

CHANGING THE MINNESOTA EXTENSION SERVICE, CHANGING THE WORK WE DO, CHANGING THE WAY WE WORK

RESPONDING TO CHANGE

MINNESOTA EXTENSION SERVICE

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

'SECOND ORDER CHANGE' IS OUR FIRST ORDER OF BUSINESS

Recently Pauline Boss of the Family Social Science Department facilitated a workshop for the Minnesota Extension Service (MES) administrative retreat. Her session focused on how to work in an organization facing conditions that demand significant change. She drew careful distinction between two ways of responding to the need for change. One way she called "first order" change, the other "second order" change.

First order change is the way most of us initially respond when conditions change. We work harder and faster; we stay later or take work home. Leisure time and sleep suffer and we patch things together in a band-aid approach. If a co-worker's position is retrenched, we divide that person's to-do list, adding to our own. Boss used the analogy of a driver attempting to move a manual transmission vehicle up a steep hill. A driver responding in first order mode would step on the gas and the car would chug, sputter and eventually stop. Such a first order response to conditions that require second order change will put organizations at risk of ineffectiveness and possible obsolescence. And, people who work in them risk burn-out.

Second order change may initially hurt more than first order response.

If first order change is a band-aid, second order change is surgery. If the mountain driver responded in a second order way, he or she would shift gears. Organizations choosing second order responses reorganize the system to do different work or to work differently. People who make this kind of change often change the way they see themselves in relation to their work or their world.

Second order change requires that we:

- read signals and acknowledge significant change in the environment

First order response to conditions that require more dramatic change put organizations at risk of obsolescence. People who work in them burn out.

Choosing second order change means organizations do different work or do the work differently. People choosing second order change begin to see themselves differently in relation to their work or the world.

- challenge assumptions no matter how dearly held, even our own
- have the courage to face the tempting, siren call of denial
- spend our time doing things that will matter several years from now
- seek synergistic company and let the creative juices flow freely
- care for ourselves physically, emotionally, spiritually, mentally and socially
- be vision-driven (Vision reflects organizational values and paints a picture of a desired state.)

SECOND ORDER CHANGES CHALLENGE MES TO LEAD, BE VISIONARY

Like surgery, the second order changes that MES is experiencing out of staff reductions and tight budgets are painful but ultimately beneficial. And similar to a patient who has undergone surgery or a life-threatening illness, MES will come out of the current downsizing experience more focused and more committed to relevant issues that matter to Minnesotans.

Dean and director Pat Borich told the cluster coordinators, cluster program area coordinators (CPACs) and others at the Feb. 11 workshop that forming county clusters and having agents specialize about five years ago were important first steps toward changes needed now. "But we may have been more concerned initially about structure than about what we deliver," he told the group. "Our vision was always that clusters would help provide leadership in issues — that counties would be less autonomous as they work on big issues of concern across county borders."

The MES Strategic Plan written in 1985 stressed issues programming, responsiveness to educational needs and the need for relevance in our educational programs. Borich said that MES staff need to keep that

vision. "Ask yourself, 'Are we doing things important to local people? Are we educational leaders with vision or servants held captive by certain groups or narrow interests in our counties?'" Borich added.

He predicted that second order changes now underway will make county lines less relevant and cluster identification more so. "Specialized work will take up an increasing amount of your time," he told the agents. "County governments expect us to bring the university's resources to bear on local issues and we will be sought out for our specialized competencies."

By the year 2000, Borich predicted that extension offices will gain increased visibility as the university's representatives for all types of information. "The whole university system will have a front door at county extension offices," he predicted. "We will be able to tap into many more areas of the university's expertise."

