Organizational change: extension staff response to increase programming for at-risk audiences

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Organizational change: Extension staff response to increase programming for at-risk audiences

by

Diane Kay Klemme

A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Major: Family and Consumer Sciences Education

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1999
Graduate College
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This is to certify that the Doctoral dissertation of

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has met the dissertation requirements of Iowa State University

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For the Major Program

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For the Graduate College
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ABSTRACT

As family and consumer sciences professionals begin to consider changes in the
profession or their individual organizations, an understanding of organizational change and
organizational change processes becomes an essential leadership skill (McGregor, 1997). To
better overcome resistance to change and create sustained change, the leaders and their staff
must learn to examine their personal and the organization's assumptions and alter those
assumptions that limit the change process (Argyris, 1997). The purpose of this research is to
examine the individual and organizational assumptions that contribute to or inhibit Extension
staff programming efforts with at-risk audiences. The research will also aid leadership as
they seek to understand organizational change and the organizational change process.

In the fall of 1995, three focus groups were conducted with Extension field specialists
and county Extension directors. The groups included staff who were not directly involved in
at-risk programming and staff with primary responsibility for at-risk programming. A focus
group script was developed that contained questions designed to elicit participants'
perceptions and opinions about key characteristics of successful at-risk programming, typical
or potential barriers to successful programming, and staff development training needs. All
focus groups discussions were audiotaped, transcribed, and analyzed using the software
program NUD*IST. Analysis of the focus group data involved: narrowing the collected data;
organizing the data for analysis; identifying emerging themes, and drawing and verifying
conclusions.

Extension staff describe working with at-risk audiences as a major change in program
priorities and question administrative and other key stakeholder support for this change.
Underlying assumptions related to individual, organizational structure, organizational culture,
and leadership factors that inhibited the organization's ability to change are identified. The study identifies a lack of clarity about the term "at-risk" and skepticism among the Extension staff as to the relationship between at-risk programming and traditional Extension programming efforts.

This study demonstrates that to create meaningful and sustained change in an organization, individual and organizational assumptions need to be exposed. ISUE staff need training opportunities that expose their assumptions and change their perceptions about working with at-risk audiences. However, the study reveals that providing additional staff development training or new job descriptions is not sufficient in itself to sustain organizational change. Issues pertinent to the organizational leadership and culture also need to be addressed in the change process.
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

"There is nothing permanent except change."

– Heraclitus (402 A.D.)

Change – "to alter; to make different; to transform" – (Merriam Webster, 1998) typically calls forth a vision of hope, suggesting a search for a "better way" of doing or living. However, change is not an easy process. Change requires a tolerance for floundering and ambiguity, a willingness to consider options, and often threatens the individual's view of the world, values, and rationality (O'Connor, 1995).

Lindblom (1997) concludes that a fundamental barrier to change is an individual's cognitive inability to step back from one's present situation and take a dispassionate, objective view of the messages being received and the messages one sends to others. He proposes that individuals are unable to take an objective view of these messages because they possess deep-seated assumptions and habits of thought that limit their ability to rationally address issues.

Baldwin (1991) and Brown (1993) have persistently asked family and consumer sciences professionals if they are creating conditions that enable families "to cope with change, adjust to change, and influence change" (McGregor, 1997, p. 12). Indeed, many family and consumer sciences professionals continually call for changes within the profession.

... that we [professionals] make a fundamental transformation in our belief system, in the way we practice, as well as in the knowledge base we use to practice our profession. Most importantly, we must appreciate that our current modes of practice
are not wrong, per se; rather they may no longer be sufficient, in and of themselves, in today's relentless change (McGregor, 1997, p. 12).

As family and consumer sciences professionals seek or at least begin to talk about changes in the profession and organizations in which they work, information is needed about planned organizational change. A planned organizational change process involves the organization's members in identifying patterns of behaviors the organization wants to adopt or discontinue. The organization's members then look for ways to change the organizational patterns of behavior (Barr & Huff, 1997).

Organizations may address organizational change by using a process called single loop learning. This process involves the organization members changing their behaviors but not their assumptions about the planned change. The degree or extent of organizational changes resulting from the single loop learning process are incremental and constrained by the assumptions held by members (Kovoor-Misra, 1996). Examples of single-loop learning can be found in most organizations, but may not be sufficient for today's world of relentless change.

A process that involves only behavior changes may no longer be sufficient to react to various anticipated and unanticipated problems associated with the unpredictable nature of change today. Instead, a double-loop learning process that involves members in continuously critiquing their actual behaviors against intended behaviors to identify any mismatches may be needed. Members correct mismatches by changing their assumptions as well as identifying and correcting assumptions held within the organization itself. These changes may include recognizing and changing specific policies, procedures, or organizational assumptions that create the mismatch (Trahant & Burke, 1996).
This study sought to identify changes necessary for a nonformal educational organization to support and sustain new programming efforts. The study did not address all new programming efforts, only those specifically related to the Children, Youth, and Families At-Risk (CYFAR) National Initiative as part of Iowa State University Extension's (ISUE) State Strengthening Project.

In 1995, ISUE Service was awarded a five-year grant from the Cooperative States Research, Extension, and Education Service – United States Department of Agriculture. The project is titled "Strengthening Community Programs for Children, Youth, and Families Living in At-Risk Environments" and is associated with the CYFAR National Initiative.

One of the Initiative goals is to help state extension services build organizational capacity for providing programming to children, youth, and families living in at-risk environments, an audience that has not typically been served by state extension services. The Initiative's primary targeted audience is families that (a) qualify for a public assistance program; (b) have incomes falling below the poverty threshold; or (c) have an income which is less than 75% of the State or county median income.

Project staff conducted focus groups with ISUE personnel in the fall of 1995 to (a) assess the current ability of ISUE staff to work effectively with children, youth, and families living in at-risk environments; (b) identify barriers which hinder the organization from positively impacting at-risk audiences; and (c) determine training needs of staff and their partners, both in terms of content and process. This study further analyzes the focus group transcripts to uncover and elaborate upon the underlying assumptions held by ISUE staff. These assumptions may inhibit the expansion of ISUE's programming efforts with children, youth, and families living in at-risk environments.
Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to further analyze the focus group transcripts to uncover and elaborate upon the underlying assumptions held by ISUE staff and that may inhibit the expansion of programming efforts with children, youth, and families living in at-risk environments. The study will explain ways in which the assumptions held by ISUE employees support or hinder the expansion of at-risk programming efforts, describe environmental circumstances that impact ISUE, and examine possible targets for ISUE organizational change efforts. Understanding the context in which ISUE functions provides leadership/management with a basis for action to reinforce those assumptions identified as productive and to change those assumptions identified as counterproductive to improving at-risk programming efforts.

Research Questions

1. In what ways do the assumptions held by ISUE staff support or hinder organizational change efforts designed to enhance the quality and quantity of programming for at-risk audiences?

2. What circumstances of change influence Iowa State University Extension's ability to program for at-risk audiences?

3. What are possible organizational change strategies that could strengthen ISUE's programming efforts with at-risk audiences?
Assumption and Limitations of the Study

This research study will describe and analyze the perceptions of selected Iowa State University Extension staff about at-risk programming efforts through focus groups. The researcher assumed that the participants of the focus groups responded honestly and completely to the focus group questions. It was assumed that the focus group participants understood and interpreted the questions as intended by the researcher. The use of qualitative research methods limited the generalizability of this study because the study attempted to explain this particular phenomenon and not others. But an extensive description of the setting aids in the transferability of the study.

This study was conducted in an established, public organization that has served a particular audience for a long period of time. Organizational change efforts may be different in less established organizations or organizations designed to generate profits.

Significance of the Study

The findings of this research study provide ISUE management/leadership with a richer understanding of the assumptions held by ISUE staff toward at-risk programming efforts and provide possible organizational change strategies that could strengthen ISUE programming efforts with at-risk audiences. These data provide management/leadership a basis for action to reinforce those assumptions identified as productive and to change those assumptions identified as counterproductive to at-risk programming efforts.

Furthermore, the study provides an understanding of the complex, interrelated factors that impact ISUE staff at-risk-programming efforts. The study benefits the key participants by creating a greater awareness about their perceptions of at-risk programming efforts.
Participation in the research study helps the participants clarify their own attitudes toward at-risk programming efforts. Other extension groups may benefit from the study by analyzing the detailed description of the study's setting to see if the data are transferable.

Family and consumer sciences professionals can utilize the information about planned organizational change efforts to anticipate some issues as they begin to plan changes in the profession and the organizations in which they work. The study's methodological procedures provide a framework that family and consumer sciences professionals can implement as they initiate planned organizational change in the profession and their respective organizations.

**Definitions**

The study's literature review and ISUE documents provided the definitions for the terms used in this study. For the purpose of the study, these relevant terms are defined:

*Capacities* — Knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to perform job duties (Children, Youth, and Families At-Risk web site, http://www.iastate.edu/Pages/families/cyfar/capacity).


*County Directors* — Extension staff who coordinate Field Specialists and Extension programs within a designated county of the state (Schwieder, 1993).

*Field specialists* — Extension staff serving one of the following areas: youth, family, community resources, nutrition, or agriculture. Staff members are responsible for programming in their specific subject matter area (Schwieder, 1993).
Organization – A set of individuals with enough stability and common history to allow a culture or pattern of behavior to form (Schein, 1990).

Organizational change – Anything that alters, makes different or converts any part of the organization including its members, structure, culture, products or services, systems, or management/leadership (Morgan, 1989).

Organizational culture – Unwritten rules and overt behavior patterns of the organization, including the observable artifacts, values and basic assumptions of the organization (Schein, 1990).

Organizational leadership – The mission, vision, strategies, and personal style of individuals in management and leadership (Terry, 1993).

Organizational structure – The management practices and the various systems of the organization including reward, communication, work design, decision-making and human resource management (Morgan, 1989).

Targets of change – Aspects of the organization and individual(s) in the organization that become a focus for the change process (Kovoor-Misra, 1996, Stewart, 1989 & Trahant & Burke, 1996).

Organization of the Dissertation

The remainder of my dissertation is organized as follows: Chapter two provides a review of literature relevant to the organizational change process. The review includes the complexion of organizational change, circumstances of organizational change, targets of organizational change, and a comparison of public and private organizations.
Chapter three describes the organization of Iowa State University Extension (ISUE) – the research setting. This description includes a brief review of the conception and development of ISUE and the impact of issues programming. Chapter four discusses the research methods and procedures used in this study. Chapter five provides the results of the data collection and analysis. Chapter six includes a summary of the study, conclusions, and recommendations for future research studies.
CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

"Change is not what it used to be. The status quo will no longer be the best way forward. The best way will be less comfortable and less easy, but no doubt more interesting – a word we often use to signal a mix of danger and opportunity."


The implementation of significant organizational change is an elusive and complex process in today's dynamic world. As change itself continues to evolve, unknown conditions will continuously present themselves. Numerous published guides explain how to manage organizational change, yet change remains a difficult task both for those who initiate change as well as those affected by it. This literature review will focus on these aspects of organizational change: the complexion of organizational change, circumstances and targets of organizational change, and differences in organizational change for public and private organizations.

Organizational change theories provide a way to conceptualize and better understand the change process in organizations. The first section of this literature review illustrates the evolving view of organizations and organizational change theories.

The Complexion of Organizational Change

Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary (1998) defined an organization as "an administrative and functional structure such as a business or a political party" (p. 819). For the purpose of this literature review, an organization will be viewed as a set of individuals with enough stability and common history to allow a culture or a pattern of behavior to form (Schein, 1990). Organizational change will be defined as anything that alters, makes
different, or converts any part of the organization including its members, structure, culture, products or services, systems or management/leadership to meet strategic objectives. O'Connor (1995) suggested that the term "organizational change" itself sends a contradictory message. Change and the change process conflict with management's basic interest of "control, stability, predictability, rationality, and economic result" (O'Connor, 1995, p. 770). Nevertheless, organizations continue to address change and the change process because typically change is viewed as a process that will increase economic productivity.

Management as used in the previous paragraph is defined as those individuals within the organization who bring order and consistency to the organization. Some individuals may argue that leadership is also involved in this process, and there is some question whether the differences between leadership and management are clearly distinguishable (Terry, 1993). For the purpose of this literature review and study, the term leadership will be used to identify individuals who provide direction for intentional organizational change.

Organizational change theories evolved during the twentieth century. As early as 1910, organizational theorists described organizations as machines best managed by planning ahead, keeping records, writing policies, providing employees with specialized tasks, and utilizing hierarchical supervision. Organizational change was viewed as a linear process that could be predicted, planned, and systematically implemented (Morgan, 1989).

However, as laborers' work tasks became more specialized, markets became more complex, and the expectations of proper employee treatment increased, organizations came to be viewed as cooperative systems (Morgan, 1989). These cooperative systems stress the need for delegation of authority, employee autonomy, openness and trust, "whole person"
well being, and interpersonal dynamics. The organization's leadership focuses on knowing workers' backgrounds and motivation in order to change workers' behaviors (Morgan, 1989).

Lewin (1952) explained the change process of cooperative systems in his classic organizational change theory. He described change as a linear, planned process and identified three stages of organizational change: unfreezing, movement, and refreezing. During the first stage, "unfreezing," the organization's leadership decides which patterns of behaviors to discontinue and identifies ways for the organization to change. In the second stage, "movement," the organization's leadership initiates the actual changes and compels the organization members to change behaviors. In the final stage, "refreezing," the organization's leadership moves to stabilize and institutionalize the actual changes by establishing systems that secure these new behavior patterns against further change.

In their Change Commitment Model, Conner and Patterson (1982) used a linear approach similar to Lewin's theory. They treated change as an event and identified critical points along a time continuum when organizational change is threatened or aided by the organization's members and/or leaders. The Change Commitment Model contains three phases: preparation, awareness, and commitment. In the first phase, preparation, the organization's leadership informs the members about potential changes. Confusion or lack of awareness by the organization's members can threaten the potential changes during this phase. In the second phase, awareness, the organization's leadership explains any changes to the members and helps maintain a positive perception about the proposed changes. Threats to change in this phase include negative perceptions about the change and lack of support for the change.
In the final phase, commitment, members of the organization accept responsibility for the change by initiating and adopting the changes, and modifying the organizational structure to accommodate the change (Trahant & Burke, 1996). Although commitment to the change is at the highest level in this stage, staff may choose to abort change after either initial or more extensive use of the adopted changes (Conner & Patterson, 1982). Changes are often aborted in the commitment stage for these reasons: (a) problems are identified that could only be recognized after a lengthy test period; (b) commitment for the change no longer exists; (c) goals of the organization have changed; and (d) individuals supporting the change have left the organization (Conner & Patterson, 1982).

Organizational leadership can use the Change Commitment Model to help the members engage and commit to organizational change. The development of a positive attitude toward the change and then achieving enough acceptance to move commitment to action are viewed as two critical factors in this organizational change model. Using the Change Commitment Model is appropriate for very stable, controlled organizations, but the model becomes less appropriate for today's turbulent, flexible, and uncertain organizational and environmental conditions. The new globalization and interdependence between nations and organizations in the 1980s and 1990s make the process of change more complex than in earlier decades. Unanticipated problems arise as organizations interact with a constantly changing environment. Now changes anywhere in the world typically result in changes elsewhere. This is unlike earlier decades when there was less international trade and dependence on specific products such as crude oil (Luke & Caiden, 1989). The organizational leadership now may have to deal with international trade limits, new labor laws or additional tariffs. The organization's leaders may no longer be fully in charge of every factor affecting
their organization and must respond to a variety of external and internal circumstances (Kovoor-Misra, 1996; Staniforth, 1996; Tichy, 1989).

As stated earlier, organizations may seek to address organizational change by using a process called single-loop learning. This process involves the organization members changing their behaviors in response to many internal or external factors. Organizational changes resulting from the single-loop learning process are incremental and constrained by the assumptions held by the members (Kovoor-Misra, 1996). Single-loop learning is found in most organizations but may not be sufficient when an organization must respond to multiple circumstances of change.

Because change is becoming more unpredictable, a linear process that changes behaviors alone may no longer be sufficient to react to various anticipated and unanticipated problems. Changes are sustained in organizations when organization leaders use productive reasoning to direct their change efforts (Argyris, 1997), institutionalize the change, and continuously and consistently reinforce the change (Trahant & Burke, 1996). An organization that changes behaviors only, as in single-loop learning, but not the underlying assumptions that sustained the old behavior, cannot sustain the new behavior over a period of time (Argyris, 1997).

Productive reasoning, also called double-loop or reconstructive learning, involves the organization's members in continuously critiquing their actual behaviors against the intended behaviors. This continuous critiquing leads to the identification of any errors or mismatches between the member's intended and actual behavior (Argyris, 1997; Kovoor-Misra, 1996). Members identify errors and may correct the mismatch by changing their assumptions that led to the error. Organization members also seek to identify and correct errors within the
organization itself such as recognizing and changing certain policies, procedures or organizational assumptions that led to the error (Trahant & Burke, 1996). The organization's members may previously have viewed these kinds of changes as unnecessary (Argyris, 1997; Kovoor-Misra, 1996; Trahant & Burke, 1996).

Terry (1993) proposed an action wheel that organization members and leadership could use to help diagnose organizational problems. The action wheel challenges staff to think about a problem in different ways as they seek solutions. The action wheel could also be used by the organization's members and leadership to aid staff as they use the double-loop learning process by identifying areas within an organization where inaccurate assumptions may exist. The action wheel (Terry, 1993) contains seven features common to all human interactions: fulfillment, power, mission, meaning, existence, resources, and structure. Fulfillment represents the completed action and is where all the other actions converge. Power represents the human energy behind the mission and addresses the stakeholder's commitment for the action. Mission provides the purpose for the actions sought and controls the power. Meaning provides the justification for the action. Existence represents the environment in which the action takes place.

Terry (1993) suggested that all human actions are interrelated and a change in any one area has the potential to affect all the other human actions. For example, a change in the power of an organization could influence the structure of the organization. This change in the structure has the potential to influence resources available, and resource changes could alter the setting where the action takes place. The setting directly influences why the organization is doing the action (meaning) which provides the mission of the organization.
The mission of the organization influences the human action needed and returns us to the power aspect of the organization.

The action wheel consists of three concentric circles as shown in Figure 1. An inner circle represents fulfillment, where all actions converge. The middle circle and outer circle contain the other six human actions: power, mission, meaning, existence, resources, and structure.

To use the wheel, organization members or leaders locate what they perceive as the problem in the middle circle and follow the arrow to locate the action Terry (1993) identified as the key to strategic intervention. For example, if the organization's members identify a lack of resources, the action wheel suggests that the key to resolving the problem resides within the organizational structure. Terry (1993) suggested that problems associated with lack of organizational resources are the result of an organizational structure that does not provide the resources necessary for the organization to do what is desired. Therefore, by changing policies or procedures within the organizational structure, Terry (1993) believed that the organization could then provide the resources necessary to provide the desired actions.

**Circumstances of Organizational Change**

If organizations operated in a vacuum, using productive reasoning to identify the assumptions influencing organizational change would be easy. However, organizations operate in a much wider environment that includes many internal and external circumstances, which influence organizational change. Authors Kovoor-Misra (1996), Staniforth (1996), and Tichy (1989) vary with regard to the number of and the labels given to circumstances.
influencing organizational change. Seven circumstances of organizational change, as identified by one or more organizational change theorists, are identified and described in Table 1.

Although these categories of circumstances were selected to help clarify and understand the change process, in reality, these circumstances overlap and are sometimes
difficult to separate in specific situations (Staniforth, 1996). Effective organizations seek to find a balance between conflicting circumstances and needs. Stakeholders' interpretations regarding the circumstances, requirements, and needs are likely to vary and may be met with agreement or disagreement (Staniforth, 1996). Thus change efforts need to address the interactive and at times conflicting relationships among the circumstances.

The human and social circumstances of change include the psychological, physical, and social aspects of individuals in the organization. Examples of human and social circumstances of change include the members' beliefs, values, behaviors, skills and relationships. Legal circumstances of change represent any law or regulation impacting the organization. These circumstances can range from local zoning codes to federal tax regulations (Kovoor-Misra, 1996; Staniforth, 1996; Tichy, 1989).

Economic circumstances of change include the internal financial resources and procedures of the organization such as the budget and budget procedures as well as external financial resources such as the stock market fluctuation. The political circumstances of change include the behaviors used to achieve organizational or individual goals such as the organization's work with advocacy groups or political party support. The organization may also opt to support individual candidates who the organization feels would be positive supporters of their services and could help them with legislation that would benefit the organization.

