Diverse Perspectives on Trends Impacting the Future of Extension in Florida

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Abstract

In Extension, understanding trends has ramifications when working with external audiences, internal audiences, and even preparing future Extension professionals. This research sought to assess the applicability of several national trends to Florida so that the Florida Cooperative Extension Service (CES) could more accurately plan to meet the needs of Florida in the future. The Organizational Change model guided this discussion and provided a theory-driven strategy for addressing future challenges facing Extension. A basic qualitative study was used, and eight participants were interviewed. Participants were required to be Florida Extension personnel who were well regarded within the organization and had a working understanding of Extension's issues. Data analysis was performed using the constant comparative method with open coding and themes were consolidated which ultimately resulted in five themes and 10 sub-themes. Findings indicated that the transformational factors challenging Extension included the external environment and mission and strategy. Conversely, the challenging transactional factors were structure, systems (policies and procedures), and task requirements and individual skills. Transformational factors were identified as the primary catalyst for change and Extension may focus efforts towards the four sub-themes that emerged from the external environment: (a) urbanization, (b) education with online technology, (c) conflicting messages, and (d) diverse audiences. Additionally, three sub-themes emerged from mission and strategy: (a) science-based information, (b) building partnerships, and (c) engaging stakeholders. The Florida CES has adapted to many 21st century challenges, but the need for change remains if Extension intends to keep its reputation as a premier educational organization.

Keywords: Extension; future; external environment; mission and strategy

Introduction

Planning to address the needs of the future requires understanding today's trends (Witkin & Altschuld, 1995). In Extension, assessing trends has ramifications for our work with external audiences, internal audiences, and even for how we academically prepare future Extension professionals. Every organization is impacted by changes in the external environment, from the top levels of leadership down to the daily policies that guide process and procedure (Burke & Litwin, 1992).

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Henning et al. (2014) described seven "grand societal challenges" (para. 1) that they anticipated would have an impact on the U.S.'s future, including challenges related to food safety, serving urban clientele, mitigating a national health crisis, and improving the resiliency of natural resources. Similarly, Fox et al. (2017) stated "Extension must become better equipped to efficiently and effectively address complex urban priorities" (para. 3). Their scan of external and historical trends resulted in recommendations for advancing Extension related to positioning, programs, personnel, and partnerships. Neither set of authors explicitly identified technology as a major trend impacting Extension, which is somewhat surprising given the now ubiquitous nature of smart phones and computers in American society. However, King (2018) offered a compelling argument for Extension to take the disruptive influence of such technologies more seriously, ominously pointing out that "Amazon, Google, and Apple have set up residence in *each of our homes* [emphasis original]" (para. 10).

Henning et al. (2014), Fox et al. (2017), and King (2018) all described relatively recent trends occurring across the national landscape. Yet, Extension remains an organization largely influenced by local contexts. We sought to assess the applicability of several national trends to our local context so our organization can more accurately plan to meet the needs of our state in the future.

Theoretical Framework

This research is grounded in social constructivism which is a collaborative nature of learning (Berkeley, 2019). Together, reality is invented by individuals of society, knowledge is created through interactions between individuals and their environment, and learning occurs when individuals are engaged in social activities (Kim, 2001). Social constructivism was used to frame this research because relationships between Extension and the public are dynamic and ever changing. Boyle (1989) described the dynamic nature of Extension as having internal factors (e.g., leadership) and external factors (e.g., environmental impacts such as drought).

During the data analysis, the emerging themes shared similarities with the Organizational Change Model (Burke & Litwin, 1992) and so it was used as a guide for discussing the findings of this research (see Figure 1). This model emphasizes a feedback loop that reflects numerous forces (external and internal) that have an impact on organizations (Burke & Litwin, 1992). The Organizational Change model helped frame the discussion of challenges based on their categorization as external or internal forces that would create the need for change.

The Organizational Change model (Burke & Litwin, 1992) can be explained beyond internal and external factors and in terms of transformational and transactional factors. Transformational factors are factors that are sensitive to the external environment and directly affect the organizational mission, strategy, leadership, and culture (Burke & Litwin, 1992). Transformational factors were defined as the primary catalyst for organizational change "likely caused by interaction with environmental forces (both within and without) and will require entirely new behavior sets from organizational members" (Burke & Litwin, 1992, p. 529). Five of the external and internal forces at the upper half of the Organizational Change Model are classified as transformational factors: (a) external environment, (b) mission and strategy, (c) leadership, (d) organizational culture, and (e) individual and organizational performance. Conversely, transactional factors were defined as the short-term, mutually beneficial exchanges that occur between members of an organization or said another way, "you do this for me, and I'll do that for you" (Burke & Litwin, 1992, p. 530). Burke and Litwin (1992) explained that the lower half of the Organizational Change Model is comprised of transactional factors: (a) management practices, (b) structure, (c) systems (policies and procedures), (d) work unit climate, (e) task and individual skills, (f) motivation, (g) individual needs and values, and (h) individual and organizational performance. Together, transformational and transactional factors contribute to a more holistic understanding of an organizational system, such as Extension.