Borich said many of the state's 18 county extension clusters are already operating effectively "despite stops and starts as we dealt with budget

See *Challenge*, page 4

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FORUM PINPOINTS CHALLENGES, OPPORTUNITIES OF TIGHT TIMES

Participants in the cluster leadership workshop identified challenges arising from the current staff reduction and the opportunities that may result. Themes which emerged included:

Challenges

- Morale of staff (stress, fear, uncertainty); functioning through the pain and ambiguity
- Need to set more focused priorities, end some activities and programs, turn others over to the community; adjust daily work to match program shifts
- Working in an atmosphere of rapid change
- Maintaining respect for the University of Minnesota and MES throughout the state
- Working with local policy makers and citizens through the changes that we need to make; gaining their support and acceptance for the changes
- Maintaining and attracting quality staff in a time of reductions
- Trust level between state/field staff (especially administrators)

Opportunities

- Shift emphasis to fewer, high demand, high quality, focused programs
- Public is ready for our changes because of the staff cuts and resource problems
- A good reason to unload the "garbage" we shouldn't be doing anyway
- Identify new resources (funding, partnerships, technology)
- New partnerships with other parts of the University of Minnesota
- New opportunities for working with volunteers as middle managers
- Explore cluster staffing and other staffing plans; explore creative staffing options with other states
- Agents can work more in specialized areas
- Cluster committees may be able to give more leadership
- MES can increase emphasis on the cluster; de-emphasize county lines and program area lines (among state staff and in clusters) ~



Program leader Beth Honadle gestures from the podium at the cluster workshop. From left are Jean Kvols, Mary Ann Scharf and Diane Flynn.

CHANGING STAFF PATTERNS MEET VARIETY OF COUNTY NEEDS

A panel shared some options for staffing that allows flexibility and sharing of agents' specializations across a wider geographic area.

• Jean Kvols, Lac qui Parle and Big Stone counties

Within Cluster 10 in southwestern Minnesota, Big Stone and Lac qui Parle counties share Jean Kvols' position in home economics. The shared position developed through a history of sharing programs between the two counties long before the two-county position was designed. Jean says that sharing a position between two counties in a single program area is more effective than having one agent work across two program areas, for example handling home economics and 4-H programming.

Jean has developed ways of operating that make her divided time more efficient in each county office. She says that having at least one fulltime staff person in another program area in each county allows her to stay up to date on each county's programs and needs as she travels back and forth. She says the shared time between counties encourages team building and fosters good results for both county staff and clientele.

Among the disadvantages are the time lost traveling and the difficulty in maintaining a presence in two offices. Getting counties to agree on program directions and priorities is not easy and because Jean is unique in her dual-county role, she can't share experiences and problems with others who may have dealt with similar dilemmas.

• Mary Ann Scharf, Stevens County

Cluster 8 in west central Minnesota has used a tri-county staffing plan for a year from September 1990 through August 1991. Each week, most agents in Grant, Stevens and Traverse counties spend four days in one county and one day in another county. Agents report satisfaction with the shared arrangement and particularly like the chance to focus on only one program area, developing rapport with campus-based faculty and clientele in that area.

The time-sharing arrangement does require extensive initial planning and decision-making, however. Clear guidelines, job descriptions, coordination of calendars and agreement on accountability and roles are critical to success in such a staffing plan. At the same time, there must be flexibility in how things are done and how agents and support staff work together.

Under such a tri-county staffing plan, county lines became less visible to clientele as well. People from Grant, Stevens and Traverse counties traveled to programs or called specialized agents regardless of county designation. Mary Ann compared shared staffing to school consolidations. As with schools, the clientele (kids in the schools and MES program participants) adjusted easily. It may be harder for staff to make that transition but it seems to be worth attempting in times of reduced budgets.

• George Morse, extension agricultural economist

Morse described staffing in Ohio where he was recently employed by the Ohio Cooperative Extension Service. That state uses both multi-county appointments (two or more counties each paying a portion of an agent's salary for work in those counties) and clustering (each county pays an agent's salary, but agents in a group of counties work across county lines).

Ohio has 57 multi-county agents who serve in two or more counties, and 67

See *County Needs*, page 4

RESPONDING TO CHANGE

STAFF CUTS FORCE NEW APPROACHES, NOT JUST WORKING HARDER AND LONGER

In the wake of major staff cuts, MES staff are understandably concerned about where we go from here, says associate MES director Gail Skinner. "We're in that period when things seem inconsistent and confusing," she said. "We can see the direction we're heading, but we're still caught up on old ways of operating and thinking."

