assistants, to whom he passes along all problems except the few that demand his personal attention. Further, the successful executive is invariably a man of an orderly mind. He is accustomed to organize his affairs on a routine, efficient basis. He makes decisions promptly. Prompt decisions and well-oiled routine will clear off most desks.

—WILLIAM FEATHER