The ethical circumstances of change include the moral values and related behaviors of individuals and the organization as a whole. Ethical circumstances may include how or why certain programs and projects have priority status. The avenues where the organizational products or services are sold or used are considered the market circumstances of change.
**Table 1. Circumstances of Organizational Change**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Circumstances</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Human and social(^a)</td>
<td>The psychological, physical, and social aspects of individuals in the organization. (e.g., individual's beliefs, values, skills, and relationships)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal(^b)</td>
<td>The governmental laws and regulations impacting the organization. (e.g., food safety regulations, welfare reform)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic(^b)</td>
<td>The internal and external financial resources and procedures of the organization. (e.g., stock market fluctuations, mandated budget allocation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political(^a)</td>
<td>The power and influence behaviors used to achieve organizational or individual goals. (e.g., advocacy groups, political party support)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical(^b)</td>
<td>The moral values and related behaviors of individuals and the organization as a whole. (e.g., client requirements for services, priority status of certain programs/projects)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Market(^b)</td>
<td>The avenues by which the organizational products or services are sold or used. (e.g., targeted clientele, product market share)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technological(^a)</td>
<td>The application and use of scientific knowledge within the organization. (e.g., computer networks, access to information)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\) Kovoor-Misra, 1996; Staniforth, 1996; Tichy, 1989  
\(^b\) Kovoor-Misra, 1996; Staniforth, 1996

These circumstances may include changes in targeted clientele and in any product or service. Technological circumstances of change represent the application and use of information and technology within the organizations. Examples include educational delivery systems and employee access to information.
Tichy (1983) used the metaphor of a rope to illustrate the interactive relationship of the circumstances of change. Tichy's schema uses three strands — political, human and social, and technical — that are interwoven to form the organizational context. Like a rope, organizations unravel when the strands are at cross-purposes, but remain strong when they work together. Change in one strand of the rope coincidentally affects the other two strands of rope and these interactions must be taken into account when planning organizational change. The goal of the organization is to keep all the interwoven strands at similar tensions and working together throughout the change process.

Kovoor-Misra (1996) concluded that organizations must be able to react to both the circumstances that precipitated a crisis or a need for change as well as the interactions with other circumstances when responding to critical events. For example, new legal regulations adopted by the federal government may call for technological changes within the organization and place strain on the economic resources. An organization's market share may decrease from potential threats of negative media coverage and consequently influence the organization's economic resources. The ethical expectations of the organization may change due to this threat and could alter the political position of the organization. Because organizations rarely have control over the external circumstances that influence change, they target areas or individuals within the organization that they can influence. The following section will identify these targets of organizational change.

**Targets of Organizational Change**

Targets of organizational change represent areas and individuals in the organization that become a focus of the change process. The organization's leadership typically has
greater influence and control over targets of change than the circumstances of change. For example, the organization's management has more control over delegating work tasks within the organization than controlling the consumer's selection of products.

Several authors (Goodstein & Burke, 1991; Kovoor-Misra, 1996; Stewart, 1989) suggest that an effective way to initiate change in an organization is to identify particular targets for the change process. Having an understanding of these targets can help an organization strategically plan and produce change.

Goodstein and Burke (1991), Kovoor-Misra (1996), Stewart (1989), and Trahant and Burke (1996) identified a variety of targets of change. Although the numbers of targets and labels vary, all the authors identified similar targets. The four targets of organizational change—individual, organizational structure, organizational leadership, and organizational culture—are summarized in Table 2 and represent a compromise between very broad and specific targets identified by these authors.

Every change initiative has its associated cost and benefits. To minimize costs in terms of lower productivity, the organizational leadership typically focuses on one target, hoping it will be the catalyst for other organizational changes (Stewart, 1989). Trahant and Burke (1996) conclude that focusing on "transformational" targets (i.e., the organization's leadership and culture) usually but not always leads to changes in the organization's structure and members. The following quotation illustrates how a transformational target can build momentum for the change process within the organization. "Dynamic leaders are effective communicators of change, and they typically build cascading sponsorships of change throughout the organizations" (Trahant & Burke, 1996, p. 46).
Individual

Individual change has been recognized as essential to organizational change (Goodstein & Burke, 1991; Kono, 1990; Stewart, 1989). Argyris (1997) identified the difficulty in realizing organizational change without seeking to change individual behavior. Theories of individual change provide information about how individuals move toward or resist change but they do not address other factors that influence the change process including organizational structure, culture, and leadership. Therefore, individual change theories are essential but not sufficient in promoting organizational change.

Preparing employees for change is a key component in an organization's change effort (Conner & Patterson, 1982). An organization's leadership generally does not "wipe the slate clean" by hiring all new employees or creating totally new programs. For successful and sustained change efforts an organization must ready current employees for the change and help employees commit to change (Conner & Patterson, 1982). Armenakis, Harris, and Mossholder (1993) defined readiness as "the cognitive precursor to the behaviors of either resistance to, or support for, change efforts" (p. 681-682). Readiness for change is reflected in an organization member's beliefs, attitudes, and understanding about the desired change.

Conner and Patterson (1982) identified that most failed change efforts are due to a lack of readiness by the organization's leadership, by individuals within the organization responsible for implementing the change, and by the individual(s) targeted for change. Stewart (1989) suggested three reasons why individuals fail or resist change efforts: they have not been informed about the desired change; they are aware of the desired change, but do not believe the organization or leadership is really serious or committed to the desired
Table 2. Targets of Organizational Change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Focus of change</th>
<th>Change strategy(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Skills, values, attitudes, and behaviors of employees.</td>
<td>Utilize selective promotion, training or termination of employees.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Structure&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Management practices, reward system, work design and communication structures.</td>
<td>Develop a new organizational structure. Change reward and communication systems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Leadership&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Mission, vision, strategies and personal style of individuals in management and leadership.</td>
<td>Change styles of management and leadership by replacing existing leaders/managers or retooling current ones.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Culture&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Unwritten rules and overt behavior patterns of the organization, including the observable artifacts, values and basic assumptions of the organization (Schein, 1990).</td>
<td>Change organizational assumptions through a process of productive reasoning.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup> identified by Kovoor-Misra, 1996; Stewart, 1989; Trahant & Burke, 1996.

<sup>b</sup> identified by Goodstein & Burke, 1991; Kovoor-Misra, 1996; Stewart, 1989; Trahant & Burke, 1996.

change; and they are aware of the desired change, but it is inconsistent with their personal views, beliefs or values.

Organizational Structure

The organization's structure typically is made up of the following systems: communication, reward, decision-making, production, and resource management (Hughes, 1990; Staniforth, 1996; Trahant & Burke, 1996). Written documents in the organization describe the organization's rules or guidelines, standard operating procedures of the
organization, and the organization's formal lines of authority. These documents represent the designated routes for communication and decision making but do not address the unwritten guidelines of the organization. For example, long-term employees know the management expects everyone to attend the annual office picnic even though employees are not required to attend the event.

Morgan (1989) identified a continuum of organizational structures. One end represents structures organized for stability, and the other end represents structures organized for flexibility and change. Structures designed for stability are typically controlled by executive management and have a hierarchical structure with rigid departmental divisions, clearly defined rules, and specific employee roles. An organizational structure designed for flexibility usually employs a small core of staff who provide direction and operational support for the organization, but contract out for most services (Morgan, 1989).

Organizational structures influence the members' readiness for and ability to change (Argyris, 1997). Organizations designed for flexibility encourage members to question assumptions and create alternative scenarios. Structures designed for stability discourage members from engaging in double-loop learning because directives are handed down from upper level administrators and these directives are to be followed. Members are not required to, nor do upper level administrators want members to, question directives.

Structures designed for stability may not be able to sustain a proposed change over a period of time (Argyris, 1990; Kovoor-Misra, 1996) because organizational members have not identified the errors or the assumptions that led to the errors and lack commitment to the change (Conner & Patterson, 1982). Argyris (1990) suggested organizational structures designed for stability can move toward becoming an organization designed for flexibility by
enhancing the members' double-loop learning process "...making previously undiscussable problems discussible..." (p. 304) and "...that embarrassment and threat are not bypassed. Rather, they are engaged and serve as the basis for productive reasoning..." (p. 304).

Rogers and Hough (1995) suggested that one's perception of the organization's structure will influence how one identifies what changes are needed and how one implements the change process. They provide five perceptual views of organizational structures. The views are not mutually exclusive; combining the views may be helpful in understanding some organizations. Each perspective assumes different core assumptions about the organizational structure and how to implement change within the structure. The perspectives and a description of each are listed in Table 3.

**Organizational Leadership**

An organization's leadership plays a significant role in organizational change (Barr & Huff, 1997; Conner & Patterson, 1982; Kono, 1990; Trahant & Burke, 1996). Typically, leaders are in the thick of change and may be unable to be calm and rational about the changes taking place (Staniforth, 1996). But when leaders overcome their own biases and recognize the need for change, they can be important change agents (Schein, 1990). Terry (1993) suggested that the tasks of leadership are not clearly distinguishable and "any one narrow view of leadership should be suspect" (Terry, 1993, p. 49). Terry (1993) purposed that the leadership of any organization must combine both traditional and provocative views of leadership. Traditional views of leadership assume that those in positions of leadership possess certain interpersonal, technical, administrative, and intellectual skills that advance the organization's productivity. Other traditional views
Table 3. Views of Organizational Structures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perspective</th>
<th>Core Assumptions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Managerial hierarchy</td>
<td>Organizations are rationally planned, goal-directed, management-controlled hierarchical structures. Decisions are considered rational and based on available information. Change initiatives begin at the top and move down through the organization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Street-level bureaucrat</td>
<td>Organizations are fragmented structures with central units dispersing power over service units. Front-line workers view the power structure of the organization as nonessential to the real work of the organization. Changes are initiated at the unit level.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational development</td>
<td>The organization is designed to address individual needs for autonomy, participation and commitment. Individual judgment is encouraged in determining the work of the organization and change is initiated at the individual level.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict and bargaining</td>
<td>Organizations are arenas of conflict over scarce resources where the bargaining process is used as a temporary solution for conflicts over organizational goals. Change is negotiated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chance and chaos</td>
<td>The organizational structure has little control over the outcomes of the organization and views success or failure as the result of uncontrollable causes. It is assumed that change will happen due to many of the circumstances of change, described earlier.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

suggest that leaders help other individuals develop leadership skills. Leaders may emerge through a process of natural selection.

The provocative views of leadership suggest leadership effectiveness depends on the leader's ability to focus on and trigger the organization's power structure to generate changes, as well as to design processes within the organization where future organizational activities
can be predicted and/or created. Leaders are expected to preserve their spiritual and moral convictions in the provocative views of leadership.

Manz, Bastien, and Hostager (1991) identified three leadership perspectives (participatory, transactional, and visionary) that are especially relevant to significant organizational change. The participatory perspective and the transactional perspective provide support for the change process, while the visionary perspective serves as the source of energy and drive for the changes the organization seeks. The perspectives and their roles in the organizational change effort are listed in Table 4. All three perspectives are necessary for sustained organizational change, and leaders must pay attention to all three when seeking organizational change.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perspective</th>
<th>Role in organizational change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visionary/artful</td>
<td>Develops an organizational vision and way to express/explain vision.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participatory</td>
<td>Develops processes that allow organizational members to engage in decisions regarding organizational changes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transactional</td>
<td>Develops processes for introducing alternative scenarios and initiating the change process.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Stace and Dunphy (1991) proposed that organizational change will best succeed if the leadership approach matches the degree of change sought and time available to make change. If the organization is seeking radical or transformative organizational change, a directive or coercive leadership may be needed. If the organization members are seeking to fine-tune or make incremental changes within the organization, then a participatory approach to
leadership is needed. A consultative or visionary approach may be appropriate for an organization which is not functioning at full capacity but has support for change efforts within the organization (Stace & Dunphy, 1991).

**Organizational Culture**

To define an organizational culture is difficult, but it is even more difficult to find agreement among researchers on ways to identify or measure an organization's culture (Bridges, 1992). Schein (1990) defined culture as

...a pattern of basic assumptions; invented, discovered or developed by a given group; as it learns to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration; that worked well enough to be considered valid and is to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems (p. 111).

An organization's culture preserves the unwritten rules and accepted norms in an environment where members have enough stability and common history to allow patterns of behavior to form. Organizational culture is created by group norm formation around critical incidents, identification with organizational leaders, and socialization of new members within the group (Schein, 1990).

The strength and the degree of internal consistency of an organizational culture depend on the stability of the group, longevity of the group, how group members acquired knowledge of the present culture, and acceptance of the cultural assumptions (Schein, 1990). A natural change process typically occurs within most organizations as new members bring new ideas and assumptions to the group (Schein, 1990). Situations that can change an
organization's culture include the following: (a) new organizational leadership; (b) a sense of crisis within the organization; (c) the adoption of different corporate philosophy; (d) the adoption of different organizational strategies (i.e., new targeted market, new products); and (e) modifications in the organizational structure (Kono, 1990).

A continuum of organizational cultures was identified by several authors and is illustrated in Figure 2 (Klein, Masi, & Weidner, 1995; Kono, 1990). Constructive or vitalized cultures value innovation, interact with other organizations, and share common goals. Information is actively collected and distributed to all members within a constructive or vitalized culture. Because the members share common goals and information is actively distributed, the members understand their role in the organization and support top leadership directives.

![Figure 2. Continuum of Organizational Cultures](image)

Stagnant or passive cultures see old patterns of behaviors repeated; employees follow rules and do not take risks. Stagnant cultures are often insensitive to changes in the environment, and employees do not generate new ideas. Leadership in this culture is autocratic and often makes poor decisions because the leaders do not consider either changing environments or other individual's opinions when making decisions. In aggressive/defensive cultures, members believe they must interact with people in ways that
will not threaten their own security. Members protect their status and security by vigorously performing tasks, usually individually, and by emphasizing their achievements to superiors.

The organization's culture is a key factor in effecting organizational change because it is the greatest barrier to change (Barr & Huff, 1997; Kono, 1990). To be viable in today's rapidly changing environment, organizations must be able to adjust the organization to meet changing realities. Barr and Huff (1997) indicated that well-developed standard operating procedures and the inability of management to appropriately interpret environmental changes promote a stagnant culture. Old patterns of behavior are reinforced and new patterns of behavior are difficult to adopt.

**Public and Private Organizations**

Circumstances of change and the targets of change exist in all organizations. However, the differing goals of public sector and private sector organizations influence how the circumstances of change and the targets of change are viewed and contested. Public organizations typically have some identifiable social or political need that the organization seeks to fill. The private organization's primary goal is to generate profits for owners and stockholders. They are primarily designed for efficiency and seek organizational change to increase efficiency. Public organizations are designed with multiple checks and balances to prevent the abuse of power of any one group or individual. The organizational change process in public sector organizations is typically slow and deliberate, weighing the interests of all stakeholders. Most public sector organizations stress the use of a neutral and nonemotive decision-making process (Battalino, Beutler & Shani, 1996).
The private sector organization often responds quickly to trends and uses subjective information and intuition. Risk-taking is often encouraged. Private sector organizations typically focus marketing on a specific audience, opting not to reach all individuals. Public sector organizations are mandated to serve broad audiences and must find ways to reach a variety of audiences. The checks and balances system of public sector organizations often creates more than one line of authority to which organization members must report. For example, many public sector organizations have boards that monitor the organization's activities. Private organizations typically have one line of authority, and if leadership is not aligned, it is eventually replaced (Battalino et al., 1996).

The definitive difference between public and private sector is that public sector organizations do not need to generate a profit to remain in business. Private sector organizations that do not generate a profit or at least break even will typically cease to exist. Public sector organizations exist in the market economy because the government or individuals recognize and fund services that may not be provided by the private sector. So public sector organizations often see their budget fluctuate as the government's budget responds to funding shifts or losses of tax revenue. The differences between public and private organizations are summarized in Table 5.

Private sector organizations must continually adapt to dynamic external circumstances of change including supply and demand, market fluctuations, and cost effectiveness (Kovoor-Misra, 1996). But Salipante and Golden-Biddle (1995) argued that public organizations should approach any potential organizational change with great caution. Other individuals (Battalino et al., 1996; Brower & Abolafia, 1995; Halachimi, 1995;
Hirokawa & Keyton, 1995) viewed organizational change in the public sector as necessary and inevitable.

Public organizations traditionally have not concerned themselves with some external circumstances such as market demand and cost effectiveness. But many now are responding to increasing external pressures such as the Government Performance and Review Act of 1993, which requires federally funded agencies to address accountability and productivity issues (Battalino et al., 1996).

Public organizations traditionally address specific issues and gain the support of certain clientele. Salipante and Golden-Biddle (1995) suggested that the public trust held by individuals programming, but there is growing skepticism within the general population.

Table 5. Differences in Public and Private Organizations*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Public Organization</th>
<th>Private Organization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Power</td>
<td>Uses multiple checks and balances</td>
<td>Depends on organizational position</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authority</td>
<td>Checks and balances create more than one line of authority</td>
<td>Uses one line of authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decisions</td>
<td>Seeks neutral, nonemotive solutions</td>
<td>Responds to trends, subjective information or intuition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision-making</td>
<td>Weighs interests of all, slow deliberate process</td>
<td>Changes relatively quickly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Input</td>
<td>Gathers extensive external input</td>
<td>Selects market direction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Market</td>
<td>Focuses on general public</td>
<td>Selects group to target</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*adapted from Battalino et al., 1996*
toward public organizations would diminish if these organizations eliminated their traditional programming, but there is growing skepticism within the general population that many traditional programs are not working (Apps & Ludewig, 1993; Battalino et al., 1996)

Literature on organizational change within the public sector mirrors the barriers to those found in the private sector. Brower and Abolafia (1995) identified the individuals within the public organization as one barrier to organizational change. Apps and Ludewig (1993) identified leadership within public organizations as a barrier to organizational change. Halachmi (1995) concluded that the public organization's culture was a barrier to organizational change.

**Summary**

This review of literature provides a brief summary of the evolution of organizational change theories. Present-day organizational change theories acknowledge that organizational change efforts are especially difficult to manage and lead because of the increasing interdependence of nations and the interdependence of individual and organizational change (Argyris, 1997). Because change is becoming more unpredictable, the linear process that only changes behaviors, may not be adequate when reacting to dynamic global changes. The double-loop learning process involves the organizations' members in continually critiquing personal and organizational assumptions that hinder the change process.

The literature review also identifies circumstances affecting organizational changes—human and social, legal, economic, political, ethical, market, and technological; and suggested possible targets—individuals, the organizational structure, the organizational
leadership, and the organizational culture – for promoting organizational change. Resistance to change differs according to the target, and each target requires different strategies and techniques (Goodstein & Burke, 1991).

The review provides a brief overview of the differences between public and private sector organizations because the study was conducted in a public organization. Although non-profit or public organizations operate under different assumptions than private for profit organization, the barriers to organizational change are similar.
CHAPTER 3. OVERVIEW OF IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY EXTENSION

The research setting is important and intricately related to understanding the data. Failure to consider the setting elements (circumstances of change) during a study may severely weaken or negate any conclusions (Berg, 1998). Therefore this chapter provides a brief history of the conception and development of the Cooperative Extension Service (CES) in Iowa and outlines the current organizational structure of Iowa State University Extension (ISUE). Also included in the chapter is a discussion of issues programming at the federal level and its influence on the Extension organization.

A review of the setting involves the researcher in a process that examines how events and their relationships influence the past, present, and future (Glass, 1989). This review of an organization's history reflects specific historical events, includes problems and remedies not free of ideology, embodies an existing structure based on past decisions, and subjects theories to more scrutiny than when looking at only short-term changes (Kieser, 1994). Cohen and March (1986) suggested that "the belief in the relevance of history, or the legitimacy of history as a basis of action, is fairly strong" (p. 215).

Any review process is subject to researcher bias because the researcher selects the events, activities, and materials for the review. To help reduce subjectivity the researcher should include a variety of information and opinions (Kieser, 1994). This review does not propose remedies for problems with the current organization, but provides a way to conceptualize and better understand the development of the Cooperative Extension Service and Iowa State University Extension.
Conception and Development of Iowa State University Extension

In 1914 the United States Congress passed the Smith-Lever Cooperative Extension Act and established a relationship between the Cooperative Extension Service (CES) in each state and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). The Act brought together federal, state, and county governments to serve the social and educational needs of the nation's isolated rural and farm population. During the early 1900s agrarian life in Iowa and other rural states was physically demanding and generated limited income. The Smith-Lever Act identified six areas of concentration for Extension: cooperative research work with the USDA, demonstration teaching, a network of county agents, marketing of agricultural products, boys' and girls' clubs featuring agriculture and home economics, and home economics instruction for farm women (Schwieder, 1993).

Although Iowa's CES was officially created by the Smith-Lever Act in 1914, Iowa's Extension Service began in 1903 when Iowa State University (ISU) agriculture professor, Perry Holden, traveled to Sioux County, Iowa and spoke to the local farmers about corn production. The trip helped establish the first experimental corn test plot. In 1906 the Iowa General Assembly appropriated funds to create a Department of Extension within the College of Agriculture at ISU, and by 1912 Iowa had its first county agent. In 1916 the first home economics demonstration agent was hired (Schwieder, 1993).

During the 1920s and 1930s the CES concentrated on efforts to increase agricultural production and aid farmers with agricultural-related concerns. Content specialists were also employed to develop programming in the areas of clothing, food, home furnishings, home management, and health. However, the home economics staff was never more than 25% of the total Iowa staff between 1918 and 1933 (Schwieder, 1993). The Extension Service also
served as a central agency for mobilizing Iowa's citizens in the World War I effort and helped farmers find workers during the labor shortage of World War II. Many of these farm workers came from urban centers (Schwieder, 1993).

The CES changed programming focus during the 1940s and 1950s. In the 1940s Extension programming efforts concentrated on aiding farmers with individual projects such as increasing crop yield and livestock management. However, in the 1950s Extension sought to increase program efforts for farm families and rural communities (Rasmussen, 1989). Programming efforts focused on these topics: efficient agriculture production practices, conservation development and use of natural resources, management of farm and home, family living, youth development, and leadership development (Schwieder, 1993). The 1958 Federal Scope Report added two concentration areas: community improvement and resource development, and public affairs.

In the 1960s Extension staff adjusted their programming to meet the demands of the "new farmer" – one with a strong business orientation and a need for technical information – by increasing the number of staff statewide (Schwieder, 1993). In 1966 twelve area offices were added to the existing network of 100 county offices that typically housed a county director who was an agriculture agent, plus a home economist and a 4-H agent. The area offices served multiple counties and provided additional support and expertise to address the farmers' growing demands for information (Schwieder, 1993).

