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Whither Leadership, Whither Extension?

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Whither Leadership, Whither Extension?

Abstract

Management and leadership in Extension have long been discussed. Leadership within Extension may not have evolved at the same rate as current issues. The current approach may not ensure success in future years. A new perspective on the current leadership approaches may be overdue. Leadership needs to go hand in hand with management, but one without the other rarely results in success. Weak or absent leadership forces the void to be filled by multiple individuals, leading to a lack of organizational cohesion. Worse yet, a dysfunctional organization may result. Many may have already recognized this and are leading from within.

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Ten years ago Fehlis (2005) posed the question: "Do we have the visionary leadership in Extension and in this land-grant university system that is necessary to carry forward our success of the last 90 years and achieve even greater success in future years?" I think the question is germane today. Are there enough leaders and managers to carry our success forward, and what is the difference between leaders and managers?

Leadership Verses Management

Evans (1967) described what he called "administrative managers and leaders," so this is not a new issue. Beyond leaders lead and manager manage, what is leadership, what is management, and what are the differences? There are countless websites dedicated to leadership, management, or the comparison between them. Likewise, there are no shortages of seminars, courses, or educational institutions offering programs or certificates on leadership and/or management. Managing and leading are different ways of organizing people to accomplish goals. For this purpose, a description of what they do is more appropriate than a description of what they are or a list of characteristics purveyors of each possess.

A leader sets organizational direction, establishes goals, provides the vision to achieve the goals, then inspires and motivates followers to achieve organizational success. Leaders challenge the norm, inspire trust, develop, and innovate. Leaders take risks. Managers organize subordinates who work for them. They administer and generally make sure that day-to-day operations are running smoothly according to previously established parameters. Managers maintain the status quo. Few can doubt that leadership is crucial. Management too, is crucial.

Leadership and Management

Management is not leadership. For success, leadership and management must go hand in hand. Good leaders are also managers, and good managers are also leaders. Management through power alone will not produce the same results as management through leadership. I suspect this is more the case in academia than in business. Inspiring subordinates to achieve goals can be done while developing talent. Leaders with great vision and lofty goals still need follow-up and follow through to see that the vision is being carried out by managers. Evans (1967) concluded that both are needed. Under challenging situations, the safe role to take is that of a manager rather than a leader.

Are Tough Budget Times Changing Leaders to Managers?

Are budget shrinkages causing leadership to be replaced by management? Budgets have certainly shrunk, as have the number of faculty, the lifeblood of Extension creativity and the heart of the success of the past 100 plus years (Johnson, 2010). Is this causing a leadership void? Is the focus on dealing with current client questions or is the focus on being ready for the next generation of clients?

If Extension does not change with the times, it is possible that Extension eventually may no longer be relevant. Holding onto past traditional models may accelerate this. "Much of Extension is still mired in the classical model of leadership based on command and control; unidirectional memos; the language of laws and policies, contracts, and RFPs. Changing times and a post-modern world demand a new perspective on leadership." This quote (Astroth, Goodwin, & Hodnett, 2011) does not bode well as a reply to "Will Extension still exist in 30 to 40 years so that I might hope to retire (Fehlis, 2005)?" The lack of leadership could drive an organization such as Extension to become irrelevant.

Are You Being Led or Are You Being Managed?

Are people busy but lack organizational cohesion? Do you see decisions that seem to lack direction? Are the decisions being made providing leadership, or are decisions just being made? What seems to be more important, understanding the vision of where you are heading or filling out forms on time? A litmus test for being managed or being led: Do you know and trust the vision of the future organizational plan, and are you inspired to help the organization get there? Astroth, Goodwin, and Hodnett (2011) make a strong case that to successfully guide Extension to the future, many of the old models may not get Extension there successfully. The central dogma of being managed and not being led is obvious: you are not being led. If organizational leadership is lacking, then it must come from within.

Leadership and Management from Within

The lack of organizational leadership and direction may be lamented, but few complain when direct oversight management is lacking. People do voice concern when leadership is lacking. The lack of organizational leadership forcing leadership to come from within may be more commonplace than many would think. Ricketts, Carter, Place, and McCoy (2012) report findings that Extension educators are aware of how to make successful leadership choices. Do you innovate? Do you ideate? Do you mentor? When you are no longer in your position, what will your clients miss? Are you an information generator as well as an information deliverer? The successes of good leaders come from not only their vision, but from those carrying out the vision so contributions have to come from everyone. Ricketts, Carter, Place, and McCoy (2012) describe categories of self-motivation strategies Extension individuals used to propel themselves towards success. Perhaps this is the Extension of the future. Organizational needs and challenges with respect to leadership are a recurring theme in many journals, including *Journal of Extension*. Whither leadership, whither Extension? Not so far, but what happens in the future?

A Final Tidbit

Ed Whitacre ran General Motors 2009-2010 in troubled times for the company (Anonymous, 2014) during which he delivered a much-cited message (Associated Press, 2009) to Detroit auto workers that can be boiled down to:

Make decisions.

Take risks.

Move fast.

Be accountable.

Sounds like the essence of leadership to me.

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