Organizational Values in Ohio State University Extension: Employee Perceptions of Value and Evidence in Practice

Abstract

As Extension's leaders prepare to move Extension into the future, they are obliged to take stock of the underlying internal forces that have the power to alter the manner and extent to which the mission is accomplished. Individually and organizationally held values are primary factors driving these forces. Acknowledging and understanding these values helps Extension leaders better understand tendencies toward resistance to change and aid in assessing the alignment of what exists with what could be. This article shares results from an Extension organizational values assessment and examine implications for the Extension system.

Karen J. Argabright
Graduate Associate
argabright.2@osu.edu

Graham R. Cochran
Associate Professor
cochran.99@osu.edu

Jeff King
Associate Professor
king.20@osu.edu

The Ohio State University
Columbus, Ohio

Introduction

Extension leaders are preparing to move Extension into the future. With a future-oriented mindset, leaders must strategize ways to become more effective in facing environmental pressures, which obligate them to take stock of underlying internal forces that impact organizational outcomes. Such forces are partially comprised of a collection of individual values that form the social infrastructure of an organization. Acknowledging and understanding these values helps Extension leaders assess tendencies toward resistance to change and move from what currently exists to what could be.

This article shares results and implications from an organizational values assessment in Ohio State University (OSU) Extension. First, we describe our research on organizational values, including identification of organizational values and congruence between perceived value and evidence of associated work-related concepts in daily practices. Next, we provide recommendations for the organization in which the research was conducted. Finally, we address implications for the Extension system as a whole, with specific thoughts on how our work informs future work in this area and can help Extension leaders be better prepared for the future.

Literature Review

Values are important guidelines, directing the manner in which individuals function on a daily basis (Safrit, Conklin, & Jones, 2003). Edwards and Cable (2009) define values as "general beliefs about the importance of normatively desirable behaviors or end states" (p. 655). More simply stated, "Values

are beliefs of what is desirable" (Hoy & Miskel, 2008, p. 179). Values are expressed at both the individual and organizational levels. An organizational value is "any concept or idea that is held in high esteem by the members of an organization and that shapes the organization's philosophy, processes, and goals" (Conklin, Jones, & Safrit, 1991, p.1). Organizations possess a particular set of values, typically put forth by founders and leaders, that guides organizational practice toward achieving a particular mission. Likewise, individuals and groups within the organization possess and are guided by a potentially differing set of values resulting from past experiences and personally held beliefs.

Organizational values, evident through organizational practices, policies, and rituals (Schein, 2010), are important in determining the image and direction of an organization (Hultman, 2005). One's perceived level of importance regarding tasks, responsibilities, or outcomes influences the type of actions or behaviors they demonstrate (Kunstler, 2004). Increasing the complexity of the importance of values within organizations, values are rarely static because they are impacted by many factors thus evolving over time. Organizational structural changes, increasingly diverse demographics, leadership influence, and societal and environmental phenomena each play a role in the evolution of individual and organizational values (Hultman, 2005).

Empirical assessments of organizational values within Extension began in the early 1990's as Extension organizations were facing societal and economic changes (Barker, 1994; Safrit, 1990; Seevers, 2000; Safrit, Jones, & Conklin, 1994; Safrit, Conklin, & Jones, 2003). These assessments have been used to inform professional development efforts and strategic planning initiatives. Each of the previously cited studies identified a set of organizational values narrowly focused on the perceptions of personnel with programming responsibilities, excluding support staff. Considering the importance of values in influencing organizational functions and the sparse amount of published empirical research narrowly focused on a subset of employees, it is beneficial for Extension organizations to identify a comprehensive picture of organizational values thus better representing the organization as a whole. As leaders strategize Extension's future, it is crucial to have a comprehensive understanding of organizational values because the values represent the organization and determine its ultimate trajectory.

Purpose and Objectives

The study reported here identified organizational values held by OSU Extension personnel and explored the evidence of the identified values in daily organizational practice. The study addressed these objectives:

1. Identify current OSU Extension organizational values as perceived by OSU Extension personnel.

2. Identify OSU Extension organizational values perceived as evident within the organization by OSU Extension personnel.

3. Illustrate similarities and/or differences between OSU Extension organizational values and OSU Extension values perceived as evident within the organization.