Figure 1

Burke-Litwin's Organizational Change Model
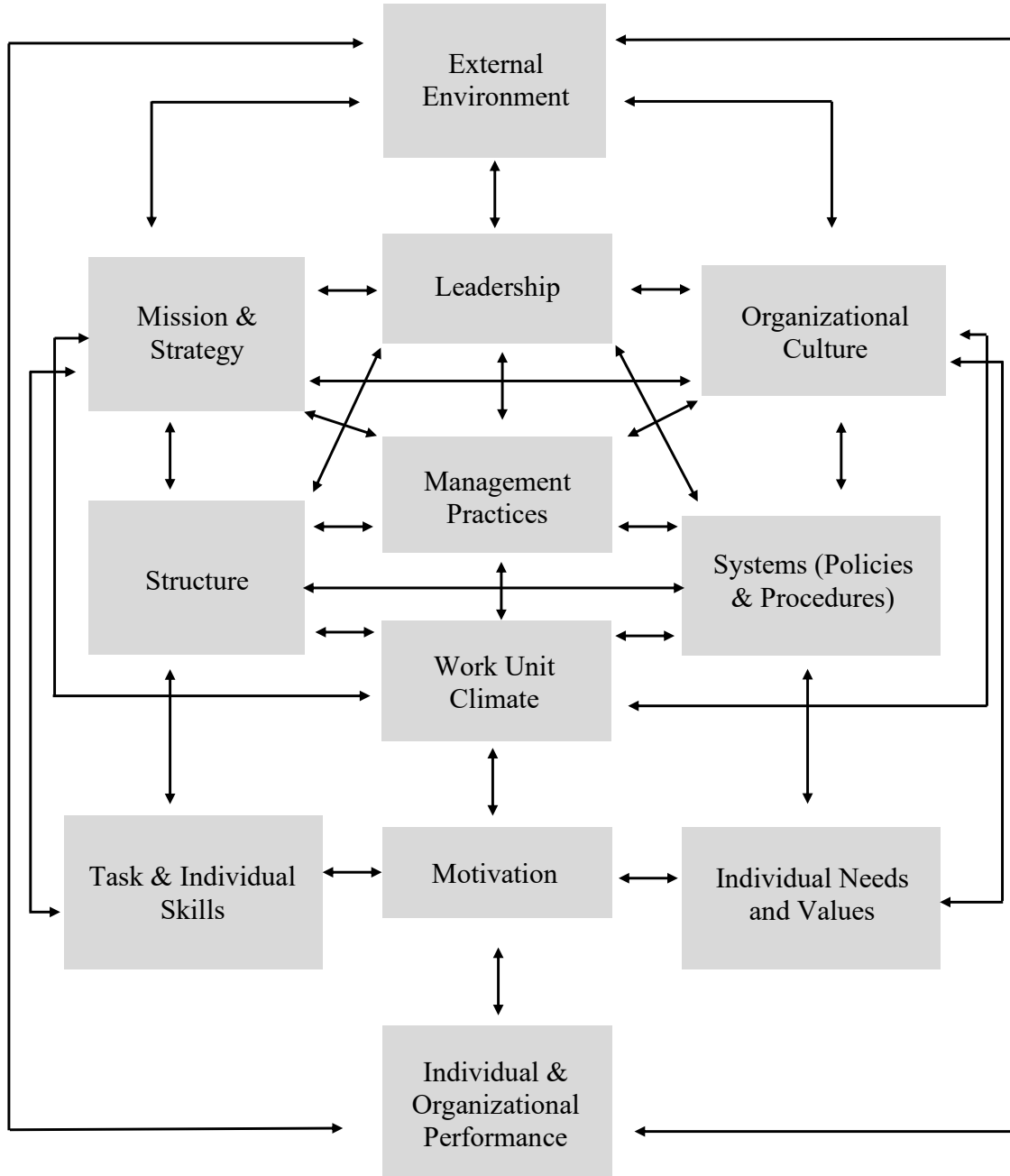
The Organizational Change Model (Burke & Litwin, 1992) is useful for interpreting the findings of our research because themes that emerge from the data can be conceptualized within Extension's organizational structure. Conceptualizing emerging themes within the Organizational Change Model can provide a theory-driven strategy for addressing future challenges facing Extension. Connecting research to practice is necessary for positively positioning Extension in the future.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this study was to explore the future of the Florida Cooperative Extension Service (CES). More specifically, we sought to identify the perceived impact of rapid population growth, natural disasters, and health concerns on Florida CES moving forward. Further, the research sought to identify perceptions about Extension's future approaches to youth engagement, partnerships, and funding.