The addition of the area offices to Iowa State University Cooperative Extension Service (ISUCES) in 1966 was part of ISU President Robert Parks plan to create an organization independent of the College of Agriculture. This reorganization brought together the four separate units (agriculture, home economics, 4-H and youth, and community
development) under one administrative head, a Dean of Extension (Schwieder, 1993).

Furthermore, the organization adopted the unit's current name, Iowa State University Extension (ISUE), to represent their independence from the College of Agriculture.

In 1969 the Iowa State University Extension Service began serving urban clientele through the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Programming (EFNEP). This program renewed Extension's historical philosophy of programming with low-income audiences (Randall, Brink & Joy, 1989). EFNEP provided low-income individuals, the elderly, and Headstart participants with nutrition education and information to help increase their self-reliance (Schwieder, 1993).

The CES continued to grow in the 1970s in both numbers of staff and program participants but the 1980s farm crisis re-directed Extension's programs in rural communities. A cut in Iowa's state budget led Extension's leadership to downsize the twelve area offices to seven, reduce staff numbers by 60 professional positions and redesign some staff positions. Displaced area staff were relocated to other area offices or county offices, and county staff began serving more than one county.

In the 1980s Extension staff began exploring new information systems to reach individuals and communities. These systems included a statewide satellite network, facsimile machines, and a computer network system linking county, area, and state offices (Abbott, Gregg, Korshing & Bultena, 1994). Exnet, the communication system linking one computer in each county office via modem to Iowa State University, became operational in May 1984 (Lee, 1987).

In 1988 ISU President Gordon Eaton commissioned a task force to review the outreach programs of ISUE (Ad hoc committee report, 1989). The study determined that
Extension was viewed as the major outreach branch of ISU and not just a function of the College of Agriculture. The task force report recommended the establishment of a position called the Associate Provost for Professional Outreach to promote university-wide communication with all the Colleges and insure adequate emphasis on outreach programming (Ad hoc committee report, 1989).

ISU President Eaton created a new cabinet level position called Vice Provost of Extension in 1989 and moved the office from Curtiss Hall (College of Agriculture) to Beardshear Hall (Central University Administration). Dr. Robert Anderson served in this position from 1990 to 1995. Dr. Nolan Hartwig served as interim Vice Provost for 13 months, prior to Dr. Stanley Johnson's appointment in September 1996 by ISU President Martin Jischke.

ISUE faced financial challenges during the 1990s. In 1992 Iowa State University Extension's budget was reduced by 12%. To reconcile the revenue loss, the number of staff was reduced and staff positions were redesigned to cover larger geographic areas.

Currently ISUE operates with a budget of 58.4 million dollars. Funding sources and percentage of funds for the 1996-1997 budget were as follows: state funds (40%), federal funds (17.5%), county funds (16.2%), grants money (14.2%), and user fees (11.6%) (ISUE Annual Report, 1997). The organizational structure of ISUE is shown in Figure 3. Current programming units include Youth and 4-H, Families, Communities, Agriculture, Engineering and Business, and Extended and Continuing Education. The matrix structure represents the interdependent nature of the system and allows the expertise of ISU to be accessed through either colleges or program areas. Currently the system retains 913 full-time equivalent positions and employs 1340 individuals. The full-time equivalent breakdown is 84.5 faculty,
Figure 3. ISUE Organizational Chart
18.0 graduate research, 392.5 professional and service positions, 154.0 merit staff, 203.5 county office assistants and program assistants, and 60.5 hourly employees (B. Bogue, personal communication, 4/15/98, from 3/31/98 personnel summary sheet).

The current ISUE mission statement reflects the organization's commitment to research-based information - When you need to make decisions that affect your family, community, business, or farm, look to Iowa State University Extension. You can rely on ISU Extension for unbiased, research-based information and education to help you make better decisions today and tomorrow (http://www.exnet.iastate.edu/general/about.html). The ISU Families Extension Unit mission also supports the use of research-based information - to help families rural and urban, young and old, large and small meet the challenges of a changing world. We reach out to families with accurate, research-based information that helps them make decisions and stand on their own" (http://www.exnet.iastate.edu/Pages/families).

The Introduction and Development of Issues Programming

One of ISUE stakeholders is the federal government, and changes in federal government regulations can impact the Extension Service at the state level (Battilino et al., 1996). One such change was the introduction of issues programming at the federal level.

During the 1980s and 1990s, Extension leaders at the federal level recognized the need to make substantial changes in Extension programming if the organization was to remain a viable and timely force in society (Anderson & Bloome, 1995). There was concern over continued federal funding when U.S. President Ronald Reagan requested a 60% cut in the CES funding in his 1986 federal budget proposal (Smith, Barbosa & Mayeske, 1990).
Demographic shifts including a continued decrease in rural and farm populations also were driving the need for change.

The CES was created to meet the needs of isolated rural and farm populations. In 1850 almost 112 million farm residents represented 50% of the U.S. population and 64% of the labor force (Rasmussen, 1989). In 1950, 25 million farm residents represented 16% of the total U.S. population, and in 1986 5.2 million farmers represented only 2.1% of the total U.S. population (Rasmussen, 1989). In Iowa the farm population and rural population has shifted from 60% in 1930 to 35% in 1990 (Goudy, Burke, Hong, Wang, Qiang & Wallize, 1996). As rural and farm populations continue to represent a smaller percentage of the population, CES may be viewed as an organization that needs less financial support because staff are working with smaller audiences (Pins, 1998).

Rapidly expanding information and technological systems have changed the need for the CES. One of the CES key resources – information – is rapidly expanding. Between 6,000 and 7,000 scientific articles are written daily, and scientific and technical information now increases 13% per year. The volume of information is doubling every five and a half years (Astroth, 1990). The CES must adopt technologies to enhance educational delivery systems so Extension will be viewed as a critical and valuable information provider at a time when individuals have greater access to information through electronic means (Astroth, 1990).

A study completed by the Futures Task Force to the Extension Committee on Organization and Policy or ECOP (1987) recommended that Extension program efforts should move away from the traditional discipline-oriented and needs approach to programming. Instead, programming should focus on the larger, most compelling issues
facing the population, and programming efforts would need to be broad-based and cross-disciplinary in nature. The term "issues programming" has been used to describe the new programming focus.

The Task Force (1987) identified eight national issues and recommended that Extension develop initiatives to address them: (a) competitiveness and profitability in American agriculture; (b) alternative agriculture opportunities; (c) conservation and management of natural resources; (d) water quality; (e) revitalizing rural America; (f) improving nutrition, diet, and health; (g) family and economic well-being; and (h) building human capital (Rasmussen, 1989). The "youth at risk" initiative was not included in the original list but was added in May 1988 (Sauer, 1990).

The report "New Directions for a New Decade" (USDA, 1989) reduced the number of initiatives from nine to five. They were: water quality; revitalizing rural America; youth at risk; improving nutrition, diet and health; and competitiveness of America agriculture. In February 1990 a sixth initiative, waste management, was added by the USDA Extension Service (Borich, 1990).

The New Directions report also officially distinguished between core programs and initiatives programs. Core or base programs are programs common to most state Extension units such as youth development, agricultural production, and nutrition education, and they represent a large majority of Extension programs (Borich, 1990). These programs are considered central to the CES mission and do not change from year to year.

The National Initiatives programs highlight specific issues of public concern. One example is the Children, Youth, and Families At Risk (CYFAR) National Initiative of 1990. The National Initiatives address complex human problems where disagreement may exist on
desired solutions and outcomes. These Initiatives emphasize interdisciplinary work, seek new partnerships with other agencies, and attempt to reach non-traditional audiences (Rasmussen, 1989). The introduction of the National Initiatives has sparked a debate among Extension staff about the organizational support needed to effectively address issue-oriented programming (Taylor-Powell & Richardson, 1990; Warner, 1993; Zoffer, Eklin & Blyth, 1994).

Of primary concern to this study is the 1990 Children, Youth, and Families At Risk (CYFAR) Initiative. The following section will briefly explain reasons for the initiative, the primary targeted audience, and ISUE Families Extension efforts.

**Children, Youth, and Families At Risk National Initiative**

In 1991 the CYFAR Initiative began funding 96 "youth at risk" projects in response to the increasing numbers of America's children living in environments where their fundamental needs of shelter, food, and care are not being met. Currently, 22% of all children under the age of 18 years live in poverty (Statistical Abstract Table of the United States, 1996). Other U.S. social concerns include a high infant morality rate, a high teen pregnancy rate, low childhood immunizations, increasing violent juvenile crimes/arrests, and a lack of basic skills of reading, language, and computation (Lerner, 1995; McCubbin, McCubbin, Thompson, Han & Allen, 1997). The CYFAR Initiative seeks to collaborate with other organizations to develop and deliver programs for at-risk audiences that promote safe, secure and healthy environments for children, positive youth development, and responsible parenting (http://www.iastate.edu/pages/families/cyfar/capacity, 1998).
The CYFAR Initiative primarily targets families who qualify for a public assistance program, whose income falls below the poverty threshold, or whose income is less than 75% of the State or county median income. Other risk factors the Initiative seeks to address include infant mortality, under-nourishment, child abuse and neglect, poor health, substance abuse, teenage pregnancy, crime, violence, and academic under achievement (http://www.iastate.edu/pages/families/cyfar/capacity, 1998).

In 1995 the USDA completed five years of "youth at risk" program funding but many of these projects are being sustained by partnerships among Extension, community, county, and state organizations. In 1994 Cooperative States Research, Education and Extension Service (CSREES) initiated State Strengthening (STST) projects to fund additional community-based projects and expand Extension statewide capacity for supporting and sustaining such programming. There are currently 40 STST projects programming in 302 communities at 427 sites. The STST projects call for collaboration across disciplines, program areas, and geographic lines as well as a holistic approach which views the individual in the context of the family and community (http://www.iastate.edu/pages/families/cyfar/capacity, 1998).

**ISUE Response to the CYFAR Initiative**

Iowa State University Extension (ISUE) seeks to blend resources and strategies to strengthen the programming efforts for the Children, Youth, and Families At Risk Initiative by combining two state-level committees. In 1993 the "Plight of Young Children" (PYC) Committee and the "Youth At Risk" (YAR) Committee became the "Children, Youth, and Families At-Risk (CYFAR) Committee." This 15 member committee includes both state and
local staff, and members promote the development and the delivery of educational programs to at-risk audiences.

Two committee members applied for a State Strengthening project grant in 1994 entitled "Strengthening Community Programs for Children, Youth, and Families Living in At-Risk Environments." The project goals were to (a) carry out a comprehensive plan for expanding statewide capacity for implementing community-based initiatives for children, youth and families; and (b) provide support for two target community projects. The grant was accepted, and funding for the ISUE State Strengthening project began in 1995. Committee members have been actively involved in developing Extension Staff workshops to expand statewide capacity and continue to support the targeted community projects. In 1997 the committee was renamed "Family Policy that Works."

Implications of Issues Programming

Some Extension leaders felt attempts to support the National Initiatives were meaningless if corresponding changes did not occur in the organization (Apps & Ludewig, 1993; Borich, 1990; 1993; Patterson, 1993, 1997, 1998; Taylor-Powell & Richardson, 1990; Warner, 1990, 1993). Changes were needed in staff attitudes and actions, programming model and delivery, management and leadership, and allocation of resources to better integrate and support issues programming. In addition, some staff felt Extension's public image would need to change in order to attract new clientele to the programs (Warner, Christenson, Dillman & Salant, 1996). The following section outlines the organizational changes that are identified in the literature and needed to effectively address the National Initiatives.
Staff Attitudes and Actions

A national needs assessment was conducted by the Search Institute and the Minnesota Extension Service to determine what Extension staff, volunteers, non-Extension youth workers, and youth understood were the keys to successful youth at-risk programming efforts (Saito, Blyth, Krueger & Walker, 1992). Three recommendations for professional development and staff training for individuals working with the Youth At-Risk Initiative emerged from the study: (a) develop a more holistic approach to youth development rather than focusing solely on programmatic issues; (b) stress the need for collaborative efforts with other agencies and organizations; and (c) base training efforts on a clear vision, a firm organizational commitment, and adequate resources to lead and back up new efforts (Blyth, Leffert, Mead, Zoffer & Walker, 1996, p. 6).

Barriers identified in the needs assessment included the following: (a) a lack of clarity and common agreement in defining "youth at risk;" (b) inconsistent support/endorsement of Youth At-Risk efforts from extension staff and constituents; (c) reservations about how to blend youth development work for youth at risk with established 4-H programs; (d) uncertainty about organizational commitment to change; (e) confusion or resistance regarding the changing roles of extension professionals working with youth; and (f) available supply of relevant learning materials (Blyth et al., 1996).

The results of another national survey found that Extension county agents were willing to provide services to at-risk audiences and appeared eager for additional training and experiences to improve their capacity to work with diverse audiences (Zoffer, Eklin & Blyth, 1994). Nevertheless, county agents identified a number of barriers hampering the expansion of activities to serve new audiences including the internal barriers of limited staff, time, and
money. The staff also viewed issues programming as a separate endeavor from the traditional 4-H club programs and thought that issues programming created additional work at a time when financial resources for youth programs were being cut (Zoffer et al., 1994). The same survey was conducted with Extension county agents in 1996 and little change had occurred since 1993. The authors noted that many changes had already taken place by 1993 in the Extension service as a result of the Youth At-Risk Initiative (Blyth et al., 1996).

Programming Model and Delivery

The dominant programming model in Extension has been the expert model (Dollman, 1993). This model is based on the following assumptions: (a) problems and objectives can be identified and put into operative or quantitative terms; (b) the defined problem can be solved by an individual with the appropriate expertise; (c) improvement will come from the implementation of solutions; and (d) Extension staff need to remain apolitical and scientific in planning programs and providing advice to clientele (Patterson, 1993).

Patterson (1993) suggested that this program planning model works well when problems are narrowly defined and there is a consensus on outcomes. But the expert programming model may not be effective when addressing the complex issues identified by the National Initiatives. Many of these issues address problems that do not have clear consensus on solutions. The primary problem-solving approach of many of the Initiative's goals involve working with other groups and agencies to help change society (Boyle, 1989). The expert model focuses on working with the individual to initiate change (Dollman, 1993). Extension staff may need to reexamine assumptions regarding competition and specialization, acknowledge differences between efficiency and effectiveness, include
multiple perspectives in the planning process (Apps & Ludewig, 1993), and address issues of neutrality (Jimmerson, 1989).

The CES prides itself on providing research-based, unbiased information. Extension staff have maintained neutrality by transferring the information generated by researchers and experts to clients who want the information, and by allowing people to make their own decisions (Jimmerson, 1989). However, the expert model uses the scientific approach to problem solving which narrowly focuses on objective problems and not broad, subjective "what-should-be" questions and problems of the National Initiatives (Jimmerson, 1989).

The effectiveness of the Extension's typical method of programming delivery (face-to-face meetings) also has been questioned (Feny & Kieman, 1989; Skinner, 1989). Ferry and Kieman (1989) conducted a survey of residents in four rural counties and found respondents expressed a strong preference for newsletters. Over 50% of the respondents indicated newsletters as the preferred method of delivery. Face-to-face meetings were the second most preferred method of program delivery (13%). Nine percent of the respondents preferred at-home program delivery.

Allocation of Resources

Funding for the Extension core programs and the National Initiatives differ. The core programs are typically funded from each state's general budget while the National Initiatives have special earmarked funding at the federal level, available through application. Some of this special funding requires state and local public and private organizations to contribute cash and in-kind resources that match or exceed the federal appropriation.
The federal government spends over one billion dollars annually on the Cooperative Extension Service (Borich, 1990) but the proportion of funding from federal sources continues to decrease in states as the federal government seeks to balance the nation's budget. In 1915, the federal government provided 41% and the states accounted for 29% of the Cooperative Extension budget. In 1988, the federal government provided 30% (the smallest percentage to date) and the states accounted for 48% of the Cooperative Extension budget (Rasmussen, 1989). This decrease of federal funding places an additional burden on state and local governments to fund the loss of federal revenue. Stagnant federal, state, and local budgets have compelled some Extension staff to pursue grant moneys as a way to increase resources for programming on the National Initiatives (personal communication with J.A. Stout, February 1998).

The possibility of shifting funds from the general state budgets to support Initiatives programming is unlikely because traditional clientele are satisfied with present programs and may be alienated by any funding shifts (Zoffer et al., 1994). A shift in funding would also limit the flexibility of funds by earmarking moneys exclusively for Initiative programming efforts (personal communication with J.A. Stout, February 1998). Since traditional clientele are satisfied with present programming, maintaining and increasing funding for Initiative programming in the future may depend upon building alliances with coalitions and non-traditional audiences (Warner, 1993).

Leadership

Patterson (1997) suggested that Extension managers have not kept pace with current management practices, changing demographics, and work force trends. Current management
practices from the human relation's perspective and quality management movement focuses on controlling the system of work instead of controlling people. These management practices nurture and benefit employee trust, loyalty, and cooperation (Patterson, 1998). Extension managers continue to direct and manipulate individual employees' work through plans of work, activity reports, target goals, performance appraisals, and merit systems (Patterson, 1997). However, Apps and Ludewig (1993) suggested current leaders may not have the skills to change management practices because their progression to their current leadership positions emphasized managing and controlling employees.

ISUE administration supported a study to identify the management culture within the organization (Broshar & Jost, 1995). The study was based on Hall's (1988) research which identified five management styles (developer, manipulator, taskmaster, comforter, and regulator) and their influence on providing an environment that encourages an employees' full potential.

The developer management style seeks to expand individual skills with performance tasks, while the manipulator management style uses compromise to deal with conflicting people and work issues. The taskmaster management style focuses only on the employees' task/work performance. The comforter management style focuses on maintaining employee's emotional satisfaction with their work. The regulator management style's goal is to meet minimum needs for both performance and people (Broshar & Jost, 1995). Hall's research identifies the developer management style as the most effective in creating an environment for developing staff competence, followed by manipulator, taskmaster, comforter and, the least effective, regulator (Broshar & Jost, 1995).
Findings indicated that 15 of 18 managers and 38 of the 55 staff identified the management style of regulator or comforter as predominant in the organization (Broshar & Jost, 1995). Leadership traits that accompany these styles include caretaking, protection, and providing for the emotional morale of the staff; they are not the most effective in developing staff capacities as identified by Hall's (1988) research.

Public Image of Extension

Although the Cooperative Extension Service offers a variety of programs, Extension continues to be viewed as an organization associated with agriculture (Warner et al., 1996). A telephone survey was administered to a random sample of 1000 individuals in 1982 and 1995. The 1995 survey showed that 45% of the U.S. population had heard of the Extension Service which represented a slight increase over the 1982 figure of 40% (Warner et al., 1996).

Respondents were asked if they knew of Extension programs in agriculture, home economics, 4-H or community development. In the 1995 survey 4-H was recognized by 69% of the respondents. Fifty percent of the respondents were aware of agriculture and home economics programs while 38% recognized community development (Warner et al., 1996). When comparing this response with figures from the 1982 and 1995 survey, awareness levels for 4-H and community development declined by 8%.

The survey also asked respondents if they or a member of their family had ever used Extension services. In both the 1995 and 1982 survey, 26% of the respondents replied they had used the service (Warner et al., 1996). The survey identified the highest rate of use was found among the farm populations of the Midwest and southern regions. Individuals using
the services typically were Caucasian, middle-aged individuals with higher education and higher income levels. Individuals least likely to use the services resided in the cities of the Northeast. Typically these individuals were minorities, young, poverty-stricken, and undereducated (Warner et al., 1996).

Summary

The Iowa State University Extension Service was created in 1903 to serve the social and educational needs of the nation's isolated rural and farm populations. ISUE has undergone structural changes, faced financial challenges, and adopted new technologies throughout the years. During this past decade, ISUE introduced issues programming through National Initiatives, which calls for significant organizational changes to achieve program objectives. Needed changes include refocusing staff attitudes and actions, adopting a new programming model, retooling management and leadership, and reallocating resources.
CHAPTER 4. METHODOLOGY

The research methodology of this study was based on the interpretive paradigm. Focus group transcripts were analyzed to identify and describe assumptions held by Iowa State University Extension (ISUE) staff and describe in what ways the assumptions held by ISUE staff support or hinder at-risk programming efforts. The chapter includes the following sections: purpose of the study, research questions, research design, philosophy of the researcher, selection of participants, data collection, data analysis, and credibility and trustworthiness.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research study is to describe and analyze Iowa State University Extension (ISUE) organization's capacity to program for at-risk audiences. I will explain the ways in which assumptions held by ISUE employees support or hinder at-risk programming efforts, describe environmental circumstances affecting ISUE, and identify possible targets for ISUE organizational change efforts. Understanding the context in which ISUE functions may provide the leadership with a basis for action to reinforce those assumptions identified as supportive and to change those assumptions that do not support at-risk programming efforts.

Research Questions

1. In what ways do the assumptions held by ISUE staff support or hinder organizational change efforts designed to enhance the quality and quantity of programming for at-risk audiences?

2. What circumstances of change influence Iowa State University Extension's ability to
program for at-risk audiences?

3. What are the possible organizational strategies that could strengthen ISUE's programming efforts with at-risk audiences?