Methods

Participants

Participants in the study were 623 personnel with a 0.5 FTE OSU Extension appointment or greater housed within the Department of Extension. Personnel included in the census represented programming personnel, administration, and support staff.

Findings show the population of OSUE personnel are predominantly white females averaging 48 years of age who have 15-16 years of Extension service. Over 65 % are college educated, with 43 % holding graduate degrees. A majority (84%) have job classifications as Educator, Program Support, and Office Support. A distribution of both the population and respondents across known demographic characteristics is displayed in Table 1.

Table 1.

Frequency Distribution of Study Population and Respondents by Selected Demographics

		Population		Respondents	
Demographic Characteristics		**f**	**%**	**f**	**%**
Gender	Female	474	76.1	311	74.9
	Male	149	23.9	104	25.1
Race	White	585	93.9	395	95.2
	African American	22	3.5	14	3.4
	Hispanic	11	1.8	5	1.2
	Other/Undisclosed	5	.9	1	.2
Job Classification	Educator	184	29.5	131	31.6
	Program support	180	28.9	110	26.5
	Office support	146	23.4	98	23.6
	Program management	32	5.1	21	5.1
	Technical support	30	4.8	14	3.4
	Admin support	21	3.4	15	3.6
	Administration	13	2.1	12	2.9
	Specialist	13	2.1	11	2.7
	Other	4	.7	3	.7
Program Area	Family & Consumer Sciences	150	24.1	98	23.6
	4-H Youth Development	135	21.7	92	22.2
	Agriculture & Natural	85	13.6	59	14.2

	Resources				
	Community Development	25	4.0	18	4.3
Education	Master's Degree	230	36.9	161	38.8
	High School Diploma	145	23.3	96	23.1
	Bachelor's Degree	141	22.6	89	21.4
	Doctoral Degree	41	6.6	33	8.0
	Two-Year College Degree	50	8.0	25	6.0
	Other	16	2.5	11	2.6
Note. N= 623 population, 415 respondents.					

Instrument & Procedures

A modified version of the Organizational Values Questionnaire (Conklin, Jones, & Safrit, 1991; Safrit, Conklin, & Jones, 2003) was used. Through a qualitative process involving experts in OSU Extension and relevant literature, items on the instrument were added/updated to reflect the current context of the organization.

The revised questionnaire contained 62 work-related concepts presented in a double-question four-point Likert-type scale format. Respondents ranked each concept from 1- not valued/evident to 4- extremely valued/evident. The questionnaire was administered electronically using LimeSurvey® and followed Dillman, Smyth, and Christian's (2009) recommendations for implementation. A response rate of 66.6% was achieved.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to describe value, evidence, and congruence of individual concepts within constructs. Exploratory factor analysis was used to establish underlying constructs representative of the larger data set (Gliem, 2012; Henson & Roberts, 2006; Hinkin, 1998). Bartlett's test of sphericity, measures of sampling adequacy, and communalities, were used to address the appropriateness of data reduction. Parallel analysis was used as a method of factor retention (Costello & Osborne, 2005; Gliem, 2012; Hayton, Allen, & Scarpello, 2004).

Addressing Non-Response Error

Non-response error was addressed through two widely accepted methods: comparisons between population and respondents, and between early and late respondents based on known characteristics (Lindner, Murphy, & Briers, 2001; Miller & Smith, 1983). There were no notable differences among the population and respondents or between early and late respondents; therefore, findings from the study are representative of the entire population of OSU Extension personnel.

Limitations & Delimitations

The work was part of a larger project examining values over time. In order to examine values over time, it was necessary to keep the original instrument scaling. The design of the study was intended solely for intra-organizational use, and the findings are not generalizable to other populations. Therefore, statistical measures testing for significance were not employed. In addition, the study relied on personnel perceptions during one brief moment in time when organizational restructuring was occurring. Respondents' perceptions reflect their individual perceptions of value and evidence in their specific organizational environment across a diverse organization.