Methods

Research Design

A basic qualitative study was used which focused on how participants interpret their experiences, construct their world, and place meaning on their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The ultimate goal of a basic qualitative research approach is to understand how people make sense of their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Participants

The target population was key individuals within the Florida CES who had sufficient institutional knowledge to be qualified to speculate about the future of Extension. For the purpose of this research, institutional knowledge was defined as a "county or state faculty; agents/educators, specialists, or directors who may specialize in any program area, are well regarded in their program area and have a working understanding of Extension's issues" (Harder et al., 2010, p. 46). A purposive sample was conducted targeting individuals representing a variety of roles in the organization. Participants were recognized as influential contributors to the Florida CES. Some were considered influential because of their formal leadership roles in the organization, while others had award-winning programs and/or had held elected positions with professional associations. Participants were included from the 1862 and 1890 land-grant universities (LGUs) that partner to create Florida CES. Eight participants were interviewed: two county agents, a state specialist, a state specialized agent, two regional specialized agents, and two state-level administrators. Three participants were male and five were female. Further details about the participants have been withheld and pseudonyms were assigned to protect the identity of participants, who might readily be recognized otherwise.

Data Collection

This study was approved as exempt by the University of Florida (UF) Institutional Review Board. One-on-one, semi-structured interviews were conducted October-November 2019 with various Florida CES personnel. The interview protocol was developed after a literature review that examined challenges and threats to Extension. There were eight major sections of the interview guide: (a) background questions (their career in Extension), (b) understanding Extension, (c) serving urban clientele, (d) addressing health, (e) natural resource resilience, (f) technology and innovation, (g) partnerships and community integration, and (h) the interview conclusion. Each section had one major question and between one and three probing questions. In addition, there were four general probing questions that were utilized to gather thick descriptions (Bailey, 2018). Interviews were anticipated to last 60 minutes, but ultimately lasted between 30-90 minutes. Interviews were conducted one of three ways based on the location and availability of the participant: (a) face-to-face, (b) electronic video via Zoom, or (c) voice over the phone. Attempts were made to address every question in the interview guide, but when time was limited, the participants' area of expertise was considered, and the remaining questions were selected to focus on those areas. Due to the nature of the interviews, not all questions

were provided during every interview. All interviews were recorded, and field notes were taken to complement the audio recordings.

Data Analysis

An interview data organization protocol was used, which detailed information about the participant and interview experience: (a) job title, (b) date of interview, (c) meeting time, (d) meeting location, (e) questions addressed, (f) description of the interview setting, (g) interview length, and (h) field notes. In addition, each interview was transcribed verbatim. The interviews were first transcribed through the use of an electronic transcriber named Otter (Maxwell, 2013). Then the transcripts were read, and manual corrections were made. The transcripts were read a second time and the constant comparative method was used with open coding to identify the initial codes (Saldaña, 2016). Passages were highlighted that related to future challenges to Florida CES. Then, highlighted passages were moved into a table format. We conducted peer review as an author team, with the lead author conducting the initial analysis and the secondary author asking questions, seeking clarification or additional evidence, and providing contextual knowledge when necessary. Additional challenges that had not been initially included were added as appropriate following peer-to-peer discussion. There were 26 initial themes and eight sub-themes that emerged after the peer review of all eight transcripts. A second review was made of the coded statements and verified that all items were only assigned to one theme or sub-theme (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). All themes and sub-themes were organized and compared to reduce code drift which is the "drift in the definition of the codes" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 202). Themes were consolidated which ultimately resulted in five themes and 10 sub-themes.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) explained four primary techniques for establishing trustworthiness: (a) credibility, (b) transferability, (c) dependability, and (d) confirmability. Credibility was established through triangulation of data by comparing participants' responses to each other and to the literature. A theme was not justified unless it arose from multiple interviews. Transferability occurred through the use of purposive sampling that obtained a wide range of Extension perspectives and the use of thick descriptions "with the widest possible range of information" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 316). Dependability and confirmability were described as an integral component to trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Dependability was achieved through the use of an interview protocol and reviewing transcripts for mistakes prior to data analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Furthermore, dependability and confirmability were achieved through an internal audit process where detailed records were kept that communicated the "accuracy of transcripts, the relationship between the research questions and the data, and the level of data analysis" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 201). Member checking was also performed which allowed the informants to review the interpretations of their reality to help ensure accuracy of data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