Research Design

Rationale for the Research Design

A research approach particularly appropriate for producing descriptive and exploratory data is interpretive inquiry. Researchers use interpretive inquiry to provide a holistic description of the quality of relationships, activities, or situations (Franekel & Wallen, 1996; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The inquiry produces a rich, descriptive explanation of the setting and those individuals in the setting (Bogdan & Bilken, 1998).

Interpretative inquiry provides insights to questions by examining the social settings and the individuals who are members of these settings. It places value on the environment of the participants and searches for deeper understanding of the participant's experiences with the phenomenon (Berg, 1998).

Data collected in interpretive inquiry are words and phrases used to describe rather than the numbers used to count and measure in positivistic descriptive research. The data usually include quotations from the participants; their dialogues are used to illustrate the themes found in the focus group discussions.

The interpretive researcher focuses on the participants' experiences, attitudes, values, and assumptions in an attempt to describe these experiences. By fully describing the experiences of the participant, the researcher attempts to uncover the complexities behind a
prevailing issue (Rockhill, 1982). The process permits the researcher to listen to the participants and uncover unanticipated issues identified by the participants.

This research paradigm does not lend itself to generalization but attempts to make sense of the phenomenon (Franekel & Wallen, 1996). The researcher does not assume a predetermined hypothesis about the phenomenon, but searches for meaning and understanding of the participants' experiences within the context and setting of the phenomenon (Berg, 1998). The answers to the researcher's questions are a product of the analysis (Berg, 1998; Bodgan & Bilken, 1998).

Freimuth and Mettger (1990) suggested that the role of the researcher is to utilize research techniques that create a dialogue among the participants to see how participants define the situation, identify any dilemmas, and consider how those dilemmas can be resolved. A focus group discussion is one widely used research tool that considers the participants' interpretation of the setting (Steward & Shamdasani, 1990). Focus groups provide a synergistic atmosphere where participants' ideas are refined as they are presented, challenged, and discussed by the focus group participants (Berg, 1998; Krueger, 1994).

Focus groups were selected as the method for this study because the researcher wanted to explore the complexity of the issues by capitalizing on the richness of the participants' experiences and on the diversity of the participants' experiences with at-risk audiences and to provide a synergistic atmosphere where participants' ideas could be discussed and perhaps challenged by other focus group participants in order to give meaning to the complexities behind both recognized and "unanticipated" issues. Several public organizations have used focus groups as a method to identify organizational needs (Denning & Verschelden, 1993; Saito et al., 1992; Wheeler & Scheinost, 1994).
Philosophy of Researcher

In the interpretive inquiry process, the researcher is viewed as the instrument the data must go through; and thus, I must struggle with charges that prejudice and researcher bias are prevalent in the data collection and interpretation of data phrases (Bodgan & Bilken, 1992; Morse, 1994). To help reduce this bias, I should (a) review my own background and knowledge about the subject, (b) spend extensive time with the data, (c) acknowledge my level of experience with interpretive research, and (d) critique my influence on the situation (Berg, 1998; Bogdan & Bilken, 1998).

As I started this study, I needed to address two questions central to my choice of methodology, what are my epistemological (how do I know what I know) and ontological (what is the reality of the situation) views (Bodgan & Bilken, 1998). The empiricist paradigm relies upon an objective, reductive, scientific process for testing knowledge in the world. The ultimate goal of empirical research is to uncover "laws of nature." Although I acknowledge the contribution and prominence of the empiricist paradigm, I believe research analyzing human behaviors is more beneficially placed in the context of the culture and historical era. I believe that the empiricist paradigm has value in applications for some types of research, but I view the post empiricist paradigm as a more credible position for my identity as a researcher.

The post empiricist paradigm suggests that a researcher can only claim to "know" phenomenon from a certain position. This paradigm considers the cultural and historical context in which the event happened. The post empiricist paradigm challenges the notion that the researcher can transcend his/ her own values or conceptualize the phenomena outside
the time and place of the event. This post empiricist view emphasizes interpretation as a central feature in the research.

Because I believe that culture and history do have some significance in much of the research conducted, I question the ontological view that there is one "Truth" for all of us to find and conduct our lives. However, I accept the idea of constructed reality, that I may never fully understand the phenomenon but I may understand a partial snapshot of the situation. I must be willing to question research and seek more clarification. The following sections will describe my subjectivity, my interpretive research experience, and my possible influence on the research setting.

**Researcher Subjectivity**

My past experiences with the Iowa State University Extension Service include involvement in the youth program as an adolescent and requesting information from county agents as a home economics teacher. In 1995 I received a research assistantship with ISUE Families Extension as part of the State Strengthening Project grant. My assistantship experiences have been varied. I have had the opportunity to develop evaluation instruments, design and support various staff training activities, code data and analyze data using statistical research methodologies, and provide research support. The majority of my work time is spent on campus working with Extension staff professionals. In this assistantship, I have limited interaction with at-risk audiences. My work experiences prior to 1995 include four years of teaching in secondary school systems and eight years of administrative work in university residence hall systems. I have interacted with individuals exhibiting at-risk behaviors (e.g., substance abuse and physical abuse), but most of these university students...
would not be considered at-risk by the Children, Youth and Families At-Risk (CYFAR) Initiative definition.

Admittedly, I knew little about ISU Families Extension or the goals of Families Extension prior to my assistantship. I had not lived in Iowa for six years and knew nothing about the changes at the state or federal level. However, I supported the mission of ISUE Families Extension – to help families rural and urban, young and old, large and small meet the challenges of a changing world. We reach out to families with accurate, research-based information that helps them make decisions and stand on their own" (http://www.exnet.iastate.edu/Pages/families).

Lindblom (1959) suggested that the lack of familiarity with an organization may limit a researcher from fully understanding all the nuances of the organization, yet this same unfamiliarity enables the researcher to approach the study with fewer predisposed ideas about the organization. I was able to gain a basic knowledge about some of these ISUE nuances by asking ISUE staff and colleagues various questions. In addition, I observed the organization's actions during my three-year assistantship.

The literature review of chapter two outlines five organizational structures: managerial hierarchy, street-level bureaucracy, organizational development, conflict and bargaining, and chance and chaos (Roger & Hough, 1995). Each structure emphasizes different core assumptions about the implementation of organizational change. The models are not mutually exclusive; however, some are more useful in certain situations.

Based on my assistantship experience, I view ISUE as both a managerial hierarchy and a street-level bureaucracy. Indeed, I have witnessed the top-down management controlled hierarchical structure of ISU Extension. I sense the clear lines of authority
generated at the campus level and dispersed throughout the statewide structures. Yet, I see the Families Extension leadership setting the unit's direction, but not necessarily impacting other units' staff. In addition, my interactions and conversations with county staff suggest that these individuals view the power structure within the organization as having little impact on their work.

**Level of Experience**

As a beginning researcher, my research efforts have been fairly balanced between the interpretive and the positivistic research paradigms. I completed a class in qualitative research methods that included an interpretive project. I also completed a class in organizational strategic planning that provided a formal approach to organizational change. Previous group process activities and experiences with residence hall recruitment committees honed my interviewing skills.

**Influence on Setting**

The researcher can influence a focus group by offering opinions and substantive comments to the discussion, being too familiar with the group, or by failing to establish a non-threatening environment that allows participants to freely discuss the issue or question. (Berg, 1998; Bodgan & Bilken, 1998). Berg (1998) suggested that a researcher can limit input into the discussion by following a prepared script.

Familiarity with the focus group participants was not a concern in this study. I had never met any of the participants, with the exception of one individual whom I met in 1978 when we were both undergraduates at Iowa State University. I was concerned instead about
establishing rapport with the groups because of this unfamiliarity. In an attempt to gain rapport, I greeted each participant upon arrival for the focus group and asked if he or she had any questions about the focus group. In addition, the focus group script explained the process and allowed participants the opportunity to ask questions for clarification.

Selection of Participants

Sample

A purposive sample was selected for this study which represented the target population and possessed the information necessary for the study (Bogdan & Bilken, 1998; Franekel & Wallen, 1996). For the focus groups, a maximum variation sampling strategy was used (Patton, 1990). The sampling strategy “aims at capturing and describing the central themes or principal outcomes that cut across a great deal of participant or program variation” (Patton, 1990, p. 172). The strength of this strategy suggests that any common themes that emerge from the diverse perspectives of the participants are of particular value in describing the introduction of at-risk programming efforts.

A total of three focus groups were planned: one in eastern Iowa, one in central Iowa, and one in western Iowa. Morgan (1998) suggested that focus group size range from seven to twelve participants. Although eight ISUE staff were recruited for each focus group, a total of twenty participants participated in the focus groups. The four individuals who were recruited but did not attend cited illness as the reason for their absence.
Recruitment of Focus Group Participants

Extension staff were recruited from a list of names generated by the Children, Youth, and Families At-Risk (CYFAR) Committee. The committee members were asked to include names of both staff not directly involved in at-risk programming and staff with primary responsibility for at-risk programming. This balance was sought to provide a diversity of opinions and attitudes toward at-risk programming. No member of the CYFAR Committee was included in the sample. Due to my limited knowledge of the ISUE staff at that time, I requested aid from the state staff to help determine the listed individual roles with at-risk programming efforts.

Using the list generated by the CYFAR Committee members, I telephoned individuals and asked them to participate in a focus group. Extension staff were asked to attend the focus group in their geographical area. A recruitment script was developed and followed during the telephone conversation (see Appendix A). The recruitment script outlined the following information about the focus group: the purpose, the anticipated length, the date, the location, the time, and the confidentiality procedures. An answer sheet for potential participant's questions was also developed to maintain consistency of answers throughout the recruitment process (see Appendix B). Individuals were offered a current book on leadership as an incentive for participation in the focus group. I exhausted the list generated by the CYFAR Committee members, but recruited at least eight individuals for each focus group. Individuals cited conflicts and time constraints as reasons for not participating in a focus group.

Individuals recruited for the three focus groups included County Extension Education Directors and field specialists in the program areas of Youth, Community Development, and
Families. Male ISUE County Extension Education Directors typically represented the agriculture unit while females were the majority within the families programming unit. Focus group participants were recruited based on the idea that a balance of gender would represent both the units and provide a diversity of opinions. Individuals agreeing to participate in the focus groups were sent a follow-up letter confirming the date, time, and location of the focus group (see Appendix C).

Focus Group Composition

Table 6 illustrates each focus group composition by member's Extension position, area of specialty, and gender. The focus group participants represented a wide range of employment time with ISUE: two participants had 20 or more years of employment while six participants had been employed five years or less. The 20 participants represented a combined total of 165 years of employment with ISUE. The average length of employment was 8.25 years.

Data Collection

Focus Groups

Focus groups are prearranged interviews with well-defined goals (Steward & Shandasani, 1990). A focus group size usually includes seven to twelve individuals who are brought together to talk about a subject (Morgan, 1998). A facilitator, oftentimes the researcher, poses a series of questions or issues to the group. The natural, relaxed setting of a focus group typically produces candor, and group participants typically explore or comment to others as part of a dynamic group dialogue (Krueger, 1994). This provides a synergistic
Table 6. Focus Group Participant Descriptors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group One</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Area of Specialty</th>
<th>Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant 1</td>
<td>County Director</td>
<td>agriculture</td>
<td>male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 2</td>
<td>County Director</td>
<td>youth</td>
<td>male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 3</td>
<td>County Director</td>
<td>agriculture</td>
<td>male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 4</td>
<td>Field Specialist</td>
<td>youth</td>
<td>female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 5</td>
<td>County Director</td>
<td>families</td>
<td>female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 6</td>
<td>County Director</td>
<td>resource management</td>
<td>female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 7</td>
<td>Field Specialist</td>
<td>youth</td>
<td>male</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<tr>
<th>Group Two</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Area of Specialty</th>
<th>Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant 1</td>
<td>County Director</td>
<td>agriculture</td>
<td>male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 2</td>
<td>Field Specialist</td>
<td>families</td>
<td>female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 3</td>
<td>Field Specialist</td>
<td>families</td>
<td>female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 4</td>
<td>County Director</td>
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<td>male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 5</td>
<td>County Director</td>
<td>families</td>
<td>female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 6</td>
<td>County Director</td>
<td>agriculture</td>
<td>male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 7</td>
<td>Field Specialist</td>
<td>families</td>
<td>female</td>
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<tr>
<th>Group Three</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Area of Specialty</th>
<th>Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant 1</td>
<td>County Director</td>
<td>families</td>
<td>female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 2</td>
<td>County Director</td>
<td>agriculture</td>
<td>male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 3</td>
<td>Field Specialist</td>
<td>youth</td>
<td>male</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participant 4</td>
<td>Field Specialist</td>
<td>families</td>
<td>female</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participant 5</td>
<td>Field Specialist</td>
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<td>female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 6</td>
<td>County Director</td>
<td>families</td>
<td>female</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

atmosphere where participants may explore topics with little input from the researcher (Steward & Shamdasani, 1990).

When compared to personal interviews, focus group interviews provide the researcher with a fairly inexpensive and less time-consuming method to gather information. The researcher also has the ability to increase sample size rather easily by conducting additional
focus group interviews. An additional strength of focus group interviews is the high level of face validity. The moderator can probe for the most truthful responses, and the readers believe the comments because the quotes come from the participants (Krueger, 1988).

Focus group interviews are not without limitations. The moderator has less control when compared to an individual interview. The group interaction may also cause some individuals to be influenced by what others say, making the discussion more difficult to analyze (Krueger, 1988). I also found the group scheduling process to be very difficult because of ISUE staffs' full schedules.

**Focus Group Script Development**

A script was developed for use with the focus groups (see Appendix D) and the same script was used for all focus groups. The script contained a series of questions designed to elicit participants' perceptions and opinions about key ingredients or characteristics of successful programming with children, youth, and families living in at-risk environments, typical or potential roadblocks or barriers to successful programming, and staff development training needs, both in terms of content and process.

The initial script was developed and then shared with an Extension staff member who had considerable experience in developing and conducting focus groups. This Extension expert critiqued the script and provided suggestions to improve the focus group script. The script was revised to incorporate these suggestions. Several members of the Children, Youth, and Families At-Risk (CYFAR) committee were then asked to review the script. No CYFAR Committee member requested any revisions. These reviews of the focus group script by Extension staff helped create and establish the credibility of the focus group script.
Capacity Building Checklist

A capacity building checklist (see Appendix E) was also developed to administer during the focus group. The checklist was designed to gather individual focus group participant's response to what they viewed as important skills and capacities of staff working with at-risk programming efforts. Each focus group participant was asked to identify his or her top five choices, but not rank the choices.

The checklist development was a joint effort between the researcher and the project director. I conducted a review of literature pertaining to family support services and programs, collaboration, and empowerment, and generated a chart that identified the common themes in each article. The project director summarized the information and developed the checklist using the common themes. Areas the checklist addressed were skills needed in collaborative efforts, barriers to collaborative efforts, aspects of successful collaboration, and aspects of successful program development. Results of the checklist are listed in Table 7 and were used to analyze individual participants' perceptions of needed skills and capacities and helped establish credibility of the focus group findings. The focus group comments were compared to the capacity building checklist to see if the focus group participants' discussion was consistent with the results of the checklist. The results of the checklist reiterated what the focus group participants had discussed.

Human Subjects Approval

A description of the procedures for the focus groups and the focus group script was submitted to the Iowa State University's Human Subjects Review (see Appendix F). The committee approved the study and concluded that the rights and welfare of the human
subjects were adequately protected, that the risks to the participants were outweighed by the potential benefits and the expected value of the knowledge sought, that participant confidentiality was assured, and that informed consent was obtained by the appropriate procedures.

Implementation of the Focus Groups

A total of three focus groups were held with Extension staff in November 1995. All the focus groups were audiotaped. Each focus group lasted approximately two hours and had either six or seven participants. I served as moderator and facilitated each of the focus groups by following a prepared script. An assistant moderator attended the three focus groups, took notes, and operated the tape recorder. The same person served as the assistant moderator for all three focus groups. This additional focus group moderator had been sought to create field notes about the group's dynamics (Berg, 1998; Krueger, 1994).

During the focus group, participants and the moderator were seated around a table. The assistant moderator was seated away from the group. The microphone for the tape recorder was placed in the center of the table, while the tape recorder was located next to the assistant moderator. A representative layout of the focus group room schema is illustrated in Figure 4.

At the beginning of each focus group the moderator and assistant moderator introduced himself or herself. The moderator outlined the purpose of the focus group, explained the confidentiality procedures, and answered any questions. The moderator then asked focus group participants questions from the focus group script for approximately forty minutes. Participants were then asked to fill out a capacity building checklist (see Appendix
E) and encouraged to take a brief break (beverages and cookies were provided). After the break, participants reassembled and the moderator asked the remaining questions from the focus group script. The assistant moderator provided a summary at the conclusion of the first and second focus group. The third focus group lasted the full two hours, and time did not permit a summary. At the end of each focus group, the participants selected a book to keep in appreciation for their participation.

![Figure 4. Focus Group Layout](image)

**Original Data Sources**

All the focus group audiotapes were transcribed for analysis. ISUE contracted with an individual who transcribes audiotapes on a part-time basis. The individual typed each focus group discussion verbatim and provided the researcher with both a printed copy and a computer disk containing the focus group dialogue. The printed copies of all three focus group transcripts totaled 85 double-spaced pages. Prior to any data analysis, I removed all descriptors from the text of each focus group transcript. I typed the assistant moderator notes and field notes for later analysis. The moderator notes totaled 11 single-spaced pages, and the field notes were three double-spaced pages.
Data Analysis

Data were analyzed in two parts. The initial analysis was done in the spring of 1996 using the software package *Data Collector* (Turner & Handler, 1991). *Data Collector* allows the researcher to manage and code textual data in order to look for patterns and identify themes. This analysis included the three Extension focus group transcripts.

The initial analyses of the data involved three simultaneous activities: narrowing the data, organizing the data for analysis, and drawing conclusions. I provided the project director with a summary of the data, and the project director reviewed the summaries against her summary of the data. The assistant moderator reviewed the data summaries to check the summary's consistency with their response to the focus group discussions.

The following steps were used in the initial data analysis: (1) transcripts and field notes were read one at a time; (2) emerging themes were identified from the data; and (3) data were coded and organized by the schema: (a) key ingredients or characteristics of successful programs for children, youth, and families and staff; (b) capacities that people need to work effectively with children, youth and families in at-risk environments; (c) roadblocks or barriers to developing successful programs; (d) staff development activities that would enable Extension and community partners to offer more successful programs; (e) reactions to the term "at-risk;" and (f) Extension's public image and ways Extension could reach a broader audience.

The initial data analysis generated a preliminary report (see Appendix G) that was shared with various groups. However, the initial analysis generated additional questions about the environmental context of the ISUE organization and how the organization could increase its capacity to program for at-risk audiences. These questions included the
following: (a) How do assumptions held by ISUE staff support or hinder organizational change efforts designed to enhance the quality and quantity of programming for at-risk audiences?; (b) What circumstances of change are influencing ISUE's ability to program for at-risk audiences?; and (c) In what ways could ISUE build capacity to enhance programming efforts for at-risk audiences?

A second analysis of the focus group transcripts was conducted in the spring of 1998. The data were analyzed using Non-numerical Unstructured Data Indexing, Searching, and Theorizing (NUD*IST) (Richard & Richard, 1994), a computer program designed specifically for use with interpretive research. NUD*IST allows the researcher to manage and code textual data obtained from interviews, observations, personal correspondence, journals and other documents in order to look for patterns and identify themes. A coding schema was developed from the literature review which identified possible circumstances of change and targets of the organizational change process (see Appendix H). New codes were added as themes emerged during the analysis.

All focus group quotes that referenced individual participants, geographic area, or groups were removed prior to coding the data. The descriptors were removed to protect the confidentially of the participants. The three focus group discussions generated similar responses to the questions. The first two focus group responses were very comparable. The third focus group discussion although more philosophical, was similar to the two other group discussions.
Theoretical Framework

The focus group transcripts were coded by schema that identified the various circumstances of change and the various targets of change as identified in chapter two. This coding schema was developed after the review of literature and combined the theories of Goodstein and Burke (1991), Kovoor-Misra (1996), Staniforth (1996), Stewart (1989), Tichy (1989), and Trahant and Burke (1996). The use of multiple theories helps confirm the themes in the findings (Gall, Borg & Gall, 1996).

Trustworthiness of Data

"A fundamental concern in qualitative research revolves around the degree of confidence researchers can place in what they have seen and heard" (Franekel & Wallen, 1996, p. 461). Lincoln and Guba (1985) identified several issues helpful in addressing the trustworthiness of the qualitative research study data including the credibility of the findings, transferability of the findings, and the dependability and confirmability of the findings. I utilized the following strategies to support trustworthiness.

Credibility

Credibility ensures the accurate portrayal of the participant's words. Because interpretive research occurs in natural settings and depends on the experiences of the researcher, the credibility of a study is often problematic (Berg, 1998). The data and findings are more likely to be credible if they are acquired through long-term engagement, persistent observation, and the use of triangulation (Berg, 1998; Bogdan & Bilken, 1998). Triangulation is the "process of using multiple data collection methods, data sources,
analyses, or theories to check the validity of the findings" (Gall, et al., 1996, p. 574). The following represent various strategies I used to help establish credibility.

**Transcript Check**

To establish the credibility of the typed transcripts, I rechecked five pages of each typed transcript. I checked for accuracy by listening and following a sample of each focus group's transcript. No major inaccuracies were found. Due to the confidentiality assured participants, no attempts were made to match participant with comments.