Findings

Identification of OSUE Extension Organizational Values

To establish underlying themes, factor analysis was used to identify a set of interpretable factors. Four factors, comprised of 39 concepts, were retained. Via maximum likelihood and Varimax orthogonal rotation with Kaiser Normalization, 23 of the 62 concepts were removed due to insignificant factor loading. Two concepts were removed from the four factor matrix due to lack of conceptual fit. Reliability coefficients (Cronbach's alpha) ranged from 0.78 to 0.87 on the four factors. The pattern matrix, communalities, eigenvalues, and percent of total variance explained are reported in Table 2.

Table 2.
Exploratory Factor Analysis Orthogonal Rotation Pattern Matrix

Item		Factor				
		1	2	3	4	h^{2}*
V9	Extension programs based on needs identified at the local level.	.604				.411
V55	Proactive educational programs.	.526				.364
V17	Flexibility/adaptability in local programming.	.522				.298
V56	Credibility with clientele.	.514				.345
V15	Freedom/independence in local programming.	.513				.275
V8	Extension programs that help people solve problems.	.505				.284
V45	Useful/practical programs.	.478				.384
V13	Direct client involvement in program planning.	.476				.360
V61	Our role in bringing about change in people's lives.	.467				.363

V11	Working with groups of clients.	.460				.306
V12	Unbiased delivery of information.	.456				.229
V46	Innovation/creativity in programming	.453				.354
V40	Helping people help themselves.	.437				.293
V3	An emphasis on excellence in educational programming.	.436				.255
V6	Leveraging resources to maximize impact.	.410				.372
V49	OSU Extension as an integral component of The Ohio State University.		.567			.446
V62	Specialization for educators/field specialists to provide subject matter expertise.		.557			.353
V29	OSUE Extension as a leader in overall outreach and engagement at The Ohio State University.		.537			.402
V31	Consistent programming offered across regions or state to address critical issues.		.536			.439
V21	The federal, state, and local Extension partnership.		.535			.393
V34	OSUE Extension as an integral part of The College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences.		.526			.358
V44	Extension financial support from the federal level.		.464			.347
V54	Alternative/external funding sources (grants, cost recovery, etc.) utilized in supporting Extension's mission.		.452			.340
V35	The involvement of volunteers to multiply our educational outreach.		.429			.251
V57	Documentation of outcomes and impacts in Extension work.		.425			.260
V5	Racial/ethnic diversity among employees.			.782		.636
V30	Racial/ethnic diversity among clientele.			.748		.653
V48	A general appreciation of diversity.			.708		.644
V52	Targeting clientele from urban/metro			.562		.435

	areas.					
V7	Employee participation in an educational program in a foreign country.			.484		.311
V50	A general awareness of global issues.			.458		.254
V26	Interdisciplinary programs.			.451		.348
V18	Supervisors who demonstrate sensitivity to the personal and family responsibilities of employees.				.667	.486
V20	Adequate resources to perform job responsibilities.				.516	.332
V19	Good fringe benefits for employees.				.468	.263
V47	The effective flow of communications through all organizational levels.				.466	.429
V51	Equal opportunities for male and female employees,				.420	.337
V32	The recognition that our employees are our organization's greatest resource.				.412	.291
V23	Teamwork among coworkers.				.404	.372
Sum of squares (Eigenvalues)		**13.4**	**2.81**	**1.94**	**1.64**	
Percent of total variance		**21.7**	**26.2**	**29.3**	**32.0**	
Note. N= 415. The eigenvalue of the fifth unretained factor was 1.41. *h2= communality coefficient.						

Each factor grouping was named by the primary author based on the conceptual fit of the variables loading onto each. The resulting constructs, their reported means of perceived value/evidence, and standard deviations are shown in Table 3. Each construct, based on perceived value, had a mean above 3.0 (1= not valued, 2 = somewhat valued, 3= valued, 4 = extremely valued), thereby signifying they were valued among the respondents. These constructs are reported in the order in which concepts loaded. The four constructs indicated in Table 3 were identified as OSU Extension organizational values.

Table 3.

Named Organizational Factors, Means and Standard Deviations of Perceived Value & Evidence

Factor #	Factor name (Construct)	Perceived Value		Perceived Evidence	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD

1	Program Planning & Implementation	3.63	.317	2.98	.512
2	Value & Relevance of the Organization	3.39	.416	2.97	.515
3	Diversity	3.02	.571	2.74	.598
4	Employment Conditions	3.69	.351	2.85	.575
Note. Value scale: 1 = not valued, 2 = somewhat valued, 3 = valued, 4 = extremely valued Evidence scale: 1= not evident, 2 = somewhat evident, 3 = evident, 4= extremely evident.					