In qualitative approaches the researcher serves as a type of "instrument" (McCracken, 1983, p. 18) for data collection as well as the data analyzer. One of us is a graduate student specializing in extension education, with a background in horticulture and sustainability, engagement in a variety of international agricultural development experiences, and internship experience in Extension. The other of us is a professor of extension education with almost 20 years of experience working in Extension at the county and state levels. Although we have attempted to be conscientious of our personal biases throughout the process, we recognize they may have had an impact and so have used the participants' own words as often as possible to help the reader independently determine the trustworthiness of the results.

Findings

Ultimately, five themes and 10 sub-themes emerged from the interviews and were divided into transformational and transactional factors as described by Burke and Litwin (1992). The transformational factors challenging Extension included the external environment and mission and strategy. Conversely, the challenging transactional factors were structure, systems (policies and procedures), and task requirements and individual skills. As the Burke and Litwin (1992) model indicated, these themes are all interconnected and are dependent parts.

External Environment

The external environment has been described as any external factor, condition or situation that influences the overall functioning of the organization (Burke & Litwin, 1992). Four sub-themes emerged from the external environment: (a) urbanization, (b) education with online technology, (c) conflicting messages, and (d) diverse audiences.

Urbanization

Participants agreed that the rising population in Florida has resulted in a loss of valuable agricultural land and the divide between urban and rural clientele has increased tension regarding who gets Extension's attention. Donna explained:

> Urbanization is near and dear to my heart because I've seen lime groves, avocado groves, and mango groves pushed out and track houses went up. The encroachment has changed the landscape of where I grew up. How do we help farmers get the best prices for their crops and make farms more efficient and avoid selling their land for urbanization?

Richard gave a similar example, "take the corridor for Daytona Beach to Tampa and I-4 . . . that area just keeps getting bigger and bigger and bigger. So, that's just going to become like one giant blob of urban or suburban enclaves."

As the urban population increases, so too do concerns from rural stakeholders about perceptions that Extension is shifting attention away from them. Carla said, "I don't think that the rural population appreciates us talking about urban Extension." James indicated that there are challenges with "the responsibility to kind of bridge that gap" between urban and rural because of conflicting views – especially difficult because they are likely firmly believed. The gap is widening between urban and rural populations while simultaneously the rural population is shrinking. Thomas noted farm operators are aging and their children are seeking alternate livelihoods. James also expressed concern about the declining rural population, noting "I'm sure that power base of our traditional audiences is getting smaller and smaller and smaller and smaller."

Education with Online Technology

Technology is evolving constantly, and Extension is pressured to keep up. Carla explained how clientele have access to more technology than Extension and are more trained on the newest innovations. Richard felt Extension is "not real nimble like industry . . . The university is a whole other organization in its set-up and how it works. So, in some respects it's difficult for us to keep up with technology improvements." Emily provided insight for how Extension should be utilizing technology for online education, sharing that Extension should improve "social media, videos and be up to date on the newest things and use the market and be out there and get in front of our clientele and consider things like online courses, distance learning, virtual reality."

Despite acknowledgement of the growing role of technology in meeting clientele needs, four participants expressed the belief that face-to-face interaction will continue to be important in the future. One of the reasons for this was a perceived preference that older generations still prefer face-to-face interactions, while younger generations are more adept at using technology. Richard asserted, "the personal touch will remain. . . . You actually have a human being that you can talk to or who can visit and that you can visit to help you with your problems." More plainly, Lisa said "you're still going to need the boots on the ground." Sandra also expressed a need for face-to-face interactions by saying, "Extension is going to stay relevant in the future, if there's still a focus on building actual connections with the community and having one-on-one interactions with people. Getting people in the office, meeting people out at their farms and really working to engage with people and build relationships."

Conflicting Messages

Participants described challenges managing conflicting messages shared by non-Extension entities in online environments. Donna explained, social media especially provides this challenge with competing information because "you never get that final solution delivered on social media" because there is always someone else who follows up with a post or comment that conflicts with the Extension suggestion. Carla agreed the Internet was a source of competition and felt clientele need education on how to consume the information found there, particularly science-based information.

