



Restructuring of Academic, Extension and Research Support Teams to Improve Effectiveness, Impact and Customer Satisfaction

Issue: The School of Environment and Natural Resources (SENR) at the Ohio State University was established in 1968 to deliver teaching, research and outreach programs focused on the interaction of humans with the natural environment. Over time, SENR's disciplinary scope shifted as reorganizations within its home college (Food, Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, CFAES) and related realignments brought in new faculty members, students and programs. The past few years in particular have brought dramatic shifts in SENR's faculty demographics (~30% turnover and net additions), explosive undergraduate (73%) and graduate (>200%) enrollment growth, an approximately 50% increase in research expenditures, and an substantial expansion in Extension disciplinary expertise and programming. The net effect of these in SENR has left the school richer in composition, more diverse, and bigger in size and impact, but increasingly stretched with respect to faculty and staff time and expertise as growth outpaced our ability to replace or add to our personnel ranks. Moreover, greater programmatic diversity has at times exacerbated a lack of cohesion in, and/or visibility of, our people and programs, both on and off the Ohio State University campus. Among staff, long lengths of service contribute to high levels of competency, but also to a sense of restlessness in their current roles, which is exacerbated by the need to cope with more students, research activity and outreach programming.

What has been done:

Reorganization of the Academic Team Student exit interviews, focus groups and an organizational consultant were utilized to satisfaction and effectiveness in our suite of student services, including recruitment; advising; placement and career development; usefulness of academic program and curricular materials; and the effectiveness of various means of communication (including email, website and social media). A series of interviews with academic services staff and other constituents in and outside OSU were also helpful in identifying specific job satisfaction and function issues among individual staff, as well as with the team as a whole. In response, the existing five-person team was completely reorganized, and one additional staff member hired, to improve student and employee satisfaction, team effectiveness, and add needed capacity and improve service menus and/or effectiveness.

Invest in Extension Team I worked with SENR's Extension Team faculty leader to discuss a fundamental change in the role of Team Leader, and issue a challenge to the Extension team at large. Historically, the principal duty of SENR's Extension Team Leader was to coordinate the collection and summarization of Extension faculty member and staff products and productivity measures for reporting purposes. However, my newly appointed team leader's interest and inclination was to provide greater leadership form a program-wide perspective. He had recently been selected to participate in an OSU/Big Ten faculty leadership program, and so there was a fortuitous convergence of both need and opportunity. Together, we asked the Extension faculty and staff to embark upon an exercise to bring both greater cohesion and collective visibility to our outreach efforts. I allocated approximately \$100,000 to the team to pursue these efforts, and we have made substantial progress on a number of initiatives. These include executing an inaugural planning for a signature event, The State of Ohio's Environment; launching the Ohio Environmental Leaders Institute (OELI); and creating the first mobile device outreach application at OSU, the Great Lakes Early Detection Network GLEDN, (apps.bugwood.org/gledn.html).

Increasing Research Support Staff Capacity New, recurring budget resources generated from increased grant activity were used to create a Grants and Contacts Specialist position, and hire an experienced person into the position. Principal duties include assisting Principal Investigators (PIs)

with the management and administration of sponsored projects; pre- and post-award activities; reviewing, analyzing and reconciling project fiscal reports; cost overruns; personnel appointments; subcontracts; consultant agreements; no-cost extensions, and project close-outs.

Impacts/New Partnerships:

Perhaps the greatest number of “new” partnerships have formed with the academic and Extension teams. They are not new per se, but rather strengthened or otherwise altered, depending upon the changes introduced into work lives and team structure. The new signature outreach event, and OELI both are expanding our stakeholder populations. The addition of our Grants and Contacts Specialist has fundamentally changed relationships between faculty and research support staff, in that for the first time they have a dedicated resource to assist with pre- and post-award matters.

Outcome of Project (societal impact/ measure of increased quality of life)

While some academic staff are still adjusting to their new roles, there has been a general improvement in workplace satisfaction, and a notable improvement in function. Follow-up focus groups with students have demonstrated service improvements, and highlighted areas still in need of additional attention. There has been a marked improvement in Extension team cohesion and morale. The new outreach “signature event” was well attended and highly regarded, and the OELI has enrolled its first class. The GLEDN mobile device app has proved very popular, been highlighted in a number of media outlets, and is recording new location occurrences of invasive species, as intended. Faculty response to the new Grants and Contacts Specialist has been uniformly positive. The occurrence of account overages and other errors has declined, proposal budget development has been accelerated, post-award fiscal monitoring has improved, and training materials are in preparation.

How has your project been aided by your FSLI experience? The emphases on understanding organizational structure, initiating and leading change, communicating change, and focusing on systems in general have been invaluable. The exercises, presentations and discussions – along with the personal feedback – have all proved useful.

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