Perceived Value and Evidence

Construct means identified in Table 3 signify the majority of respondents rated the concepts within the construct as either valued or extremely valued. Constructs Employment Conditions and Program Planning and Implementation were the most valued by respondents, while Diversity was the least valued. Diversity also had the highest standard deviation among the valued constructs. Means for perceived evidence were slightly lower than perceived value consistently across the four constructs.

Assessing Congruency Among Value and Evidence of Individual Items Within Constructs

In the interest of a deeper analysis for organizational development purposes, we further report findings among the 39 work-related concepts within the four constructs. To highlight congruence/incongruence between perceived value and perceived evidence, we compared the respondents' ratings of value and evidence for the 39 individual items. The following tables show, by construct, the percentages of personnel rating each concept by valued or extremely valued combined and evident or extremely evident combined. Overall findings indicate personnel valued or extremely valued concepts greater than they were perceived evident or extremely evident. Very large percentages of personnel expressed high levels of value for concepts within Employment Conditions and Program Planning and Implementation yet perceived many of these concepts as less evident within daily practices.

Table 4 shows most of the concepts within this construct were valued or extremely valued, with ratings of evident or extremely evident being moderately lower. Minimal gaps between value and evidence were noted among concepts "unbiased delivery of information," "helping people help themselves," and "working with groups of clients." Larger gaps were noted between value and evidence among "Extension programs based on needs identified at the local level," "innovation/creativity in programming," and "freedom/independence in local programming."

Table 4.
Comparison of Percentages of Respondents Rating Valued & Extremely Valued
and Evident & Extremely Evident for Construct Program Planning and

Implementation

Program Planning and Implementation	Valued & Extremely Valued	Evident & Extremely Evident
Extension programs based on needs identified at the local level.	95.5%	61.4%
Extension programs that help people solve problems.	95.1%	80.7%
Our role in bringing about change in people's lives.	95.1%	77.6%
An emphasis on excellence in educational programming.	94.9%	80.7%
Useful/practical programs.	94.5%	76.0%
Credibility with clientele.	94.2%	77.8%
Helping people help themselves.	93.7%	81.0%
Innovation/creativity in programming	93.3%	63.8%
Unbiased delivery of information.	93.0%	81.7%
Proactive educational programs.	92.0%	68.4%
Flexibility/adaptability in local programming.	91.8%	64.1%
Working with groups of clients.	89.8%	76.1%
Freedom/independence in local programming.	87.7%	59.3%
Leveraging resources to maximize impact.	87.3%	59.6%
Direct client involvement in program planning.	79.0%	52.0%
Note. N=415. Respondents were not required to designate a response to every concept.		

Employment Conditions reported in Table 5 shows a large gap between value and evidence, specifically among "the effective flow of communications through all organizational levels." This large gap was followed by "the recognition that our employees are our organization's greatest resource" and "adequate resources to perform job responsibilities," representing slightly smaller gaps. In general, there were not high levels of congruence among value and evidence within this construct.

Table 5.

Comparison of Percentages of Respondents Rating Valued & Extremely Valued
and Evident & Extremely Evident for Construct Employment Conditions

Employment Conditions	Valued & Extremely Valued	Evident & Extremely Evident
Adequate resources to perform job responsibilities.	96.0%	58.8%
Teamwork among coworkers.	95.4%	70.1%
Supervisors who demonstrate sensitivity to the personal and family responsibilities of employees.	94.7%	73.0%
The recognition that our employees are our organization's greatest resource.	94.2%	54.0%
Good fringe benefits for employees.	93.8%	80.5%
The effective flow of communications through all organizational levels.	93.7%	39.2%
Equal opportunities for male and female employees.	90.8%	73.2%
Note. N=415. Respondents were not required to designate a response to every concept		

Table 6 exhibits the concepts associated with Value and Relevance of the Organization. A large percentage of personnel (92.8%) rated "OSU Extension as an integral component of The Ohio State University" as valued or extremely valued, while one of the lowest percentages (59.7%) among evident or extremely evident. This concept had the largest gap between value and evidence within this construct. Other gaps seen across the concepts were minimal, therefore showing relative congruence between value and evidence within this construct.