James also expressed concern regarding conflicting information about science from non-Extension sources shared on social media platforms. James explained,

> today, it seems like people take social media as the main source of their information. And oftentimes, that information is not based on science and apparently doesn't need to be based on science. . . . the trust in science doesn't seem to be as high level as it was when I was growing up. . . . There're so many different sources of information, it's easier to get information off of Facebook or whatever.

Social media has increased stakeholders' exposure to multiple information sources and viewpoints that sometimes conflict with Extension's recommendations, jeopardizing Extension's reputation as a go-to source for information. Emily suggested finding and working with the opinion leaders respected by stakeholders as a way to combat and correct misinformation. Conflicting messages from non-Extension sources on social media is a challenge for Extension to reach stakeholders, provide science-based information, remain relevant, and maintain trust with stakeholders.

Diverse Audiences

The participants widely recognized the diversity of their state, considering the racial, ethnic, and socio-economic, and language characteristics of their potential clientele. Sandra emphasized that "Having that – everyone's welcome here [Extension] environment is very important." However, Carla felt like despite all stakeholders being "Invited to the party," not all were genuinely welcome. Reaching all of Florida's residents through Extension was viewed as a challenge. Richard said, "Particularly, I am thinking about the low-income folks, the underserved population, that kind of thing." Donna also voiced concern regarding Extension's clientele demographics and said,

> I would like to see a lot more diversity and inclusion in the Master Gardener program because when I look out at my audience, I see white people with silver hair, and they're all - the majority of Master Gardeners, like 80% are between 55 and 75, college educated, women. . . . When you hold a mirror up to their face, they'll say, 'well, we're the people who have time to volunteer'. . . . it's hard to argue with that . . . but what we say is that, 'you know, we are representing this county' . . . our folks who are active need to look like the population of the county.

Florida continues to experience growth in the number of non-native English-speaking residents. The U.S. Census reported 29.7% of Florida population spoke another language other than English at home and 22.2% of the population spoke Spanish at home which was higher than the national average (U.S. Census, n.d.). More specifically, two of the largest counties in Florida, Miami-Dade County and Broward County (Florida Association of Counties, n.d.) reported 35% of the county population were multi-lingual households (600,000 households) and 68% of the county population were multi-lingual households (1.7 million households), respectively (U.S. Census, 2015). Sandra felt a plan is required to address Florida's large population of non-native English speakers if Extension desires more diverse programs and the ability to reach a wider range of audiences. Florida CES does intentionally look for Spanish language skills in new hires for counties known to have significant Hispanic populations, however, this transitional strategy takes time. Richard noted "I can't take an agent and wave a magic wand and, you know, now they can speak Spanish."

Mission and Strategies

The mission and strategies are the beliefs of all employees regarding the central purpose of the organization (Burke & Litwin, 1992). Florida Extension has explicitly stated the mission as "a partnership between state, federal, and county governments to provide scientific knowledge and expertise to the public" (University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences [UF/IFAS], n.d.a, para. 1). Three sub-themes found were: (a) science-based information, (b) building partnerships, and (c) engaging stakeholders.

Science-based Information

Extension remaining grounded in science-based information and stakeholders trusting that the research is unbiased were identified as important by several participants. Donna explained, "if it comes from the University of Florida Extension its unbiased, science-based. . . . That's what makes Extension unique from any other source." James said that Extension "has to stay in science-based piece of this." Additionally, Sandra explained that research must take into consideration cost estimates that show recommended practices are economically feasible.

Maintaining a reputation as an unbiased information source can be challenging because of long-standing relationships between Florida Extension and industry groups. For example, Sandra said that Extension has "very strong support from Florida Cattleman's and the Florida Dairy Industry – very political. What if a plant-based diet is better, then do we make our supporters very angry?" Those types of potential loyalty conflicts contribute to some stakeholders being skeptical about the science-based information being disseminated by Extension. Donna elaborated, "People are anti-Extension information in Florida because they think Extension is in cahoots with big agriculture and fertilizer companies" but Florida Friendly Landscaping promotes best management practices. Extension is likely to continue to navigate this difficult territory.

Controversial topics are especially challenging for Extension. Participants explained their uncertainty regarding how to address public pushback while also remaining unbiased and science-based. Carla explained, "Sustainable is a bad word for some. That alone is a challenge. Don't want to hear about climate change." Conversely, Emily said, "I just cannot stress it enough that the future of Extension has to include some sort of formal climate change element or we are going to become irrelevant so quickly . . . I can't even tell you." James agreed with Carla and explained how people are uncomfortable with discussing climate change, but "Places in Florida are clearly experiencing climate change like Miami is having sea-level rise issues." James gave another example of a controversial topic: "Hemp–elephant in the room for alternative crops." Although, hemp has the potential to have positive economic and environmental impacts the social stigma regarding the crop has led to some controversial

conversations. Maintaining the science-based mission will continue to be important for Extension moving into the future.