**Member Checks**

Member checks consist of presenting the data from the focus groups to the participants of the focus groups as a way to uncover any discrepancies, errors or questions about the interpretation of the data (Gall et al., 1996). Member checks might reveal any factual errors that could be easily corrected. All focus group participants were sent a letter (see Appendix C), the preliminary report (see Appendix G), and a summary sheet (see Appendix J), and were asked to respond to any discrepancies, errors, or questions on a response sheet (see Appendix K). A possible reason no participants responded to the members check may be due to the fact that many of the participants had attended a meeting where a representative check (below) was conducted. I did not follow-up with focus group participants' lack of response because of the high quality of information generated from the representative checks.

**Representative Checks**

Representative checks are used in interpretive studies to determine if the data are typical of the situation from which they were obtained or whether there was an over reliance on obtaining data from elite informants (Gall et al., 1996). Two representative checks were
conducted using the data from the preliminary report. These representative checks included approximately 100 Families Extension staff (some of whom had participated in the focus groups) and approximately 50 Expanded Food and Nutrition Educational Programming (EFNEP) assistants.

The Families Extension check was held in April 1996, and the EFNEP check was held in May 1996. Each lasted approximately two hours. Participants were given the preliminary report (see Appendix G) and allowed time to review the information by either reading the report or reading posters displaying the information. After reviewing the information, participants were asked to respond to the following questions: (a) What is one item you found that was surprising? (b) What is one item that confirms an opinion you already held? (c) What is one item in the reports that needs further clarification? and (d) Who else needs to review this information? Results of the representative checks are included in Appendix L and confirmed the focus group participants' thoughts regarding at-risk programming efforts. The results of representative checks suggested that the focus group findings provided an accurate interpretation of ISUE staff thoughts about at-risk programming efforts and reaffirmed the interpretation of the focus group participants' dialogue.

Although a third representative check was planned for some members of the ISUE administrative team, the group encountered an unanticipated event, and our time with the group was limited. The preliminary report information was shared, but time did not allow for feedback from the questions. Members of the administrative team were invited to contact the researcher if they had any questions about the report or if they wanted to have further dialogue about the study.
Results of Capacity Building Checklist

The capacity building checklist tallies were used to help establish credibility by comparing the tallies to the focus group discussion. The items selected on the checklist were similar to the focus group interpretation. Because the checklist was completed during the focus group, the results could have been influenced by prior discussion or influenced the conclusion of the focus group discussion. Nonetheless, it does become one of the items that helps confirm the accuracy of representing the focus group participants' discussion.

The tallies from all 20 focus group participants' checklists were recorded and tabulated. The maximum number of tallies any one response could receive was 20 – the total number of focus group participants. The top seven responses and number of tallies each received are reported in Table 7.

Peer Debriefing

The use of peer debriefers encourages the researcher to keep personal biases and perceptions in check (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). I used peer debriefers to help evaluate the focus group questions prior to conducting the focus groups, to offer suggestions on the steps used in the study, to review findings, and to check out the theoretical framework proposed by the researcher. The research team included the project directors, the assistant moderator, project staff, CYFAR committee members, and major professors. The assistant moderator and second coder served as peer debriefers (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).
Table 7. Results of Capacity Building Factors Checklist*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tally</th>
<th>Item from Checklist</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Moves beyond networking or sharing information with other agencies and organizations to create a shared vision and mission for children, youth and families in their communities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Engages youth, parents and other community members in assessing community problems and finding meaningful solutions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Has a clear, long-term commitment to supporting children, youth and families living in at-risk environments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Accommodates different learning styles in educational programs for youth and adults.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Understands the differences between an expert and empowerment approach to education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Acknowledges and values the diversity of family life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Believes learners have a great deal to contribute and highlights their strengths and promotes the exchange of ideas.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*These are the top seven items, not all that could be considered.

Transferability

Transferability refers to whether the study would be applicable in another situation. Although external validity is not a goal of interpretive research, the researcher assists the transferability of an interpretive study by providing a "thick description" so the reader will have a sufficient base of information to determine if the findings are applicable in his or her particular situation (Gertz, 1973). Chapter three can help the reader understand the current
environment of ISUE, and help the reader determine if the findings are applicable to his or her situation.

**Dependability and Confirmability**

Readers of interpretive research want to be confident that the process of inquiry was consistent, ethically sound, and the findings are logical and grounded in the data. Readers also want to be satisfied that the participants in the study found the data an accurate representation of the phenomenon (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The dependability of the study implies that the findings would be the same if the study were repeated. The confirmability of a study shows that the inquiry was a function of the participants and environment of the study, and not the biases and interest of the researcher. I used a combination of strategies to establish the dependability and confirmability of the study. An audit trail that includes raw data (including field notes and tapes), transcriptions of tapes, coding transcriptions, and systematic use of transcripts or documents is available. I also used a second rater in the coding of the data (Bogdan & Bilken, 1998).

**Inter-Rater Reliability**

For this research study, consistent coding conclusions were determined by using inter-rater reliability. A reliability coefficient is obtained by summing the number of agreements where both raters assigned the same code, dividing that sum by the total number of possible agreements and multiplying the results by 100 (Linn & Gronlund, 1995). Agreements were considered to occur when coders assigned the same code or codes to a response. Disagreements were considered to occur when coders assigned different codes to a response. When disagreements occurred, the differences could be negotiated. A reliability of
at least 0.70 to 0.80 should be achieved to ensure inter-rater reliability. For this study, an inter-rater reliability of 0.78 was achieved between the other coder and myself.

**Summary**

The purpose of this chapter was to outline the procedures used in developing the focus groups script, recruiting of the focus group participants, collecting and analyzing data. The chapter also addressed procedures used to increase the trustworthiness/triangulation of the data and the capacity of the researcher as an instrument.
CHAPTER 5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The primary goal of this study was to explore the individual and organizational assumptions that contribute to or inhibit Iowa State University Extension's (ISUE) work with at-risk audiences. Additional goals of the study were to examine the circumstances of change affecting ISUE's capacity to program for at-risk audiences and describe possible organizational change strategies that could strengthen ISUE's at-risk programming efforts.

Chapter five will identify and explore the assumptions that ISUE staff hold and how these assumptions support or hinder ISUE programming efforts for at-risk audiences. The discussion will include focus group participants' quotes which appear in italic typeface. This discussion will also include possible circumstances of change that may influence each assumption and identify possible organizational change strategies that could change the assumption and strengthen ISUE programming efforts with at-risk audiences.

The chapter will continue with a summary of circumstances of change that influence ISUE work with at-risk audiences as identified in the first section of the chapter. This section will report the circumstances of change under the seven categories: human and social, legal, economic, political, ethical, market, and technological as identified in chapter two (Kovoor-Misra 1996; Staniforth 1996; Tichy, 1989). Although the various circumstances of change followed one of the assumptions, many of the circumstances influenced several of the assumptions. I have listed the circumstances of change under the assumption that most closely reflected the participant's quotes regarding the assumption; however, some of the discussions do overlap. The chapter will conclude with a summary of the possible organizational change strategies that could strengthen ISUE programming efforts with at-risk audiences. This section will discuss the organizational change strategies under the targets of
change – individual, organizational structure, organizational leadership and organizational culture – as identified in chapter two (Goodstein & Burke, 1991; Kovoor-Misra, 1996; Stewart, 1989; Trahant & Burke, 1996).

Research Question 1: In what ways do the assumptions held by ISUE staff support or hinder organizational change efforts designed to enhance the quality and quantity of programming for at-risk audiences?

Organizational assumptions are habits of thought that are so embedded in the members of the organization and within the organizational culture that usually they are not questioned. Lindblom (1997) recognized that deep-seated assumptions are fundamental barriers to change. Argyris (1997) concluded that the organization's members must use the productive reasoning process to question the correctness of individual and organizational assumptions. By using the productive reasoning process, ISUE staff can recognize and change policies, procedures, or organizational norms that inhibit the organization from providing at-risk programs (Trahant & Burke, 1996). As stated earlier, an organization that only changes behaviors but not the underlying assumptions that support the old behaviors cannot sustain the new behaviors over a period of time (Argyris, 1997). Thus ISUE will need to identify and change organizational assumptions that limit at-risk programming efforts if staff hope to sustain these programming efforts over a period of time.

Assumptions are so deeply ingrained in the organization that it is difficult to identify them. The assumptions identified in this study emerged after a detailed analysis of the focus group transcripts and represent the predominant sentiment of focus group members' beliefs about the ISUE organization, at-risk audiences, and at-risk programming efforts. All the
assumptions appeared to hinder Extension staff work with at-risk audiences and appeared to limit the organization's ability to change. However, the negative spin of the assumptions could be the result of the way the questions were posed to the focus group participants. The focus group questions concentrated on identifying the barriers to at-risk programming efforts and not on describing the assets ISUE has available to provide programs for at-risk audiences. The following section will identify the six assumptions that emerged from the data analysis and discuss each assumption in regard to ISUE's at-risk programming efforts.

Assumption One: A lack of clarity about the meaning of the term "at-risk" offers Extension staff a justification not to provide at-risk programming.

The National CYFAR Initiative defined the primary "at-risk" audience as families who qualify for a public assistance program, whose income is below the federal poverty threshold, or whose income is less than 75% of the state or county median income (Rasmussen, 1989). The focus group participants lacked a clear understanding of the targeted audience for the CYFAR Initiative and were perplexed about the use of the term "at-risk."

*Each one of us around the table, who are our colleagues, have a different definition what it means if you're at-risk, then how can we focus on programming with at-risk if there's not one very concise, easy to remember definition...*

*I'm not sure if I have a clear picture of the audience.*

*I really have a hard time defining people that way [at risk]. And I'm going to be open and upfront about that. I have a hard time categorizing people.*

*Is someone receiving food stamps automatically assumed to be a family at-risk? By definition – yes.*
It might be a whole long list [risk factors], and it's not just one, it's usually a compilation of those kinds of things...

...maybe the term "at-risk." It's so broad. You can interpret that however you want.

People in high financial brackets also are lacking some kind of resources.

This lack of understanding of the term "at-risk" raised doubts about ISUE staff knowledge of the Initiative's targeted audience. Although the CYFAR Initiative has clearly defined the primary audience to federal and state administrations, focus group participants may not have been aware or were uncertain and confused about the "at-risk" definition.

This lack of clarity regarding the term "at-risk" by ISUE staff is not atypical of Extension staff across the nation. A national needs assessment conducted by the Search Institute and the Minnesota Extension Service identified one barrier in developing successful youth at-risk programs as the lack of clarity and common agreement in defining "youth at risk" (Saito, Blyth, Krueger & Walker, 1992). This prior Extension Initiative, "Youth-At-Risk," focused primarily on youth development, while the CYFAR Initiative also included children and families as targeted audiences. The inclusion of additional audiences does not appear to have helped ISUE staff understand or clarify the term "at-risk" or define the targeted audience.

Similar responses to the term "at-risk" were identified by the ISUE Families Extension representative check done in April 1996. The preliminary findings from the focus groups (see Appendix H) were presented to 100 Extension staff who were asked to respond to the question, "What is one item that confirms an opinion you already held?" One theme that emerged from responses to the question was a sense of confusion and uncertainty regarding the term "at-risk."
However, comments from the focus group participants suggested that some staff thought that the lack of a clear, concise definition provided a justification to limit programs for at-risk audiences until the term is clearly defined. The last three focus group statements suggested that some staff have used this lack of clarity to adopt their own definition of at-risk or to continue programs for groups not included in the Initiative's at-risk definition.

Some focus group participants gave their own definitions of the term "at-risk" suggesting that they were not comfortable or not aware of the Initiative's definition.

*You have to be careful or you have to define what you mean by resources.*

*Well, I think another thing we have to make sure is that people understand and separate that at-risk is not a resource issue.*

*So I guess to me, risk is a relationship. It's a relationship of the person to their environment.*

Other focus group participants identified specific audiences that they thought needed to be included in "at-risk" programming efforts.

*And we kind of talk about at-risk, everybody's mind jumps to the poor, and the lower resource individuals. ...we're seeing more and more where middle and upper income kids experimenting with violent behaviors ... and it's simply out of boredom and not sense of belonging and those other issues that go with it too.*

*I would offer, also, that a child from a relatively stable family that is, that has suitable income to meet and then some, and doesn't have a lot of the commonly held indicators of risk, that child in that family, if he or she is watching an average of seven hours a day of television that child is very highly at-risk.*

In these quotations focus group participants suggested that at-risk programming efforts need to include children who are experimenting with violent behaviors and children who spend large blocks of time watching television. Although these children may not meet the economic criteria outlined by the Initiative, some focus group participants believed that these children and youth should be included when planning at-risk programs.
Participants may have offered alternative definitions for the term "at-risk" and identified additional audiences for at-risk programs because they were not aware of the Initiative's definition. Alternatively, some participants may have been clear about the Initiative's definition but wanted a broader definition. Stewart (1989) concluded that a reason organizational change efforts fail is because the organization's members believe the desired change is inconsistent with their personal views, beliefs, or values. In this case, some focus group members' definitions of the term "at-risk" were broader than the CYFAR Initiative definition of "at-risk."

The focus group comments, the representative check responses, and the 1992 national assessment by Saito et al. (1992) reflected employee confusion regarding the term "at-risk" and a lack of awareness of the desired changes the CYFAR Initiative seeks to address. Readiness for change, the cognitive predecessor to behaviors of either resistance to, or support for, change efforts was reflected in the organization members' beliefs, attitudes, and understanding of the desired change (Armenakis et al., 1993).

This confusion over the CYFAR Initiative targeted audience threatens organizational change efforts to serve at-risk audiences (Stewart, 1989) and suggests that some ISUE staff may not be ready to engage in at-risk programming efforts. To successfully sustain change efforts, ISU Extension will need to prepare current employees for change and help staff commit to change (Argyris, 1997). Failure to challenge and change this assumption would allow ISUE staff to continue using the perceived lack of a clear definition for the targeted audience as an excuse not to provide at-risk programs.
Circumstances of Change Influencing Assumption One

The human and social circumstances of change include psychological, physical, and social aspects of individuals within the organization (Kovoor-Misra 1996; Staniforth 1996; Tichy, 1989). Examples of human and social circumstances include the staff's current skill level, attitudes, behaviors, beliefs, values, and relationships. The participants' experiences with at-risk audiences and length of employment with ISUE are two possible circumstances that may have influenced ISUE staff lack of clarity regarding the term at-risk.

Participants' Experiences with At-Risk Audiences

Participants whose primary job responsibilities did not include at-risk programming efforts identified several past experiences with at-risk audiences. Three participants reported prior elementary or secondary school teaching and coaching experiences. Other participants identified past work responsibilities and volunteer experiences including work with third world countries, religious organizations, youth development programs, and a child abuse prevention team.

Individuals whose primary work responsibilities included efforts with at-risk audiences listed many work-related experiences. Some participants had extensive responsibilities with the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program. Another individual was currently teaching family education programs and helped design the National At-Risk Internet web site. One individual reviewed Children, Youth, and Families At-Risk (CYFAR) grants. Some participants reported collaborative programming efforts with other agencies such as juvenile justice, local school systems, and urban family resource centers. Other participants provided current youth programs addressing violence prevention, teenage
parenting, youth and stress, and career education. Two participants coordinated summer camps for at-risk youth.

The focus group participants had a wide range of experiences with at-risk programming efforts. Most participants whose Extension positions did not include at-risk programming identified past experiences with at-risk audiences. Extension staff who worked with at-risk audiences reported a wide variety of programming activities including several inter-agency collaborations.

Many of the at-risk experiences identified by the focus groups participants would be considered focused at the targeted CYFAR audience, but others would not be fall under the CYFAR "at-risk" definition. The participants did not make this distinction, possibly because they are unsure of the current at-risk definition. The prevailing at-risk definition used by Extension in the early 1990s suggested that everyone was to some degree at-risk. The CYFAR Initiative has narrowed the all inclusive at-risk definition and sought to address specific at-risk characteristics.

Length of Employment with ISUE

The focus group participants' average length of employment was 8.25 years, a long enough length of employment for many of the participants to be aware of early 1990s definition of at-risk. This fact somewhat explains the finding that many of the participants continue to accept the definition that everyone was at some degree of risk. Some of the focus group participants may not be familiar with or have not adopted the narrowed definition used by the CYFAR Initiative. These ISUE staff may need to redefine their professional definition of at-risk. Hopefully the focus groups provided dialogues that will help staff begin
to understand the new definition and begin to change their thinking about the definition of at-risk.

**Possible Organizational Change Strategies for Assumption One**

The lack of clarity surrounding the term "at-risk" suggests that the communication system within ISUE Extension has had limited success in transmitting the Initiative's definition of "at-risk." The organization's communication system includes the transmission of both written and verbal information to the organization's members, key stakeholders, and the general public.

Focus group participants suggested that ISUE will need to clarify the at-risk audience to staff so they can understand and support the desired change within the organization.

... maybe the term "at-risk." It's so broad. You can interpret that however you want.

Each one of us around the table, who are our colleagues, have a different definition what it means if you're at-risk, then how can we focus on programming and with at-risk if there's not one very concise, easy to remember definition...

It's clearly defined in terms of administration. I think there is. there is the talk. I don't know what the support is. But I don't know that the people who are our leaders locally are necessary supportive of it.

Staff positions have changes. Territories continue to change... see Extension staff being very fluid, not staying in the same county for 20 years. I think it reduces our credibility and our contacts.

Extension nationwide is riding a wave of trying to meet, identify the needs of high risk children, youth, and families and communities... so organizationally administration cannot ignore children, youth, and families at-risk.

I'm not sure that I think this so-called at-risk programming is kind of a self-selecting process.
The National CYFAR Initiative has clearly defined the "at-risk" audience but these quotes suggested that some ISUE staff continue to be unclear about the targeted audiences and their role in the Initiative. The last comment implied that some state level administrators may be unclear about their required response to the National Initiative.

This comment is particularly troubling when staff consider that issues programming was introduced as a way for Extension to remain a viable and timely force in society (Anderson & Bloome, 1995). If state level administrators do not meet the CYFAR goals, ISUE could find itself in the unenviable position of defending its inability to meet the CYFAR goals to their Federal partners. Currently the Federal government has earmarked special funds for at-risk programming efforts but Extension intends to incorporate issues programs into Extension core programs. States that do not provide positive responses to CYFAR efforts may limit their probability of securing future funding allocated for at-risk programs and possibly other programs.

The statements also suggested that local leaders may have limited knowledge about the CYFAR Initiative and may not support programming efforts because they are unclear or uncertain about the Initiative's goals. This lack of communication between state and county levels may result from some state staff uncertainty about their role with at-risk programming efforts, or may be the result of continued staff turnover and changing roles. Local leaders might be unsure about which county staff person to contact regarding their role with the Initiative. Local leaders may lack this information because state level and/or county level staff do not view at-risk programming efforts as a county priority and have not informed local leaders about this Initiative. The last quote certainly suggests that some supervisors have not required ISUE staff to provide at-risk programming efforts.
At-risk programming efforts will not increase if the information needed to inform staff about the proposed changes is not distributed to all ISUE staff and stakeholders. Stewart (1989) suggested that lack of information about the desired change is one reason an organizational change effort fails. ISUE will need to educate staff and stakeholders about their roles in at-risk programming efforts, if they want to increase the quality and quantity of programs. There is no guarantee that all county staff or local leaders will be supportive of at-risk programming efforts but ISUE must realize that these individuals must at least know about the desired changes before they choose to either support or not support these efforts.

Assumption Two: At-risk populations cannot help Extension staff gain political or monetary support for their program.

Focus group participant statements suggested that at-risk audiences lack the resources and motivation to support ISUE through political advocacy or by providing monetary support to aid the organization. In the following focus group comments, participants suggested that at-risk audiences lack political power and do not support the political process because they do not vote.

*Extension is becoming an increasing political organization. For its very survival Extension is more political savvy and active. And yet the programming to children, youth, families, and communities at-risk is giving resources to the least politically powerful among all of our constituents. It's on the scale of political power; the folks that I think we're talking about here today are politically powerless as any in the country. And yet, Extension cannot use this work with children, youth and families at-risk for political gain.*

*What I heard too, is my participants don't vote. So why work with people who can't, who are not going to vote to pass the referendum?*

*We need to work with people who are going to vote, like the master gardeners.*
These focus group quotations raise questions regarding individual staff commitment and support for at-risk programming efforts. The comments suggest that some ISUE staff question using ISUE resources for individuals who may not be able to help the organization gain political advantage. Stewart (1989) suggested that some organizational changes fail, not because the members lack knowledge about the change, but because the change is not consistent with their personal views, beliefs or values. Thus some ISUE staff may continue to lack commitment or support for at-risk programming efforts until their personal beliefs about at-risk programming efforts are challenged and changed.

The assumption suggests that ISUE could increase its capacity and understanding of at-risk audiences if some individuals within the organization change their attitudes and understanding about at-risk audiences. Some staff seemed reluctant to explore the possibility that ISUE resources should be used to help individuals perceived as unable to help the organization advance. However, this notion is in keeping with the original mission of the Extension service. Iowa State University Extension Service was founded in the early 1900s to serve the social and educational needs of the nation's isolated rural and farm population (Schwieder, 1993). This population was viewed as lacking knowledge, skills, and income to advance in society, characteristics similar to the current at-risk audiences.