In her wrap-up session at the Cluster Leadership Workshop Feb. 11, Skinner urged cluster program area coordinators (CPACs) and cluster coordinators to be flexible and open to change. "There is no one right way to work through programming in a downsized organization," she said. "There are many right ways, and the closer you are to the needs in your area, the more effective you'll be at determining your best course."

She emphasized that second order changes such as MES faces demand new approaches. "Don't just think of ways to work harder and longer to cover the duties of former staff members. It's not in anyone's best interest to do that," she said. "Instead, explore new ways to lead and re-examine the things that need doing."

This re-examination is underway at all levels. Skinner said MES administrators are beginning marketing training to help them gauge the market impacts of downsizing and changes in program delivery. "One logical question is 'Can we continue to support the same number of program initiatives with fewer staff members?' We need to look at this and we may decide that some programs are best left for others to handle," Skinner said.

She stressed that collaboration with other states' extension services and local agencies may provide new, more efficient ways of meeting community needs.

For CPACs, Skinner recommended developing a common vision for the cluster. "What would you like to see? What programs and what outcomes will benefit your counties the most? Keep these things in mind constantly," she added.



MES Associate Director Gail Skinner

She differentiated between management and leadership. Management strives for orderly results while leadership sets change as its goal. "These are times for leadership skills. We need people who can lead the process, not just manage it.

"I wish we could tell you the outcome of this process, but no one can," Skinner stressed. "I do know, however, that no organization has more capacity, ability and creativity in its people than MES has. If we capitalize on this as we keep our goals in mind, there will be opportunities for all of us to succeed." ~

CREATIVE RESPONSES TO CHANGE HAVE BEGUN THROUGHOUT MINNESOTA

Changes within the Minnesota Extension Service have already resulted in organizational changes that have made efficient use of existing staff and extended the benefits of agents' expertise to more Minnesotans.

• Jann Wright, Olmsted County

Faced with a reduction in staff, Jann Wright established a transition team to recommend reductions and changes in programs. The team consisted of 11 adults and youths who (1) had a broad interest in youth development and were willing to look beyond their own project or constituency, (2) were task oriented and would work quickly and efficiently and (3) could discuss differing perspectives without attacking people. After two meetings and a public forum, the team completed its assignment. Team members discussed their recommendations with the 4-H federation, county extension committee and the board of commissioners. More than 2,000 county residents were invited to the

forum so that they could better understand the problems the staff faced and express their opinions on appropriate steps to take.

The team's recommendations resulted in the elimination of more than 240 days of staff time, allocating at least two hours per day for agents to work uninterrupted and establishment of a corps of middle management volunteers and a system for more equitable use of agents' time. The Olmsted County Board of Commissioners endorsed the plan and returned some funds to 4-H for implementing them. As a result of the process, Wright reports an improved relationship with commissioners, an ongoing assessment of programs and special events and a greater level of personal satisfaction with her position.

• Jean Anderson, Isanti County

The five-county PICKM cluster (Pine, Isanti, Chisago, Kanabec and Mille Lacs counties) includes 11 agents and only one county (Isanti) has three agents

See Creative Responses, page 4



CHALLENGE TO MES *continued from page 1*

crises, staff cuts and other problems that have made progress slow." He added that extension will regain momentum after this slowdown to deal with staff reductions. He challenged CPACs to use this reacceleration as an opportunity to become true leaders in education for their areas.

"Don't expect recipes for action to come from St. Paul," Borich said. "The recipes must come from you. You are empowered to lead and, with our shared vision, you will make a difference to your communities and the whole state."

He challenged CPACs and clusters to take the initiative and set priorities based on needs. "You may need to say 'no' to some groups and some programs you have always served, but setting priorities is part of leadership."