Building Partnerships

Building partnerships is anticipated to increase in importance due to Extension's limited resources. For example, Emily explained limited resources and shrinking budgets will prove challenging and that "There is going to be competition among those organizations for the same resources or grants." Lisa suggested that public and private partnerships will be key to Extension's success in the future. Specifically, Carla said, "building partnerships with other organizations can capitalize on strengths that each bring to the table." But Richard noted potential difficulties partnering with the private sector, explaining, "once you start to get into the private sector then . . . your appearance of biasness could come into question if we're partnering with a company that produces a product or something like that. Like now, you are endorsing that product." Lisa, James, Donna, and Sandra said maintaining trust is a critical component of building partnerships. Trust can be difficult to accomplish because, as Carla explained, "Each agency has different expectations and different rules to follow and so that makes things complicated."

In addition to building external partnerships, participants identified challenges addressing complex societal issues and the need to build stronger internal partnerships within the LGUs. For example, Donna explained opioid addiction is impacting the agricultural labor force, but Extension agents are not trained in public health issues of this type although there are other units of the UF and Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University (Florida A&M) with the appropriate expertise. Lisa also wondered, "How do we utilize brain trust on campus?" There is a need to build partnerships between Extension and others to address complex societal issues and shrinking budgets; however, challenges persist with partnerships such as remaining unbiased and managing different expectations.

Engaging Stakeholders

Extension is challenged to capture the attention of stakeholders who increasingly live in urban communities offering a plethora of services. James said that it is difficult to engage stakeholders because "people are bombarded with lots of other opportunities." Today's youth are a difficult audience to engage over time, as compared to prior generations. For example, Richard compared his childhood with today and noted,

> There's a competition for the time, you know, when I was a kid there wasn't that many choices or organized activities . . . but now, there's youth sports leagues and dance class, and this and that and the Boys and Girls Clubs and all those kinds of things. So, there's school activities too. So, you can only do so much. So, that's the challenge right there is the competition for the time of the youth.

Not only is it challenging to compete with all these other opportunities, but Extension has a short time frame to grab the attention of stakeholders. Getting stakeholder attention is further complicated by sometimes having an obligation to share government-sourced information, like the USDA food guidelines. As Emily said, "one of the biggest challenges is getting our message heard quick enough and in a flashy enough way that it is going to entertain. . . . It seems like a lot of it [nutrition education] is based on the USDA's food guidelines, which frankly are not engaging at all and seem extremely outdated."

Better marketing and communication were discussed as needs for Extension to better engage stakeholders moving forward. Lisa pondered, "How do we keep Extension in the forefront of people's minds?" James felt "Extension needs to go out and do a better job of communicating what we're doing." Sandra provided an example of failed stakeholder engagement online when the same information was shared two different ways and due to marketing efforts, one format received approximately 40 million site visits, whereas the other platform received approximately 20,000 site visits. Ultimately, Donna said, "Extension is the best kept secret in the world."

Many questions remain regarding the most efficient methods for marketing Extension. Richard said, "So, how do we reach all these people, you know, with help that they need and will use? We certainly have the knowledge, but it's the dissemination of it that is challenging." Emily explained that new outreach methods are needed because Extension will not be able to serve enough people through traditional face-to-face methods alone. Thomas explained, "there are still people out there and probably a large segment of the population that may have not heard of Extension. And that's tough. . . . There is a need to be able to better reach audiences through programming that either demonstrates or programming that educates."

Structure

Structure is connected with the achievement of an organization's mission and strategies and is related to various levels of the organization's design such as levels of responsibility, authority, and communication (Burke & Litwin, 1992). There was one emergent theme regarding human resources which was Extension personnel.

Extension Personnel

Hiring and retaining qualified staff is an important component of Extension's future. Concern was expressed about having sufficient numbers of employees. Emily said, "It seems like staff and people are always a limiting factor, we need more staff and we need more people." Emily was also asked how she got her career in Extension and explained, "Well, to be honest, I didn't really know about Extension as a career path." Similarly, when Richard was asked how he got a job in Extension, he responded "By accident."