Although the federal government spends over 800 million dollars annually on the Cooperative Extension Service (http://soloman.reusda.gov/80/new/whatnew0322t.htm) one may challenge the assumption that ISUE holds vast political support because of the 1986 federal budget proposal that requested a 60% cut in federal funding (Smith, Barbosa & Mayeske, 1990).
In a national survey, Warner et al. (1996) showed that only 45% of the U.S. population had heard of the Extension Services and of that 45%, only one-fourth had ever used any of the Extension programs. The survey found that individuals who were most likely to use the service were the farm populations in the Midwest and South. These individuals typically were Caucasian, middle-aged individuals, who had more education and higher income levels than the average population. Warner et al. (1996) suggested that future support of the Extension service might need to come from nontraditional audiences – low income, minority, and less educated audiences – because Extension's traditional audience continues to decrease. In Iowa, the farm and rural population has shifted from 60% of the total population in 1930 to 35% of the total population in 1990 (Pins, 1998).

It can be inferred for this assumption that the current Extension culture prefers to provide services to individuals who support and sustain the organization's activities. ISUE is a public organization and public organizations are mandated to serve all populations, including groups that are perceived to lack political power (Battalino et al., 1996). ISUE serves the general public, and thus staff may need to become reacquainted with Extension's historic mission of bring education to the disenfranchised. Staff may also need to participate in training opportunities that change perceptions and philosophies about working with diverse groups, including at-risk audiences. If ISUE does not challenge and change this assumption, the organization has the potential to see a decrease in financial and political support because the public continues to view ISUE as providing services to a shrinking clientele. Rural and farm populations continue to decrease, and the public may begin to question the need for Extension services.
Circumstances of Change Influencing Assumption Two

Staff attitudes and beliefs about at-risk audiences and staff commitment to at-risk programming efforts are some of the human and social circumstances of change that influence assumption two. In addition, a perceived lack of skills by some staff may limit some staff from feeling confident or prepared to work with at-risk audiences,

Staff Attitudes

Focus group participants suggested ISUE staff should review their own attitudes toward at-risk audiences to uncover any biases that could influence their ability to work with at-risk groups.

*I think we have to look at our own attitude ... Not deficit families rather than looking at them as a whole.*

*And they see them as real deficit families rather than looking that they might have some pluses.*

The focus group discussions revealed that some staff view at-risk audiences as families that are very needy and not families that might have positive attributes. These statements suggest that staff who focus solely on the perceived needs of at-risk audiences have an incomplete understanding of the audience. If staff adopt a deficit attitude toward at-risk audiences it could limit their work by not using individual or family assets to help resolve problems. By acknowledging individual or family assets, staff gain a greater understanding of at-risk audiences and thus could potentially provide more effective solutions to address problems.

The focus group discussion also reveals additional perceptions held by ISUE staff about at-risk audiences. The following focus group statements illustrate participants' and
Other individuals' beliefs about the at-risk audiences' educational level, parenting skills, lifestyle, emotional status, and need for Extension Services.

...she went to present a program to a group of limited resource families. And when she got there, she realized that these people had college degrees, so I think, assuming that people of limited resource are illiterate is probably not a good idea.

...limited resource families and parents are not the only ones that abuse their kids, or neglect. They're not the dirtiest people in the world. My joke is when rich folk's house is dirty, that person is eccentric. But when that person is a limited resource family, then she, that person, is just filthy.

...I find people in at-risk environments extremely [sensitive], they got antennas two-mile long on this thing [issue of power] and their antenna is extremely sensitive.

So you've got to keep in touch in your mind what is a client's social feeling, respond to it. And therefore, you're going to have to do a lot of individual work.

I hear a lot of people say "I don't have the time to work with at-risk, because they require so much one-on-one kind of interaction." I don't see it. It's what I've heard.

When these basic needs are satisfied, the client has time to get our materials and try to improve their life.

These stereotypes held by ISUE staff and others suggest that some staff might not think at-risk audiences could aid ISUE as an organization or have the time to help ISUE efforts. Any of these stereotypes would find staff treating at-risk audiences differently than their traditional audiences because the staff perceive that at-risk audiences are not at all similar to their traditional audiences. Individuals who believe these characteristics define all at-risk audiences will design programs and interact with at-risk audiences based on these stereotypes. In reality, the two audiences may be very similar in many areas, and none of these stereotypes may reflect the potential at-risk audiences.
Staff Commitment to At-Risk Programming Efforts

Some focus group participants questioned staff commitment toward at-risk programming efforts, their desire to program with at-risk audiences, and the resulting success of programs that were provided by non-committed staff.

And if you have some, a staff person who is just doing it kind of because they were told to do it, versus that they have the compassion, or the passion to work with the audience, it doesn't work. They have to be a caring person about what they are doing. And I don't know how you put that in a job description, ... I've had it work both ways where I've had people that really cared and it went places, and when they went, yes, they did the job. They did the thing that needed to be done, but the care wasn't there.

Because if they're non-receptive they're going to do a poor job of it, anyway, and they may do more harm that they do good.

I have to have the commitment; I also have to have the time to do it.

The first three comments suggested that the quality of at-risk programming efforts depend on the person's compassion to work with at-risk audiences. ISUE staff who do not desire but are required to work with at-risk audiences may have limited success when compared to staff who want to work with at-risk audiences. The last quote indicates that staff must have both the commitment and time to work with at-risk audiences. This statement implies that the staff's current workload does not allow time for work with at-risk audiences.

Staff that do not want to work with at-risk audiences or feel they do not have the time to work with at-risk audiences could undermine the ISUE's at-risk programming efforts by providing poor quality programs. At-risk audiences may opt not to attend these insufficient programs and ISUE would not attain its goal to increase the quality and quantity of at-risk programming efforts.
Staff Skills

Focus group participants suggested that for individuals to work effectively with at-risk audiences additional skills would need to be developed or honed and that staff would need to possess the following characteristics: trustworthiness, flexibility, dedication, a nonjudgmental attitude, caring, and be empathic, and not intimidating in appearance and language.

Confidentiality. They have to have that trust, the client has to have that trust with either the volunteer or paid staff that they can talk to them. They can communicate with them and it won’t go any further. That’s real important.

So if you’re not flexible and open to the possibility of hearing things you didn’t expect when you started asking questions and if you don’t have an understanding of why diversity is valuable, then you’re less likely to succeed.

A mindset. It goes back to the very first question ... about they [staff] need to be nonjudgmental ... and willing to try new things. Not be confined to a box. Willing to think outside the box.

I think they have to have an understanding of the at-risk situation. What it's like to be on, on the other side of the fence.

And I think that as staff going in ... kinda learn and figure out what it is and how you assess what you’re going to do and that type of thing. So I think there's a real knack for doing some of that.

...no matter how many times they've done it [program], those people would never know. And I guess that's a personal buy in of that person.

It just seems to me that such dedicated people that they are what really makes it work, you know, that they care. They really care about the people.

Another thing I think, in addition to caring is that the people that are working with those families need to come in at a level not above those families. And what I mean by that is not only by the way they dress, but also by their language and how they speak to people.

Focus group participants easily identified many characteristics that they thought individuals working with at-risk audiences should demonstrate. These characteristics, in
reality, are ones that most employers would like all staff members to exhibit. However, staff could easily feel overwhelmed as they review this list of characteristics and think they do not have the capacities needed to work with at-risk audiences. Also, some focus group participants expressed how difficult it is for individuals to change their stereotypes about at-risk audiences.

The family and children get a reputation that's really hard for the people, the public, or in general or specific people to change their thinking about this family.

...hearing the group talk about the kind of skills and the type of empathy, and type of understanding, and the getting out of other roles that we play and switch those hats, from my perspective, is one of the farthest reaches that I'd have to get out... and I can't.

Although the first quotation does not directly state that ISUE staff have difficulty changing their thinking about an at-risk family, the statement implies that everyone has difficulty changing their perceptions about at-risk audiences. Change is not an easy process, and the second quotation is one focus group member's response to what he/she viewed as an impossible task of switching roles and learning new skills needed to work with at-risk audiences.

After focus group participants discussed their views on the skills needed to successfully work with at-risk audiences, this individual shared a personal reaction. The participant was overwhelmed by what he/she saw as skills needed to work with at-risk audiences and questioned his/her ability to learn these new skills. This second quotation illustrates a participant engaging in the productive reasoning process during the focus group discussion.
Staff who feel they do not have adequate training or knowledge may seek to limit interaction with at-risk audiences. Armenakis, Harris, and Mossholder (1993) identified lack of employee readiness for a change as a reason some organizational change efforts fail.

Possible Organizational Change Strategies for Assumption Two

In the prior section, focus group participants suggested that for ISUE staff to work effectively with at-risk audiences, individual skills and attitudes may need to be developed or honed. These characteristics included trustworthiness, flexibility, dedication to at-risk audiences, a nonjudgmental attitude, empathy for the audience, and a not intimidating. Although some of these items are difficult to teach, ISUE could provide workshops that help staff develop some of these skills and educate the staff about at-risk audiences.

Focus group participants recommended a variety of training topics that could help ISUE staff work with at-risk audiences.

*I guess, when we talked about collaborating and establishing community links...we have to get away from the "staff only" lingo and the "staff only" mindset.*

...we talked about this being a collaborative effort...we gotta work with other people.

*I think they have to have an understanding of the at-risk situation. What it's like to be on, on the other side of the fence.*

...there seems to be some opinion that personal experience is valuable as far as how to relate to and communicate with other people. A willingness and maybe, in some instances, a commitment or the organizational commitment to allow people to invest time and energy in certain areas of programming.

*Intercultural communication.*

Participants were also asked on the capacity building checklist to mark the ten items they thought were important when working with at-risk audiences (results in Appendix F).
Items on the checklist that identified staff skills and abilities included the following: (a) move beyond networking or sharing information with other agencies; (b) engage youth, parents and other community members in assessing community problems; (c) accommodate different learning styles in educational programs for youth and adults; (d) understand the difference between the an expert and an empowerment approach to education; (e) acknowledge and value the diversity of family life; and (f) believe the learners have a great deal to contribute.

The participants' comments as well as the results from the building capacity checklist suggest that ISUE staff need additional information about at-risk populations, more opportunities to work with diverse audiences, and more knowledge about collaborative efforts and training to build collaborative skills. Comments from the representative checks with EFNEP and Families Extension also imply that Extension staff might lack an understanding of the at-risk population and the issue of diversity. General themes from these checks suggest that the current Extension staff lacked understanding and respect for other cultures, and knowledge about at-risk audiences and confirm the need for diversity training. The Blyth et al. (1996) survey of county Extension staff in 1993 and 1996 found an increase in staff members who felt they knew how to reach diverse audiences. Perhaps this increase can be attributed to a variety of workshops on the issue of diversity that helped staff better understand this issue. Also, Stewart (1989) concluded that an increased understanding of the desired organizational changes among the members increase the likelihood of successful organizational change. This suggests that as increasing numbers of ISUE staff understand the desire to increase at-risk programming efforts, the chances of successful organizational change will increase.
ISUE can promote individual change efforts by providing information and training that helps staff understand the proposed changes and by providing an environment that supports change effort. However, some staff may be unwilling or unable to incorporate the desired changes into their work. Some staff may choose to leave the organization, or ISUE administration may need to terminate staff who do not incorporate the desired changes into their work. ISUE can challenge and change assumption two by providing staff with additional skills and information about at-risk audiences. ISUE could also aid staff in utilizing new skills by adopting a different programming model.

Assumption Three: A different programming model is needed for at-risk programming efforts.

Focus group participants suggested that successful at-risk programming efforts could only be achieved by collaborating with other individuals and community agencies or organizations already working with at-risk populations. Participants' statements also suggested that the development of successful at-risk programming efforts involve other individuals, not just Extension staff. Focus group comments included the following:

*I think community cooperation, involvement of a lot of different agencies is almost essential to make something successful.*

*It's developed within and by the community.*

*We like to think we're in the expert role. And I don't by any means think that's an appropriate role here.*

*...we're trying to talk to folks that are at-risk; saying, "This is what you need to do to solve your problem"...this is very, very difficult to do.*
And nobody has really asked us if that's what we need. I think that taught me a lesson... you can't walk into a place and say, "This is what we're going to do here"... we need to kinda talk with some other people.

The at-risk population is already organized so it makes it more convenient to wind up working with them.

Focus group participants viewed successful at-risk programming efforts as programs developed by community members and agencies and not by Extension alone. Participants proposed that an "expert" approach to at-risk programming limited the capacity building process of a program because it limited program participants' involvement in the program development process.

One participant implied that ISUE staff could find audiences for at-risk programming efforts by collaborating with already established groups or agencies working with at-risk audiences. These statements raised the concern that ISUE staff may not think of themselves as the "experts" when working with at-risk audiences.

Extension staff have traditionally viewed themselves as "experts," and the dominant programming model in Extension has been the expert model (Dollman, 1993). This model is based on the following: (a) problems and objectives can be identified and put into operative or quantitative terms; (b) the defined problem can be solved by an individual with the appropriate expertise; (c) improvement will come from the implementation of solutions; and (d) Extension staff should remain neutral and objective when planning programs or when providing advice to clientele (Patterson, 1993). The expert programming model assumes most staff treat problems with a detached or impartial manner.

Most ISUE staff are familiar with and use the "expert" approach to program development. Staff typically serve as the exclusive developers of programs, relying on
research-based information to address problems (Borich, 1990). The expert model focuses on working with the individual to initiate change on problems that are typically narrowly defined and for which there is no general consensus solution to the problem (Dollman, 1993). However, this model may not be effective when addressing the complex issues identified by the National Initiatives (Patterson, 1993).

Many of the issues addressed by the CYFAR Initiative (i.e. how to decrease poverty, provide stable environments for children, and address basic needs) do not have a clear consensus on solutions. The primary problem-solving approach to many of the Initiative's goals involves working with the family, other groups and agencies to help change society (Boyle, 1989).

Saito et al. (1992) and Boyle (1989) confirm that the primary problem-solving approach to most at-risk programming efforts should include working with other groups or organizations and families. Together these groups will need to work together to help change social conditions so all families can thrive.

Circumstances of Change Influencing Assumption Three

Extension staff attitudes toward program development and their unwillingness to give up their "expert" role in program development are circumstances of change that influence assumption three. The stereotypes identified in assumption two discussion also have the potential to influence staff development of at-risk programming. Some staff may not want to develop programs based on what they see as the at-risk audiences' perceived needs.
Staff Attitude Toward At-Risk Program Development

Some focus group participants discussed the introduction of a more inclusive, asset-based approach to programming as a significant change from the "expert," needs assessment-based approach used in Extension programming efforts.

*It's a fundamental change for us after 80 or 90 years of Extension programs to be asset-based instead of needs based, or asset driven instead of needs driven. And no more does it shows up than in families and communities. And it's not just that we're wasting great resources by not being asset based by focusing on the needs. But when you focus on needs you automatically define people as needy.*

*If you're talking about making change, you have to get into capacity. And if you focus on needs you never see what's there.*

*... you work with them, not provide to them ... We're coming in and as the "expert." Here's the program. Here it is and then out you go and have very limited success.*

*...real problems with programs that come in and are doing things for people.*

*People that have a very complete and finished and polished product when they enter the community are less likely to be successful than people that are going in and begin with trying to find out what the children, youth and families of a particular neighborhood feel that they need. So there is a certain amount of sequencing on the fly, so to speak, of developing as you go along.*

*Clients are the resource for the program, not the recipients of the effort.*

Typically an ISUE program planner identifies the needs of the program participants and then develops programs that tell participants how to alleviate or decrease these needs. In an asset-based approach to program development, the planner identifies participants' strengths and works with program participants in using their assets to address problems.

The participants' quotes suggested that change from a need-based program development approach to an asset-based approach for programming represented a paradigm shift for many Extension staff. Staff no longer would be viewed as the "expert" but would work in collaboration with program participants to help deal with issues and solve problems.
Staff using this approach could create an empowering environment where program participants would be enabled to provide input and build capacities to help find solutions.

Two programming issues were among the top six most frequently selected items of the capacity building checklist. The focus group participants identified (a) believes learners have a great deal to contribute and highlights their strengths and promotes the exchange of ideas, and (b) understands the differences between an expert and empowerment approach to education. The participants' selection of these checklist items suggested that the focus group participants believe that at-risk programming needs a different program model.

The capacity building checklist completed during the focus groups confirmed that participants viewed collaboration skills as needed for successful at-risk programming efforts. The most frequently selected item on the checklist was to "move beyond networking or sharing information with other agencies and organizations to create a shared vision for children, youth and families in their communities." The second most frequently selected item was to "engage youth, parents, and other community members in assessing community problems and finding meaningful solutions."

The Families Extension representative check supported these findings. Representative check participants' comments from the question "What is one item that confirms an opinion you already held?" generated the following themes: (a) the public views Extension as "experts;" (b) there is a conflict between Extension's "expert" organization culture and some Extension staff who view their role as to empower; (c) learners need to be in the program planning process, and (d) Extension staff should focus on assets/strengths rather than deficits.
Staff Beliefs About At-Risk Programming and At-Risk Audiences

Focus group participants were also asked to respond to a question about the differences in programming for at-risk audiences and not at-risk audiences. Some focus group participants' statements suggested they did not see any differences between programming efforts with at-risk and not-at-risk audiences.

I'm not sure there are a lot of differences. It's a matter of degree. I mean the environment and the culture in this country is placing so much pressure on all families that I'm not sure there's a lot of differences.

I really don't think there is much difference.

There are times I don't stop and think about there being any differences.

You have the same amount of time to capture them and draw them into the program as any other audience.

The lack of acknowledged differences might indicate some staff's lack of experience with at-risk programming efforts and diverse audiences. Focus group participants may have interpreted the question as "how" staff members should treat at-risk program participants instead of how staff should develop at-risk programs. Program planning and development is a complex, multi-step process and staff may be referring to one step in the process.

However, other staff expressed a feeling of being overwhelmed by at-risk programming efforts.

I get overwhelmed by the globalness of it all, and the magnitude of it.

You have to have the tools to keep from being overwhelmed.

...they didn't have the education, they didn't have a job yet, they didn't have the income, and they had parenting responsibilities beyond what was appropriate for their age. Where do I start? There are so many things that they desperately need.
These participants' comments expressed the complex nature of the problems addressed by the CYFAR Initiative and suggested that ISUE staff felt overwhelmed as they tried to blend established programming efforts with new programming efforts (Blyth, 1996). Issues programming, like CYFAR, focuses on the larger, more compelling problems facing communities and as a result requires programming efforts that are more broad-based and cross-disciplinary in nature (Rasmussen, 1989).

The stereotypes identified under assumption two regarding at-risk audiences' educational level, parenting skills, lifestyle, emotional status, and need for Extension Services also suggest that ISUE staff believe work with at-risk audiences require lots of time and support. Staff who believe these characteristics define all at-risk audiences will design programs based on these perceived needs or limit work with at-risk audiences because of the perceived time commitment. In reality, none of these stereotypes may reflect potential audiences.

Staff who believe all at-risk audiences lack literacy skills may develop programs that do not match the educational level of the participants. Program participants who attend a program may become bored, feel insulted, or view ISUE staff as condescending. Participants may not attend future programs and ISUE staff might attribute the program's low attendance to the perceived lack of time program participants have for self-improvement. In this example, staff might use one stereotype to justify another stereotype instead of using the productive reasoning process to critique the attendance problem.

Staff who believe at-risk audiences are very sensitive about their situation and want one-on-one programs may limit their efforts because of the perceived time commitment. Staff may also limit their efforts because they are uncomfortable with one-on-one
programming. In reality, some at-risk audiences might not want one-on-one programming and would enjoy group programs.

**Staff Role in Program Development**

Some ISUE staff may be unaccustomed to working with other agencies and organizations or addressing problems that do not have an "expert" solution. Staff may lack the knowledge or skills needed to collaborate with other agencies and to provide a holistic approach to programming efforts. Focus group participants did express their discomfort with this new approach to programming and expressed an unwillingness to address CYFAR programming.

What I was responding to is that people are afraid that they're gonna be made to program in a way that they're not comfortable.

But I relate to my colleagues that say, "Oh gosh, don't turn me into a touchy feely facilitator."

We knew we had clients and a group recruited that we were going to have to interact with. And if we didn't know our stuff, personally we'd come out looking like a fool.

I'm not sure that I think that this so-called at-risk programming is kind of a self-selecting process. Please don't tell me I've gotta pass on this CYFAR information at my swine meeting or my dairy meetings or stuff like that. I'm good at what I do. I know my material; I am helping these families financially with their livestock operations. And that's a valuable thing that Extension provides, I don't think we need to take, try and change people's jobs and mindset to reflect the wave of the 90s.

These focus group comments identified some staff uneasiness with adopting program models associated with at-risk programming efforts and suggested that staff may be unwilling to give-up their "expert" role in program development and delivery. Negative perceptions toward more collaborative program development could threaten organizational change efforts. Developing a more positive attitude toward collaboration appears to be
critical for ISUE staff as they seek to increase at-risk programming efforts within the organization (Conner & Patterson, 1982).

**Possible Organizational Change Strategies for Assumption Three**

If ISUE adopts a program model that is more collaborative and inclusive in nature for at-risk programming efforts, staff may need to reexamine their ideas about designing programs. Staff may need to reexamine assumptions regarding competition and specialization, acknowledge differences between efficiency and effectiveness, include multiple perspectives in the planning process (Apps & Ludewig, 1993), and address issues of neutrality (Jimmerson, 1989). Staff may be challenged to take a political or ethical position when seeking solutions to some of the problems addressed by the Initiative.