Borich spurred CPACs to be creative and to generate excitement for new programs and new ways of cooperating with other groups and organizations. "We can't miss this window of opportunity to demonstrate our leadership and our vision or the staff cuts that we are experiencing now will be only the beginning. With our resources and our creativity, don't tell me that MES can't make a big difference to Minnesota. We can and we will," he concluded. ~

CREATIVE RESPONSES *continued from page 3*

to cover the three major program areas — agriculture, home economics and 4-H. To take advantage of the agents' specializations and maintain a presence in the counties, PICKM agents work cluster-wide on many programs and marketing is a shared concern for all. Using the marketing slogan "Helping You Put Knowledge to Work," the PICKM agents actively promote their specialized knowledge and always identify themselves in the media as extension educators. Plans are being developed for support staff to also work across the cluster, supporting each other and carving out specialized duties such as newsletters or mailing list maintenance that can serve several counties.

Anderson says the PICKM agents work well together and seek opportunities for multi-county programs. Clientele have accepted the new arrangement and participation is up in county programs. Although each county currently maintains a distinct county extension office, Anderson says the staff hopes at some point that a "Super Office" in a centrally located community with county satellite offices will allow even greater cooperation and collaboration and maximum benefit from agent specialization.

• **Pauline Nickel**, Southwest District Director

Nine counties in extreme southwestern Minnesota (Cottonwood, Jackson, Lyon, Lincoln, Murray, Nobles, Pipestone, Redwood and Rock counties) are considering a joint powers agreement. These nine counties comprise Commissioner District 8. These counties are considering signing a single memo of agreement rather than nine separate memos. Such a document would spell out each county's role in staffing. The agreement could emphasize agents' specialization and each county's role in paying for travel and other expenses involved in functioning across county lines.

Nickel says the county commissioners have been discussing the possibilities of a joint powers agreement. Cooperation across county lines could give the nine counties greater ability to acquire grant dollars for programs and could take advantage of the agents' specializations and other unique strengths. ~

COUNTY NEEDS *continued from page 2*

of the 88 counties have at least one agent who covers another county. One experiment has a 4-H agent covering three counties with each of the counties having a full time program assistant in 4-H. This allows the agent to concentrate on educational programming and the assistants to handle the more traditional events. The state is also exploring clustering with four pilot clusters. A preliminary draft of a Ph.D. dissertation by L.J. Osborne at Ohio State states that citizens are more likely than agents to accept and be satisfied with multi-county and cluster programs. Keys to success in such staffing patterns include:

- Experienced, successful agents (performance problems are magnified when working in more than one county)
- Back-up support from associates (similar to MES's program assistants)
- Location of office in a place consistent with shopping patterns or regional communities rather than solely in county seats.
- Use of FAX machines and 800 numbers is critical
- Support staff should be included in discussions about ways of working and problem solving
- Multi-county or cluster newsletters and monthly reports make more efficient use of agent time and reinforce the multi-county nature of programs and agents' work.
- **Diane Flynn**, home economics program leader

The field faculty strength of Iowa State University Extension is in the process of being cutback by 10 percent or 29 positions. One of the most controversial changes is the redefinition of the function of the area office. The area specialist title will no longer be used. Field specialists, a new title, will have areas of specialization and will serve an aggregation of counties but be housed in county offices, according to Flynn, who was formerly on the ISU extension faculty.

Each county will continue to have an extension office with one faculty member serving as county director. This person will also devote time to the work of a program unit. In addition to the county director, county committees and extension administration will determine the mix of expertise needed in the county and faculty will be assigned accordingly. The prognosis is that most field faculty will "specialize," although the array of specializations has not yet been determined.

Flynn stated that some faculty members will have multi-county assignments. The concept of clustering where faculty are assigned to a cluster team comprised of a variety of specializations is not being pursued. According to Iowa Extension's Vice Provost Robert Anderson, no faculty member will maintain two offices or have two desks, phones or sets of files. A faculty member will have but one "home." The relationship between extension and the community college system will be strengthened and area directors may locate area administrative offices at community college sites. ~

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