Lisa explained the most effective way to build trust and maintain relationships with communities is to hire an adequate number of personnel whose diversity reflects that of the community. However, Richard lamented:

When you look at when we [Extension] put job advertisements out there, the kind of applicants we get, I wish they were more diverse . . . but they're not. Maybe people that don't go to land-grants or aren't familiar with it aren't in tune with 'hey, I'd like to have an Extension career.'

If Extension aspires to remain relevant in the future, issues with hiring and retaining qualified personnel must be addressed. Community demographics are constantly fluctuating; therefore, Extension is challenged to be sensitive to community demographics and hire personnel representative of the population it serves.

Systems

Systems was another theme that emerged from this research. The *systems* factor described by Burke and Litwin (1992) explained how productivity is promoted through performance reviews, budgets, and personnel capacity. The two sub-themes regarding budgets emerged which were funding Extension and revenue enhancement.

Funding Extension

Participants anticipated future challenges regarding funding for Extension. Specifically, there were concerns about loss of funding from partners and unequal funding for Extension based on differences in the LGU responsible for it. As contribution to funding changes for Extension, Lisa said, it has been because "The government doesn't always put their money where the value is." For example, James described how budget cuts had reduced support for one of the Research and Extension Centers. Also, Thomas argued financial disparities exist between the Florida's LGUs. Thomas said, "there is the 1890s and the 1862s and the disparity is so great between these two systems . . . look at the University of Florida, a well-established, resource rich university system. And here we are at Florida A&M . We just don't compare." None of the participants anticipated Extension would see an increase in funding level support in the future.

Revenue Enhancement

Revenue enhancement has been deemed a way to support the organization financially; however, challenges exist with determining who pays and for what. Sandra said that Extension "Needs more programs that are self-supporting. There are very few at this time." But Thomas had concerns about revenue enhancement stemming from his personal experience, sharing:

> Gadsden County is one of the poorest counties in Florida. And so, even when I was an agent, I always kept registration fees as low as possible. . . . I think that we need to be careful and not get too happy charging so much that some people may not be able to afford your educational opportunities.

Emily also expressed concern regarding revenue enhancement and explained that she understood some programs should have fees but her clientele are mostly low-income and she likely would not have clientele if she charged for her program. Carla said a challenge remains for faculty to understand "the graduated system where the costs of programs and resources are profitable, partially covered or free." Richard agreed with Carla and said that he has noticed trouble teaching the graduated system to faculty. Richard explained, "We are still trying to get our faculty to figure out what we are talking about . . . It's not maybe a real clear concept for people."

Increasing revenue through grants was mentioned by Emily. She explained, "I think that our agents really need to get more comfortable with the idea of grants. . . . But I know that is frustrating and intimidating to some people that haven't had to work with grants in the past." Thomas summed up the pressing need for increasing revenue when he stated, "populations are expanding and growing and so I don't know . . . feeding that beast is going to be hard."

Task Requirements and Individual Skills

Disaster preparedness emerged as an area in which changes in task requirements and individual skills (Burke & Litwin, 1992) were anticipated to be necessary. Participants were asked how increased hurricanes would impact Extension in the future because of Florida's vulnerability and recent experiences with major hurricanes. Participants broadly recognized the importance of providing Extension personnel with education on disaster preparedness. Emily said that for Florida, "it is not just bad luck" but that "this is a real change in our environment and climate change is going to make things like this more and more common."

Disaster preparedness includes helping anticipate disasters and respond to them during and after the event. James said that there is a need "for more preparedness training for faculty – armed with information to help people prepare." Thomas also argued for increased training (face-to-face or electronically at a distance) to get important information to stakeholders in advance regarding natural

disasters. After the storm, Lisa said agents would need to be prepared to document the damage caused. Unfortunately, some of that damage may impact Extension faculty as well, who live and work in the same vulnerable areas as their clientele. The unique challenge of Extension's role in hurricane preparation and recovery was articulated by Emily, who explained "I think it is actually going to put a strain on the agents . . . not only prepare themselves when it comes to dealing with storms and climate change but also having to find ways to help their clientele with difficult issues at the same time."

Conclusion, Implications, and Recommendations

Our research sought to explore the potential impact of selected issues on Florida CES' future. Burke and Litwin (1992) theorized major changes in an organization stem from changes in the external environment, creating pressure within the organization for transformational change associated with mission and strategy, leadership, and organizational culture. Our study found urbanization, technology usage, conflicting messages from competing information sources, and increasingly diverse audiences were all disrupting the external environment. Similar external environment factors have previously been identified in the literature (e.g., Fox et al., 2017; Gregg & Irani, 2004; King, 2018; Scheer et al., 2011), suggesting Florida is not entirely unique in terms of trends impacting them. However, population growth and rapidly increasing racial and ethnic diversification are particularly evident in Florida (U.S. Census, 2015). Florida CES will need to make adjustments at the transformational change level (Burke & Litwin, 1992) to successfully adapt to the shifting environment.