ISUE also will need to challenge and change staff assumptions about at-risk programming development and staff perceived stereotypes about at-risk audiences. If these assumptions are not challenged and changed, staff may develop programs that are irrelevant for participants. At-risk audiences may find programs not applicable to their current situation, feel insulted or humiliated, or view ISUE staff as not knowledgeable in the diversity of all families, including at-risk families, when developing programs for audiences. If ISUE staff are not challenged to engage in the productive reasoning process to critique these stereotypes, their biases could limit the organization's capacity to effectively address at-risk programming efforts by providing ineffective at-risk programs. Ineffective programming has the potential to decrease public support – financial and non-financial – and Extension could fail in their attempt to achieve the CYFAR goals.
The productive reasoning process will need to be used to challenge and change these stereotypes. Several participants used this process as they disputed one stereotype identified in the focus group discussions — you need to provide childcare or a total package for all age groups at one setting so they can come — with the following statements:

*She has found out that they (EFNEP participants) do not want their kids going to child care during a program, their clients don't want someone else taking care of their kids cause of their self-esteem.*

*They really don't want childcare because they don't trust just anybody with their kids.*

These narratives reflect the productive reasoning process used by some staff in their work with at-risk audiences. One focus group participant shared that some Extension staff who provide at-risk programs thought the participants would be willing to leave their children with the childcare services provided by the program. Later the same staff realized that program participants were not willing to leave their children with unfamiliar childcare providers. In this case, ISUE staff initially thought at-risk audiences were indifferent about the quality of their children's childcare but realized this was an inaccurate stereotype.

As ISUE staff gain more knowledge through interaction with at-risk audiences they will be able to share this information with other members of the organization. This information will aid individual change efforts by allowing staff to review and critique their own assumptions against new information (Argyris, 1997).

The current programming model limits collaboration with other agencies and is not inclusive of multiple perspectives, both items that seem to promote successful at-risk programs. Failure to challenge and change the current programming model will put ISUE staff at a disadvantage as they plan at-risk programs.
Thus a key strategy for ISUE leadership to increase at-risk programming efforts could be to change the organizational structure to support staff as they work toward increasing at-risk programming efforts (Goodstein & Burke, 1991; Kovoor-Misra, 1996; Stewart, 1989; Trahant & Burke, 1996). However, the following assumption suggests that ISUE leadership is not supportive of at-risk programming efforts.

**Assumption Four: The current Extension leadership does not support at-risk programming efforts and this limits at-risk programming.**

Focus group participants' comments suggest that the current leadership could increase the quality and quantity of at-risk programming efforts by changing some aspects of the organization that may limit these efforts. Participants suggested that leadership could increase support by acknowledging the time commitment associated with inter-agency collaborations and acknowledging the smaller audiences associated with at-risk audiences when comparing the numbers to traditional programming efforts. ISUE leadership should hope at-risk participant numbers are less than traditional programming numbers because the overall CYFAR goal is to decrease the at-risk population. Focus group participant comments included the following:

*For some it's the incentive system. Are they judged on their quality and quantity of work – how many at-risk children, youth and families they're working with?*

*... I have a relatively high amount of freedom to decide what, how I will do things, but not necessary what I will do, but how I will do them... But do their [administration] expectations of field staff reflect the balance between traditional programming and innovative programming?*

*But now you gotta go out and do this and somebody already has their plate overflowing, you've gotta take something away if you expect'em to do something*
more, I think. And I don't know who has permission. You know how people feel when they can take this off their plate and go on and do this.

Your administrators say, "and where is your impact?" And I've never really had any of them say that, but there are times you wind up thinking: "Boy, I'm suppose to show impact. ...to wind up working with some at-risk families or individual in more rural areas, the need may be every bit as great or even greater because they can be that isolation factor. So how do you balance five hours for one person versus you could travel 10 minutes and have gotten 20.

And I don't know whether it's the fact that it takes more time or the system is such that we feel: Ok, I have got to come up with some hard data that's going to show changes have been made. I have to be able to demonstrate behaviors with at-risk families. Whereas if I'm working with middle class, and I don't have the impact data...

It's clearly defined in terms of administration. I think there is the talk, I don't know what the support is... But I don't know that the people who are our leaders locally are necessary supportive of it.

The focus group comments indicate that the leadership within ISUE could increase at-risk programming efforts by articulating a higher priority for at-risk programming within the organization. ISUE leadership may also want to redesign the reward system that would allow staff to decrease traditional programs and acknowledge the growing role of staff in at-risk programming efforts. These participant comments suggest that ISUE administration evaluate staff impact by program attendance numbers. The last comment implies that administrators do not consider the program's audience when reviewing these numbers; and this lack of consideration leaves staff perplexed on how to justify time intensive, low attendance programs with at-risk audiences.

ISUE staff appeared to be motivated to provide programs that generate large public interest or work with already established groups in order to produce high attendance numbers. There appears to be little incentive for staff to program for smaller, at-risk audiences.
Focus group participants also suggest that the lack of financial support provided by Extension leadership limits at-risk programming efforts. In the following quotations the focus group participants equate the amount of financial support given to the at-risk programming efforts with the priority that society and the organization give to these efforts.

*And I think our whole society, our whole nation, it's the right thing to be very important with families. But! The buck speaks. When you track some of that stuff, it doesn't go there.*

...working with people at-risk, they talk about special funds, soft money that isn't a part of our regular work.

*Well it goes back to this funding concept of unless you've got some kind of special funding for something, then you're not really doing and working with at-risk.*

*Is Extension ever going to put resources into making something happen, are you just going to sit around and talk?*

*Does it ever seem to you like if we're going to work with children, youth and families at-risk that it has to be something we go out and find money or resources? If it's not an at-risk program, well then, it just kinda seems to be part of the Extension world.*

These statements reflect the focus group participants' sentiment that the limited amount of money allocated to at-risk programming efforts reflects the priority level given to these efforts by the organization's leadership. Staff noted that Extension supported the CYFAR Initiative with special funds separate from the core program funds, implying that at-risk programming efforts were not considered part of the regular Extension work. Saito et al. (1992) and Zoffer et al. (1994) also identified the lack of adequate resources as an internal organizational barrier to implementing at-risk programs.

If ISUE staff fail to challenge and change the continued question of leadership's support for at-risk programs, the quality and quantity of programs will not increase. Stewart (1989) concluded that organization change efforts fail when staff are aware of the desired
change but do not believe the management is really serious or committed to the desired change. If staff members view at-risk programming efforts as a low priority in terms of job responsibilities, staff may not critique or change their work tasks to incorporate at-risk programming efforts. Nor will staff adjust work task or seek changes for the organization's policies and procedures that hinder at-risk programming efforts (Trahant & Burke, 1996).

Circumstances of Change Influencing Assumption Four

One obvious circumstance of change that influences assumption four is the current leadership style within ISUE. However additional circumstances of change that influence this assumption reflect the current leadership's control on staff workload and program flexibility.

Current Leadership Style

Apps and Ludewig (1993) suggested that current leaders might not have the skills to change management practices because they attained their current leadership position by managing and controlling employees. Broshar and Jost (1995) identified the management style of regulator or comforter as predominant in the ISUE organization. Leadership traits that accompany these styles include caretaking, protection, and providing for the emotional morale of the staff. These traits are ineffective in developing staff capacities, supporting staff to try new ideas, allowing independent action, or providing an environment that engages the members in the productive reasoning process (Argyris, 1997; Hall, 1998).

Failure to address the current leadership within ISUE will perpetuate an environment that limits the organization's productive reasoning process. Staff will continue the same old patterns of behavior, and at-risk programming efforts are not likely to increase.
Staff Workload

In the focus groups, participants suggested workload issues may be a symptom of a lack of administrative commitment to at-risk programming efforts. Focus group participants suggested leadership could aid at-risk programming efforts by reducing staff workloads.

*I think the single most important issue for Extension personnel is workload issue. Right now it's critical. It impacts everything, literally everything we do.*

*I think the single most important issue for Extension personnel is workload issue. Right now it's critical. It impacts everything, literally everything we do.*

*It takes two months to do the County Fair. You don't have time for much else.*

*I do think it's all in the message, because, there are also those that might see it as add-on. And they're saying I'm already overwhelmed. I don't have the time. I can't add one more thing. And it's more a matter of them getting the message that what they're already doing is children, youth, and families. That this is not an add-on.*

*I've already incorporated what I see as youth at-risk into my programs that I can, under my time structure and so forth. And granted, I'm sure there's much I'm missing, but time constraints.*

These comments indicate that the focus group participants viewed at-risk programming efforts as additional work to an already over-loaded work schedule. The participants do not consider the Initiatives programs as part of the Extension core or base programs and some staff view the Initiative programs as lesser priorities than core programs (Borich, 1990).

These focus group comments suggest that ISUE administrators determine staff workloads and only administrators can give staff "permission" to remove work responsibilities. Focus group participants seem to view ISUE as a hierarchy where changes in work responsibilities come from the top (Rogers & Hough, 1995). Staff expect the administration to clearly define their roles and responsibilities toward at-risk programming efforts but questioned if current staff expectations reflect both traditional and at-risk
If staff believe expectations focus on traditional programming, then staff will spend more time and resources with these efforts.

These statements raise questions about ISUE administration's support for at-risk programming by not "allowing" staff to reduce traditional Extension programming. Staff seem to think that if administrators truly supported at-risk programming efforts they would reduce some of their current responsibilities and provide staff with more time to support these efforts.

The focus group comments that suggest leadership is responsible for determining workload issues was consistent with the ISUE administrative study (Broshar & Jost, 1995). This study determined that the ISUE administrators typically provide specific directions for staff, insulate staff from any controversies, and assure staff that the organization is doing good things. These leadership characteristics do not promote an environment supportive for the productive reasoning process because staff are not encouraged to discuss the pros and cons of controversial issues or encouraged to question the activities of the organization. In addition, none of current management characteristics seemed to reflect the participatory, transactional, and visionary leadership perspectives that Manz, Bastien, and Hostager (1991) deemed necessary for sustained organizational change efforts.

The representative checks conducted with Families Extension staff confirmed the focus group participants' reaction to staff workload. Responses to the question, "What is one item that confirms an opinion you already held?" showed that many staff felt overloaded, stressed, angry, and burnt out. In the Zoffer et al. (1994) national survey, Extension county agents identified limited money, lack of staff, and lack of time as internal organizational barriers to at-risk programming efforts. The county agents also viewed youth at-risk
programming efforts as separate from their traditional work; they believed these efforts created additional work at a time when resources were limited.

**Program Flexibility**

Focus group participants' comments suggest that ISUE has limited flexibility when addressing at-risk programming efforts.

...we hadn't hard-coated our boundaries, we'll be able to erase things and move people around. I mean, it's a pain to deal with, for programming but if we have that we can really change, we'll be able to change.

That's another barrier is all the hoops that we have to jump through to do normal work.

...we write grant proposals because money is there versus where we have a need and we go for the money. ...an RFP comes across your desk and you go: Huh, I wonder what we could do with this!

Staff identified strictly defined boundaries and administrative paperwork as a barrier to traditional Extension programs. Participants suggested that staff seeking approval for at-risk programs face additional bureaucratic hurdles. Staff appeared to view ISUE as a very hierarchical system. If staff perceive that ISUE is very hierarchical they will view change initiative as beginning at the top and moving down through the organization (Rogers & Hough, 1995). Staff appeared to suggest that if ISUE really supported at-risk programming efforts, the program approval process would be easier.

Eventually staff may become so frustrated with this process that they will stop seeking approval for at-risk programming effort. An inflexible system also discourages members from engaging in the productive reasoning process as illustrated in the last focus group quotation (Morgan, 1989).
In the last statement a focus group participant reflects how staff wrote grant proposals based on resources availability, not needs. Staff do not seem to use the productive reasoning progress to question ISUE leadership about the lack of resources for what they view as needed programs. If ISUE staff do not use productive reasoning to begin to question the use of current resources, at-risk programming efforts are not likely to increase.

**Possible Organizational Change Strategies for Assumption Four**

The leadership within the organization is directed by the mission, vision, strategies, and personal styles of the individuals in management positions and plays a significant role in organizational change (Barr & Huff, 1997; Conner & Patterson, 1982; Kono, 1990; Trahant & Burke, 1996). The organizational leadership is typically viewed as a "transformational" target (Trahant & Burke, 1996) and changes at this level usually lead to changes in the organization's structure and members.

Terry (1993) suggested that problems with the organization's leadership might best be addressed by seeking changing within the organization's mission. Thus, ISUE staff members may need to critique the current organizational mission and alter the mission to reflect a commitment to at-risk audiences programming efforts.

ISUE may seek to increase support for at-risk programming efforts by reorganizing existing personnel to provide a more supportive environment for at-risk programming staff or retooling the current leadership. Staff may seek to replace current personnel with leadership that is more supportive of these efforts. But staff may misjudge some individual and replace current leadership with someone less supportive of at-risk programming efforts. Or staff may seek to reposition current staff so individuals supportive of at-risk programming will work
with staff who provide these services. Staff may opt to increase support for at-risk programming efforts by educating the current leadership about the CYFAR Initiative and its positive impact on program participants. Current leadership may embrace these efforts and provide additional support for at-risk programming efforts.

Terry (1993) suggested that problems related to the organizational structure are directly intertwined with the organization's leadership because leaders typically determine how decisions are made, how staff are rewarded, and how resources are allocated. Changes to the organization's structure are often successfully addressed by focusing on changes within the leadership of the organization. Thus ISUE leadership could seek to address changes in the organization's decision-making system, reward system, and resource management system that would be more supportive of at-risk programming efforts.

**Decision-Making System**

To increase at-risk programming efforts, ISUE leadership will need to redesign the current decision-making system or develop a new system that allows quicker and easier approval for at-risk programming efforts. ISUE could potentially increase these efforts by providing an environment that allows staff to engage in the productive reasoning process and provide a forum that allows staff to question the current policies and procedures of the organization that seem to limit resources of at-risk programs.

ISUE staff must realize that the organizational leadership may resist efforts that question their decision making or appear to limit their decision-making authority. Many of the current leaders have been rewarded for their ability to manage and control employee work and do not want employees questioning their actions (Apps & Ludewig, 1993). The ISUE administrative study (Broshar & Jost, 1995) found that the majority of ISUE leaders
tend to provide specific directions to staff, insulate staff from controversies, and assure staff
that ISUE is doing good things. None of these traits support or promote an environment in
which staff might question the limited organization's support toward at-risk programming
efforts.

**Reward System**

The reward system within an organization includes the way in which the
organization's members are acknowledged and compensated for their work. Focus group
participants questioned whether the ISUE reward system compensated staff for work with at-risk audiences.

To increase at-risk programming efforts, ISUE leadership could change the current
reward system or adopt a new system that accurately reflects the difference between the two
audiences. Administration could use alternative evaluation techniques to judge staff impact
with at-risk audiences. Some of these techniques might include the number of staff
collaborative at-risk programming efforts, progress reports on program participants, or staff
interaction with program participants. In reality, administration and staff must realize that if
their at-risk efforts are successful the program numbers will continually decline.

All staff may not support a different reward system. Staff who continually meet or
surpass the previous system's expectations may question different expectations. Staff who
are unhappy with the system may leave the organization. Other staff may change only what
is absolutely necessary to meet the minimum expectations. ISUE leaders may find that some
staff are unable or unwilling to meet the expectations and will need to be terminated.
Resource Management System

The resource management system within the organization represents the distribution and development of the organization's resources, both human and financial, as the members seek to address the goals of the organization. The focus group participants suggested that ISUE leadership might need to redesign staff training to reflect methods used in at-risk program development. Participants also suggest that current financial resources could be redistributed to address at-risk programming needs.

*Be careful when you plan in-service training because you're setting up a model for how staff also work. So if you want staff to work inclusively and from asset-based, however you want the staff to work, that's how you should do your in-service.*

*Modeling is one of the chief ways that human beings learn.*

*Instead of looking for outside resources all the time, we need to help understand how we use our existing resources.*

Focus group participants suggest that training efforts reflecting an inclusive, asset approach could enhance staff skills by providing them an example of the model. Current workshops typically have experts lecture staff on how to overcome perceived deficits. Workshop trainers using an asset approach would identify staff strengths, and the workshop participants and trainers together would determine how these strengths could be used to solve problems. To reflect the inclusive nature sought with at-risk programming efforts, Extension could invite potential program participants and other agency personnel to attend workshops. If ISUE provides these types of workshops, staff could feel more confident in using these techniques and increase the potential success of their at-risk program planning efforts.
Some ISUE staff may be resistant to changes to workshop training. Staff that are accustomed to the traditional lecture method may not want to engage in more interactive programs and may choose not to attend interactive programs. ISUE may also need to provide alternative methods to introduce staff to new information. Some staff may also be resistant to hiring staff who represent various audiences and seek to avoid or limit interaction with certain individuals. ISUE administration could address some of this resistance by hiring qualified personnel, encouraging staff interaction, and educating staff about diverse audiences.

The National Initiatives were designed to address current social issues, and the USDA provided limited funds to support these efforts. The intent has been for Extension to establish the Initiative programs into base programs and to fund them from the base program budget. One focus group participant suggested that Extension should look at existing resources to support at-risk programming support.

Shifting funding to support new programming efforts is an option for the national and state level programs. But Salipante and Golden-Biddle (1995) suggested that public organizations need to move slowly and deliberately when changing the organization's program focus. They must weigh the interest of all stakeholders because most public organizations are designed to address specific audience needs not provided by private sector organizations. ISUE must realize that a shift in funding may alienate traditional clientele and ultimately lead to decreased funding for the entire Extension program (Salipante & Golden-Biddle, 1995; Zoffer et al., 1994).

ISUE must also realize that any of these changes have the potential to decrease other organizational activities such as traditional programming efforts. ISUE has a finite number
of resources, and if at-risk programming efforts are increased, other activities will need to be decreased. Rapid changes in traditional programming efforts could decrease public support by traditional audiences and potentially decrease ISUE resources.

Assumption Five: At-risk programming efforts are not viewed as part of the regular Extension work.

Focus group participant statements seem to acknowledge that the ISUE culture does not view at-risk programming efforts as part of regular Extension work.

*Does it ever seem to you like if we're going to work with children, youth and families at-risk that it has to be something we go out and find money or resources? If it's not an at-risk program, well, then it just seems to be part of the Extension world?*

*It doesn't meet the Top 100. I mean, I go through needs, I go through programs, and I go through matching and priorities and what clients want. And if, by the time you do all the organization's priorities and each field specialist priorities and campus specialists' priorities and ongoing programs and what the clients say, plus what you want to do, that factors in too. What you want to do, that type of talk [at-risk] hasn't gone on my list.*

*It's clearly defined in terms of administration. I think there is the talk, I don't know what the support is... But I don't know that the people who are our leaders locally are necessary supportive of it.*

*And we can't focus on what it is we really want to do, and be happy with that.*

*Because, to large degree, the nature of our work, the expectation, whether they're written in the job description, or they're simply organizational culture, part of the organizations culture, is that we're managers of events. And many of those events have questionable educational or life skill values, much less the ones that are educational and life skill values. But it's very difficult to be a manager of ongoing, annual events and do significant work with children, youth, and families living in at-risk communities. We tend to add it on to our job if we want to be involved.*

*...maybe we aren't working specifically with a group that's been labeled by somebody else as being at-risk, but that's OK because we're working with others that are.*

*We don't need everybody doing the same work in this state.*
Focus group participant comments suggest that ISUE staff do not view at-risk programming as part of the regular work of the organization. Staff view at-risk programming efforts as "add-on" to their already heavy workload. If staff continue to place a low priority on these efforts there will be little increase in at-risk programming efforts because staff will concentrate on their "regular" work.

These focus group quotations suggest that at-risk programming efforts are not a high priority in the organization and among field staff, traditional clientele, and local leaders. Participants implied that the administration talked about the importance of at-risk programming efforts but provided little support to increase efforts. Some focus group participants seemed comfortable letting other members in the organization program for at-risk audiences.

The responses from the capacity building checklist and the Families Extension staff representative check reflect these same concerns. Focus group participants expressed the need for long-term commitment to at-risk programming efforts on the capacity building checklist. The response, "have a clear, long-term commitment to supporting children, youth, and families living in at-risk audiences" was the second most frequently identified item.

Statements from this check show Extension staff expressing a need for focus and suggest that personnel and the system lacked a clear overall sense of Extension's role toward at-risk programming efforts. A national survey of the organization's capacity to provide at-risk programming efforts confirmed that the Extension Service lacked a clear vision and a firm organizational commitment to youth at-risk programming efforts (Saito et al., 1992). A lack of clear commitment is a reason organizational changes fail, and ISUE efforts to
increase at-risk programming efforts may continue to be hampered as staff question the organization's commitment to at-risk programming (Stewart, 1989).

**Circumstances of Change Influencing Assumption Five**

Focus group participants' comments suggest that a lack of organizational commitment to at-risk programming efforts was a circumstance of change that influenced assumption five. In addition, focus group quotations suggest that ISUE staff have not committed to at-risk programming efforts for fear of losing traditional audience support.

**Lack of Organizational Commitment**

Focus group participants' comments suggest that some staff think ISUE lacks long-term commitment to at-risk audiences.