Table 6.

Comparison of Percentages of Respondents Rating Valued & Extremely Valued
and Evident & Extremely Evident for Construct Value and Relevance of the
Organization

Value & Relevance of the Organization	Valued & Extremely Valued	Evident & Extremely Evident
OSU Extension as an integral component of The Ohio State University.	92.8%	59.7%
The federal, state, and local Extension	87.8%	72.8%

partnership.		
The involvement of volunteers to multiply our educational outreach.	87.0%	75.9%
Extension financial support from the federal level.	87.0%	60.9%
OSU Extension as an integral part of The College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences.	85.6%	74.2%
OSU Extension as a leader in overall outreach and engagement at The Ohio State University.	85.1%	60.2%
Alternative/external funding sources (grants, cost recovery, etc.) utilized in supporting Extension's mission.	81.9%	73.3%
Documentation of outcomes and impacts in Extension work.	81.2%	77.3%
Specialization for educators/field specialists to provide subject matter expertise.	78.8%	64.4%
Consistent programming offered across regions or state to address critical issues.	75.7%	56.7%
Note. N=415. Respondents were not required to designate a response to every concept.		

Table 7 shows concepts related to Diversity. Overall there was relative congruence between value and evidence within this construct. There were no extremely large gaps. Although there is congruence within this construct, the overall perceived value of this construct is the lowest of the four.

Table 7.

Comparison of Percentages of Respondents Rating Valued & Extremely Valued
and Evident & Extremely Evident for Construct Diversity

Diversity	Valued & Extremely Valued	Evident & Extremely Evident
A general appreciation of diversity.	85.5%	73.8%
Racial/ethnic diversity among clientele.	79.0%	62.6%
Racial/ethnic diversity among employees.	74.9%	64.1%
A general awareness of global issues.	74.7%	55.6%
Interdisciplinary programs.	69.6%	50.6%
Targeting clientele from urban/metro	68.0%	60.0%

areas.		
Employee participation in an educational program in a foreign country.	21.7%	19.5%
Note. N=415. Respondents were not required to designate a response to every concept.		

Discussion

This section begins with a brief summary of the findings and discussion of their relation to previous research. Next, recommendations are provided for OSU Extension on using findings within practice, including thoughts on further exploration of this topic. Finally, we address the implications of this research for the Extension system, with specific thoughts on how our work informs future organizational value assessments and aids in preparation for the future of Extension.

Research Insights

Identification of Organizational Values

Organizational values identified in the study, representing the construct areas of Program Planning and Implementation, Value and Relevance of the Organization, Diversity, and Employment Conditions, provide a holistic picture of the organization studied. Additionally, the 39 individual concepts across the four constructs allow for a more refined focus in identifying strengths and weaknesses among the specific work related concepts.

Comparing identified organizational values from the study reported here to those from previous studies (Barker, 1994; Safrit, 1990; Seevers, 2000; Safrit, Jones, & Conklin, 1994; Safrit, Conklin, & Jones, 2003), a distinct pattern emerges. Noting the instruments used in each of these studies were very similar, the majority of values identified in previous studies comprise only one of the current study's identified constructs, Program Planning and Implementation. Likely due to the selected populations in previous studies consisting of personnel with programming responsibilities, this finding begins to provide evidence that past organizational values were narrowly focused on programmatic perspectives, thus representing only a portion of the organization. Through the current analysis, organizational values represented among the four constructs highlight aspects of the organization that otherwise may have gone unnoticed when only surveying program personnel and not including support staff.

Congruency Between Value and Evidence

At the construct level, Diversity showed the greatest congruence, while Program Planning and Implementation and Employment Conditions showed incongruence between value and evidence. While it is important to celebrate the similarities, the congruence, we focus our discussion on exploring the differences, the incongruence.