Of the three transformational factors, mission and strategy emerged as the factor for which participants had the most concerns. Participants held onto the importance of delivering science-based information as Extension's key mission, but expressed concern about the ability of Florida CES to keep an unbiased reputation given the need to address controversial topics such as climate change, hemp, and fertilizer use. Participants felt building more partnerships internally and externally would be an increasingly important strategy moving forward, as has been suggested by Fox et al. (2014). Finally, an urgency to better engage with stakeholders was expressed, with participants recognizing that the current strategy of reaching stakeholders is outdated and results in many people being unaware of Extension and its services.

Since our data were collected, the world has been unsettled by the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic magnified the importance of being able to deliver science-based information to clientele using technology. Unfortunately, past research showed social media usage has led to Extension clientele having trouble deciphering what content is dependable (Auer, 2011 as cited in Gharis et al., 2014) and even during an unprecedented pandemic the innovative technology usage has been no replacement for hands-on experiences (Allen, 2020). Given the preponderance of conflicting information being provided online and the corresponding rise in skepticism towards information provided in that medium (Rainie & Anderson, 2017), the challenge for Extension to positively engage clientele and provide science-based information using online technologies may turn out to be even more disruptive to Extension's future than our participants predicted last fall. Too, the current dependence on technology during the pandemic makes it even more pressing for Florida CES to find safe strategies that fully engage its diverse audiences, especially those "left on the sidelines when it comes to the current and future direction of their communities" (Beaulieu & Cordes, 2014, p. 5).

Transactional factors are short-term, mutually beneficial exchanges among members of an organization (Burke & Litwin, 1992) and three such factors emerged as challenges in the future for Extension including structure, systems (policies and procedures), and task requirements and individual skills. The structure of Florida CES was recognized by participants as being severely understaffed and was described as having trouble recruiting and retaining qualified, diverse employees. In part, staffing shortages are caused by the unpredictable nature of Extension funding (Franz & Townson, 2008) and

policies which create the need for Extension to continually justify its funding (Henning et al., 2014). Bigbee et al. (2009) called for increased funding from various sources to support Extension research, a suggestion that circles back to the identified need for Florida CES to reexamine its partnerships strategy moving forward.

The trends outlined for the external environment and impacting the mission and strategies factors of Florida CES may require difficult changes for the organization but can also offer the greatest rewards for improving the overall performance of the organization (Burke & Litwin, 1992). Florida CES should use a strategy of what Fox et al. (2014) described as diversified programming to address the needs of urban, suburban, and rural communities, many of which are increasingly multicultural. We are encouraged to the see the creation and growth of Café Latino, a faculty-created and faculty-led initiative designed to "provide equitable and inclusive participation of Latino/Hispanic youth, families and communities in the benefits and leadership of Cooperative Extension" (UF/IFAS, n.d.b, para. 2). Customizing programming to be responsive to Florida's changing environment includes Extension adapting to growing demands for multilingual communication, especially Spanish speakers. Similarly, Extension should consider allocating more resources to recruit, hire, and retain more racially and ethnically diverse professionals to support the increasingly diverse state population.

Shifting to strategies which enable Extension professionals to impact more members of Florida's rapidly growing population will require the adoption of newer technologies that reach more people, as was suggested by King (2018). Additionally, professional development programming is needed to create change at the individual skill level (Burke & Litwin, 1992), partly to support the increased use of technology. Based on our findings, we recommend Florida CES consider focusing more training and resources to increase Extension professionals' knowledge and abilities related to (a) urban programming, (b) education with online technology, (c) working with diverse audiences, (d) revenue enhancement and use of extramural funding, and (e) disaster preparedness. Developing skills in the recommended areas should better position Florida CES to respond to the changes in the external environment and to make new strategies become viable solutions for the organization.

Extension must be able to navigate current challenges while also helping to create a resilient organization to address future challenges (Frahm & Brown, 2002). Our research highlighted current challenges and indicated emerging trends in Florida that should be on the organization's radar moving into the future. Future research should explore trends such as partnerships, revenue enhancement, hiring and retaining diverse Extension personnel, and communication tactics that engage and educate clientele about important issues, possibly using a case study approach focused on positive examples. Florida CES has adapted to many challenges of the 21st century, but the need for change remains a constant if Extension intends to maintain its reputation as a premier education and outreach organization for the state.

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