Large percentages of personnel valued or extremely valued most of the 39 concepts comprising the

constructs identified by factor analysis. Conversely, several of these concepts were perceived evident or extremely evident by noticeably lower percentages of personnel. The greatest incongruence (30 point or greater difference between perceived value and evidence) was noted among the following concepts:

- "The effective flow of communications through all organizational levels;"

- "Extension programs based on needs identified at the local level;"

- "innovation/creativity in programming;"

- "OSUE Extension as an integral component of OSUE University;"

- "the recognition that our employees are our organization's greatest resource;" and

- "Adequate resources to perform job responsibilities."

Many factors may contribute to these incongruences. For example, 'the effective flow of communications through all organizational levels showed the largest incongruence across the four constructs. This finding suggests that the communication strategy within the organization was not resonating with personnel and that efforts must be implemented to improve communication within the organization. Some thoughts should be considered to further explore communication strategies such as: a) what type of communication is suffering, lateral, vertical, or both?; b) how are the messages crafted?; c) what is the content, tone, and delivery method?; and d) are there ways to align messages with values of personnel?

Recommendations for OSU Extension

Findings from the study reported here provide leaders within OSU Extension the opportunity to view organizational practices through the eyes of those on the frontlines. Specific areas in need of review and evaluation, denoted by incongruent concepts, are communication practices, innovative/creative programming, OSU Extension's connection with the larger university, and aspects of personnel relations.

Even in the instance of congruence attention is still warranted. It is recommended that OSU Extension continue efforts to enhance diversity within the organization. Findings from the study show congruence between perceived value and evidence within the Diversity construct, yet the perceived value is the lowest of the four constructs. Although efforts have been put forth by OSU Extension to promote diversity, it appears personnel still lack actions associated with it. For example, "'interdisciplinary programs," was not perceived as valued by large percentages of personnel and was perceived even less evident. However, interdisciplinary efforts are included among the direction of the current change initiatives within OSU Extension (OSUE Strategic Plan 2008).

Implications for Extension System and Extension Professionals

Today, personnel within Extension organizations represent an increasingly diverse subset of individuals within society. The study reported here provided data for a current group of Extension professionals that can be compared with those in other studies, towards development of a framework looking at organizational values system-wide.

There has been much discourse around change and the importance of change for the future of the Extension system over the past decades (Argabright, McGuire, & King, 2012; Astroth, Goodwin, & Hodnett, 2011; Bloir & King, 2010; Buchanan, 1993; Extension Committee on Organization and Policy, 2010; King & Boehlje, 2000; Patton, 1987; Patton, 1987; Smith, 1988; Smith, 1990; West, Drake, & Londo, 2009). In practice, we have seen a variety of approaches within each state organization but little meaningful dialogue about system-wide change with actionable recommendations. As Extension moves forward to address the challenges of the future, deeper examinations of organizational values are warranted (Jimmerson, 1989). Extension needs to know what it stands for, thus gaining the ability to successfully navigate the inevitable and continuous shift into the future.

Specific implications of the research for the Extension system and Extension professionals are as follows.

- First, the methods and procedures outlined in this study depict findings illustrating a holistic picture of organizational functions. When leaders make decisions that take into consideration all aspects of the organization, those decisions lead to more efficient programming efforts across the organization and in turn enhances overall organizational effectiveness.

- Second, in addition to being used as a framework for administrative decision making, the holistic set of identified values can be used to provide insight into the values of personnel providing a better understanding of the group. This would be particularly helpful during change initiatives as communication messages could be constructed cognizant of personnel values thus potentially alleviating resistance to change at the onset.

- Third, findings from this study provide crucial information regarding the strengths and weaknesses of existing practices within the organization. Administrators will be able to use this organizational value set as framework to identify areas in need of improvement and mobilize resources accordingly, striving towards overall organizational alignment.

- Finally, this study can be replicated by leaders within any Extension organization. Replications of this study can begin to provide data that can then be used to develop a set of constructs representative of the entire Extension system.

Findings from the study reported here presented a set of work-related concepts that show both congruence and incongruence among personnel perceptions of value and evidence. These findings provide OSU Extension with great opportunities to enhance organizational efficiencies through strategic decisions for the future. Through reasons stated in this article, it is beneficial to determine the organizational value set of an organization. The question still remains as to what these values look like exhibited in practice. Further research in this area should involve operationalizing these values, thus providing a framework of behavioral expectations for personnel and adding rigor to future

perceptions of evidence.

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