*And yeah, commitment is, is very, very key. It's absolutely necessary. And I think it needs to be long-term commitment. I think that what you're talking about is long-term problems that need long-term solutions. And the commitment, whether the funding lasts a year or two years or five years, the commitment to the process and to the results had to be long term. So many high risk communities have been victimized by short-term programs and when the money's gone and the numbers are counted, the assistance or the empowerment, or the organizational effort is gone. And then, many of those people feel used.*

*You know. We got a grant. We're going to do something for you. Oh, but the money ran out at midnight. Good-bye.*

Members expressed concern over long-term commitment to funding at-risk programs, suggesting that short-term monies victimize high-risk communities when services are discontinued once funds are depleted. Because the Initiative programming efforts have limited funding time frames, some staff questioned the organization's commitment to the change effort. Extension staff questioned the value that the organization placed on at-risk programming efforts and the priority given to fund the Initiative's programming efforts.
The perceived lack of priority given at-risk programming efforts may limit some ISUE from becoming involved in these programming efforts because staff may not see a future for these programming efforts. Staff may not want to invest time or personal commitment in programs that may only last a few years. Other staff may not want to become involved with at-risk programs because of potential impact on at-risk audiences if funding is cut.

**Fear of Losing Traditional Extension Audiences' Support**

Focus group participants questioned Extension's role in working with at-risk audiences because the traditional clientele may not want Extension to work with this audience. The following quotes were an exchange between two focus group participants.

*I just got a letter last week from a family nutrition class... being very negative on why is Extension working with these people [food stamp recipients]... and why do we bother to work with that clientele?*

*I haven't had a letter, but I've had a verbal comment on the same program. "That group" meaning the food stamp recipients are already receiving countless waves of support through different agencies. Why is Extension getting involved in targeting this one?*

*So there may not be total agreement from all our public on the appropriateness of working with all audiences.*

The above statements reflected staff concern about public response to working with at-risk audiences. The focus group comments suggest that some members of the general public questioned ISUE work with at-risk audiences and suggested there are other agencies that provide services for at-risk audiences.

These comments reflect the general public lack of understanding regarding the breadth of the Extension Service programming efforts, and this lack of public knowledge could threaten support for the organization's efforts to reach new audiences. Traditional
ISUE audiences may feel neglected if they view ISUE as expanding programming efforts and may decrease support for all ISUE programming efforts. ISUE is a public organization and must weigh the interests of all stakeholders in the development and delivery of services.

However, some focus group statements suggest that Extension staff should work only with individuals who staff perceive can help the organization.

*What I heard too, is my participants [at-risk] don’t vote. So why work with people who can’t, who are not going to vote to pass the referendum. We need to work with people who are going to vote, like the master gardeners.*

*Extension is becoming an increasing political organization. For its very survival Extension is more politically savvy and active. And yet the programming to children, youth, families and communities is at-risk programming and is giving resources to the least politically powerful among all of our constituents. It’s on the scale of political power; the folks that I think we’re talking about here today are as politically powerless as any in the country. And yet, Extension if they cannot use this work with children, youth and families at-risk for political gain...*

This statement reflects a participant’s idea that working with the "right" individuals or groups who can help the organization. These focus group members suggested that ISUE should concentrate services toward individuals and businesses, in particular agricultural ones, who support the organization.

Warner et al. (1993) disputed the idea that Extension should rely solely on agricultural programming and suggested that future political support for Extension may depend on building alliances with coalitions and other non-traditional audiences. Warner et al. (1996) based their conclusions on the study’s finding that only 45% of the U.S. population had ever heard of the Extension service and only 26% of the population had used any of Extension services. In addition, the audiences most likely to use the Extension services, farm populations in the Midwest and southern regions, continue to decrease (Rasmussen, 1989).
Possible Organizational Change Strategies for Assumption Five

Focus group participants' comments reflect that the participants think the ISUE culture continues to support traditional programming efforts, those related to agriculture and businesses associated with the agriculture industry. This assumption affirms the concept that the Extension culture does not view at-risk programming efforts as part of the "real" work of ISUE and that these efforts are not viewed as a priority within the organization.

Because the organizational culture preserves the unwritten rules and accepted norms of the organization (Schein, 1990), ISUE organizational culture must be challenged and changed if staff hope to increase at-risk programming efforts. The key strategy for changing the organizational culture is for the ISUE staff to engage in the productive reasoning process so that they may critique and change the policies and procedures within the organizational structure and leadership that hinder the organizational change process (Argyris, 1997).

Terry (1993) suggested that solutions to problems within the organizational culture are most successful when staff or leaders seek changes within the meaning of the organization. Staff would need to critique why the culture does not support at-risk programming efforts and what is at stake if this assumption continues. Failure to address these culture assumptions will find ISUE continuing in their traditional programming pattern.

The ISUE leadership could enhance the communication system within the ISUE organization to help staff understand ISUE's role and commitment toward at-risk programming efforts. ISUE leadership could also increase communication with the general public leadership by providing needed information to stakeholders and verbalizing ISUE
commitment for at-risk programming. This would provide an avenue to address stakeholder opposition and clarify ISUE's long-term commitment to at-risk programming efforts.

Assumption Six: The primary mission for Iowa State University Extension is agriculture.

Some focus group participants suggest that ISUE presents itself as an organization that tries to help all individuals. But other focus group participants' comments suggest that the ISUE culture continues to support efforts related to agriculture and businesses associated with the agriculture industry.

I see Extension as we present ourselves... we are the door to the resources at Iowa State University, and the land grant university system nationwide....

I'm just saying is that the way we currently present ourselves is that you walk in our door and you've got X situation, whether it's a problem with grubs in your lawn or whether it's because you can't manage your budget or whether it's because you're not making ends meet with hog prices, we will try to help you.

We're talking here politically, can that really happen? So we can talk all we want. But I'm sensitive to what our major portion of our funding pie. And that's an agricultural standpoint here in Iowa

Please don't tell me I've gotta pass on this CYFAR information at my swine meeting or my dairy meetings or stuff like that. I'm good at what I do. I know my material; I am helping these families financially with their livestock operations. And that's a valuable thing that Extension provides, I don't think we need to take, try and change people's jobs and mindset to reflect the wave of the 90s

And we can't focus on what it is we really want to do, and be happy with that.

Although some Extension staff might identify with the organization's broad range of services, other focus group comments suggest that some staff continue to view ISUE as an organization that should concentrate on agriculture issues. Staff who believe ISUE's primary
audience is the agriculture industry are not likely to support any programming effort that may decrease resources for traditional programs.

The general public also shares the view that Extension is an organization that focuses on agriculture and the agriculture industry. In a national survey the Warner et al. (1996) found that the general public viewed Extension as an agricultural service organization and few recognized that the organization worked with communities and at-risk audiences to reduce situations that impact to this population. ISUE will have limited success with increasing at-risk programming efforts if their targeted audience is not aware of the programs or does not view Extension as a viable source of the information. If ISUE wants to increase at-risk programming efforts, staff members may need to promote their programs in order to reach at-risk audiences.

Circumstances of Change Influencing Assumption Six

As a public organization, ISUE has multiple stakeholders, and conflicts between stakeholders hinder organizational change, as staff must address conflicting goals regarding at-risk programming efforts. ISUE's public perception as an agriculture service organization also affects the potential success of at-risk programming efforts.

Conflicting Stakeholder Opinions

Public organizations such as ISUE exist in an environment of multiple checks and balances, where multiple stakeholders may have different opinions (Battalino et al., 1996). Focus group participants identified how ISUE is trying to survive in an environment of conflicting stakeholder expectations (Battalino, et al., 1996).
It's a paradox that in Iowa, political we have to keep telling the legislature that we haven't abandoned agriculture. At the national level, we have to keep telling Congress and the people in Washington, D.C. that we're more than agriculture.

It takes two months to do the County Fair. You don't have time for much else.

We're talking here politically, can that really happen? So we can talk all we want. But I'm sensitive to what our major portion of our funding pie. And that's an agricultural standpoint here in Iowa. I'm concerned about the push-pull. One state representative has the philosophy that the youth programming is to be how we keep our youth within the state involved in agriculture.

Legislators still may get grumpy if I don't have the impact data.

The focus group participants describe conflicting views among ISUE stakeholders, suggesting that the federal government wants the state Extension Service to provide more programs beyond agricultural programming. However, state officials seem to want ISUE staff to concentrate more on agricultural issues. The participant's statements also illustrate conflicting philosophies regarding youth programming and working with at-risk audiences.

ISUE is also working in an environment where there are multiple stakeholders who have conflicting opinions about ISUE's role with at-risk audiences. These conflicting opinions can threaten any organizational change effort (Stewart, 1989).

Public Perception

The general public continues to view Extension as an agriculture service organization (Warner et al., 1996). Warner et al. (1996) national survey found that individuals who were most likely to use the Extension service were the farm populations in the Midwest and South – Caucasian, middle-aged, educated, and who had above average incomes. This typical clientele does not reflect the targeted audiences of the CYFAR Initiative. The National Initiatives seek to provide services to non-traditional clients such as minorities, the young (0-
18 years of age), and individuals with low levels of education and income (Rasmussen, 1989).

The public perception of ISUE is agriculture. As stated earlier, ISUE will have limited success with increasing at-risk programming efforts if their targeted audience is not aware of the programs or does not view Extension as a viable source of the information. If ISUE wants to increase at-risk programming efforts, staff members may need to promote their programs in order to reach at-risk audiences.

**Possible Organizational Change Strategies for Assumption Six**

Terry (1993) suggested that problems within the organizational culture are most successfully addressed when staff or leaders seek changes within the meaning of the organization. Staff will need to critique why the culture does not support at-risk programming efforts and what is at stake if this assumption continues. Failure to address these culture assumptions will find ISUE continuing in their traditional programming pattern. ISUE will need to determine how viable the organization will be if the general public continues to view ISUE as only an organization that deals with agriculture and the businesses associated with agriculture.

Organizational culture is difficult to change because ISUE staff and leadership must also consider individual change efforts and organizational structural and leadership changes as they seek to change the organizational culture. Individual change is also necessary in any organizational culture change process because all organizations consist of a collective group of individuals (Goodstein & Burke, 1991; Kono, 1990; Stewart, 1989).
This organizational change effort will be unsuccessful if ISUE staff are not ready or do not support increasing the scope of ISUE work. For example, if ISUE staff seek to change the culture by encouraging all staff to participate in a community collaborative effort project; the organizational change effort may fail for a number of reasons. Failure could be the result if staff may not want to work collaboratively, staff do not have the skills to work in collaborative efforts, and staff do not view any negative repercussions in the reward system or from leadership for working in a collaborative.

The six assumptions identified in this section are all part of ISUE's organizational culture that appears to hinder at-risk programming efforts. The staff inability to change one or all of the assumptions has the potential to continually limit at-risk programming efforts.

**Research question 2: What circumstances of change influence Iowa State University Extension's ability to program for at-risk audiences?**

The circumstances of change represent the many internal and external events that influence organizational change efforts. Some of the circumstances of change occur at the macro level of society, while others happen at the micro level of the organization or individual. Circumstances of change can be predictable, but often circumstances are unpredictable. For example, most organizations did not predict the recent stock market upturn and its positive effect to their organization's financial resources.

The circumstances of change can be viewed as either barriers or aids to the organizational change process, so ISUE needs to consider these circumstances of change when planning any organizational change efforts to expand at-risk programming efforts. For example, the national focus on CYFAR programming could be viewed as beneficial to
expanding at-risk programming efforts, but the other circumstances identified could hinder the organization's ability to expand at-risk-programming efforts. The circumstances identified as barriers become potential targets for organizational change efforts.

The circumstances of change describe the current setting where staff want to increase the ISUE capacity to program for at-risk audiences. Terry (1993) suggested that strategic intervention within the organization's resources has the potential to produce the desired changes in the current setting. The resources of the organization include both the tangible and intangible components needed to accomplish the action. Thus ISUE staff will want to review the current at-risk programming resources and change resources to address circumstances of change that appear to hinder at-risk programming efforts.

The seven circumstances of change as identified in chapter two are human and social, legal, economical, political, ethical, market, and technological (Kovoor-Misra 1996; Staniforth 1996; Tichy, 1989). These categories have been identified to help clarify and explain the circumstances of change. However, the circumstances often overlap and are sometimes difficult to assign to one particular category (Tichy, 1989). In the following section, the circumstances of change have been identified under one category to help with interpretation, but there will be some overlap in the discussion due to the interrelated nature of the circumstances of change. These circumstances of change will help ISUE staff understand the organization's current environment toward at-risk programming efforts and identify possible aids or barriers to at-risk programming.

The human and social circumstances of change include the psychological, physical, and social aspects of individuals within the organization (Kovoor-Misra 1996; Staniforth
Examples of human and social circumstances include the staff's current skill level, attitudes, behaviors, beliefs, values, and relationships.

Legal circumstances of change represent the laws and regulations governing the organization (Kovoor-Misra, 1996; Staniforth, 1996) including both federal laws and local regulations. The CYFAR National Initiative is a mandated requirement from the USDA, and all states must report at-risk programming efforts to the federal partners in their annual Government Performance and Review Act (GPRA) report (Battalino et al., 1996; Panetta, 1993). Although state Extension Services have always reported programming efforts, this act requires states to report programming efforts in regard to specific goals. The focus group discussion generated limited statements about the legal implications of the CYFAR Initiative.

One possible reason for the lack of statements regarding the legal circumstances of change could be the timeline of the focus group. The GPRA requirements were fairly new at the time of the focus groups, and not all focus group participants were informed about the legal reporting requirements. Perhaps another reason for the lack of statements regarding the legal circumstances of change may depend on how the focus group participants viewed upper level administration. The Broshar and Jost (1995) study of ISUE management style identified caretaking as a predominant trait within the organization. Lower level staff may view upper management as individuals who are responsible for reporting requirements to the federal government and may not see the GPRA as a part of their job responsibilities.

The technological circumstances of change represent the application and use of information and technology in the organization (Kovoor-Misra, 1996; Staniforth, 1996; Tichy, 1989). Technological circumstances of change include the educational model used to plan and deliver research-based education, the way in which staff access new information,
and the use of technology in educational programming. The technological circumstances of change suggest two potential threats to organizational change: the conflict between the "expert" approach to programming and staff who contend that at-risk programming efforts need to empower and be more collaborative, and the lack of readiness by some Extension staff to understand and develop collaboration and empowerment skills (Armenakis et al., 1993).

The market circumstances of change relate to the avenues through which the organizational product or services are sold and/or used (Kovoor-Misra, 1996; Staniforth, 1996). Examples of market circumstances of change include change in targeted audiences and change in products or services offered.

ISU Extension is influenced by all of the various circumstances of change as identified in chapter two. Tichy (1989), Kovoor-Misra (1996), and Staniforth (1996) recognize that the introduction of a new focus to the Extension organization like the CYFAR Initiative can influence several circumstances of change. The circumstances of change influencing ISUE's response to at-risk programming efforts are summarized in Table 8.

Participants identified a number of circumstances of change influencing ISUE's ability to expand programming for at-risk audiences. These circumstances include a national focus on programming for children, youth, and families at-risk (CYFAR) but identify limited resources to support these programming efforts. Participants described conflict between key stakeholders about Extension's work with at-risk audiences and a perceived lack of organizational support for at-risk programming efforts. They also thought that some ISUE staff might lack the knowledge and the willingness to work with at-risk audiences. Participants reflected a lack of understanding about the meaning of the term "at-risk" and
### Table 8. Circumstances of Change Influencing ISUE Response to At-Risk Programming*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Circumstance</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>ISUE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Human and Social</td>
<td>The psychological, physical and social aspects of individuals in the organization.</td>
<td>- unclear about the term &quot;at-risk&quot;&lt;br&gt;- staff attitude toward at-risk audiences&lt;br&gt;- staff capacity and skills&lt;br&gt;- staff opinion about at-risk programming efforts&lt;br&gt;- staff workload</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic</td>
<td>The internal and external financial resources and procedures of the organization.</td>
<td>- limited resources for at-risk programming efforts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political</td>
<td>The influential behaviors used to achieve organizational or individual goals.</td>
<td>- conflict between stakeholders&lt;br&gt;- decrease in traditional audiences&lt;br&gt;- question of organizational support&lt;br&gt;- question of organizational flexibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical</td>
<td>The moral values and related behaviors of individuals and the organization as a whole.</td>
<td>- question of long-term commitment&lt;br&gt;- question of what values the organization represents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Market</td>
<td>The avenues the organization's products are used or sold.</td>
<td>- question of ISUE audience&lt;br&gt;- support for traditional programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technological</td>
<td>The use and application of scientific knowledge in the organization.</td>
<td>- limitations of expert programming model</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Legal circumstances of change were not included due to lack of response from focus group participants.
questioned the appropriateness of the current programming model to address at-risk-programming efforts.

Research question 3: What are the possible organizational change strategies that could strengthen ISUE's programming efforts with at-risk audiences?

To strengthen ISUE's programming efforts with at-risk audiences, staff will need to focus the possible organizational change strategies on the targets of change. The targets of organizational change – individuals, the organizational structure, the organizational leadership, and the organizational culture – portray aspects of the organization and individual in the organization who become the focus of the change process.

The organization's leadership typically has greater influence over the targets of change than the circumstances of change. These circumstances often depict items that the leadership may have little influence over such as new laws, regulations, or citizen participation. Targets of change often denote areas of the organization where leadership does have some influence. For example, ISUE management has more control over mandating staff work with at-risk audiences than assuring that the public will attend the program.

Some organizational change efforts are easier to accomplish than others. Change efforts that target only staff behavior and not issues associated with the organizational structure or culture are often easier to implement. For example, having county Extension Directors extend office hours so working individuals could use services may not be difficult to accomplish. Office staff could rearrange or adjust schedules to maintain longer office hours. But to change an organizational culture that does not give priority to working with at-risk audiences would require staff to engage in the double loop learning process (Argyris,
1997). Staff will need to identify items within the organizational structure that do not support working with this audience and seek to correct these items. For example, staff might identify that the paperwork for developing an at-risk program requires three extra forms and two additional administrative signatures. To change this process staff could seek changes with the bureaucratic paperwork process to reduce the time required to secure signatures, to limit the administrators required to approve the project, or streamline ISUE forms. This change would involve gaining approval from several administrators, the individuals responsible of the paperwork trail, and individuals involved in designing and supplying ISUE forms.

Many organizational change initiatives have costs. To minimize costs organizational leaders often focus on one target hoping it will be the catalyst for other organizational changes (Stewart, 1989). Leaders in ISUE may opt to focus on one of the "transformational" targets (i.e., the organization's leadership and culture) because changes in these areas usually lead to changes in the other areas including the organization's structure and members (Trahant & Burke, 1996). A change within ISU leadership might result in a new leader who is very supportive of at-risk programming efforts. This individual could perpetuate changes within other areas of ISUE that support these efforts. On the other hand, if the new leadership does view at-risk programming efforts as vital to the organization's future, he/she may stifle any attempts to expand these efforts.

ISUE leadership may promote earlier adoption of at-risk programming efforts by concurrently focusing on the four targets of change (Trahant & Burke, 1996). A focused effort to change all the targets at the same time could result in a rapid increase in at-risk programming efforts. However, a focused change effort on all targets may decrease the
organization's action in some areas such as in ISUE traditional programming efforts. Salipante and Golden-Biddle (1995) cautioned public organizations against any radical change efforts like this because rapid changes in traditional programming efforts often diminish the public trust of traditional clientele. Loss of support from traditional clientele who are perceived to have more political power than at-risk audiences could result in less political and financial support for ISUE.

Possible organizational change strategies that could increase ISUE's at-risk programming efforts are reported under the four targets described in chapter two: individual, organizational structure, leadership, and organizational culture (Goodstein & Burke, 1991; Kovoor-Misra, 1996; Stewart, 1989; Trahant & Burke, 1996).

Individual

Individual change within the organization represents changes in the members' skills, values, attitudes, and behaviors. These characteristics may be altered by retraining current staff, hiring new staff, or selectively promoting and terminating current staff (Kovoor-Misra, 1996; Stewart, 1989; Trahant & Burke, 1996). Individual change has been found to be key in organizational change efforts because most organizations don't fire their entire staff and hire all new employees when seeking change (Conner & Patterson, 1982). The organization's leadership can promote individual change by providing staff with information needed to understand the proposed changes (Armeakis, Harris & Mossholder, 1993). However, providing information about the change to staff is only the first step in the productive reasoning process. The organization's leadership must also provide an environment where staff feel comfortable in using the productive reasoning process as they critique their
personal beliefs and correct any discrepancies (Barr & Huff, 1997). If ISUE staff do not feel that the environment is supportive of individual change efforts, few changes will occur and staff will continue to repeat old behaviors.

A national survey by Zoffer et al. (1994) did not identify this lack of staff commitment toward at-risk audiences and suggested that Extension staff held positive attitudes about working with at-risk audiences but lacked the time and the resources to provide at-risk programming efforts. ISUE leadership may need to consider that providing additional resources for at-risk programming efforts and decreasing staff workloads may increase at-risk programming efforts.

Terry (1993) provided ISUE members and leaders with possible strategies to address these individuals change issues. Using Terry's (1993) action wheel, staff could seek to change staff commitment by focusing change efforts at the organization's mission. If ISUE adopts at-risk programming efforts as an organizational priority then staff commitment toward these efforts may change to reflect the organizational priority. Terry (1993) suggested that staff perceptions about at-risk audiences and lack of skills could best be addressed by changes to the organization's structure. The organization's structure allocates resources, both tangible resources such as staff skills and intangible resources such as staff attitudes (Terry, 1993). Leaders and staff could critique the ISUE organizational structure and identify the policies, plans, and procedures that limit the resources needed for staff to provide at-risk programs.
Organizational Structure

ISUE organizational structure includes the management practices and various systems—decision-making, communication, reward, and resource management (Hughes, 1990; Staniforth, 1996; Trahant & Burke, 1996). An organization's structure can be viewed on a continuum with one end representing rigid structures designed for stability and the other end representing structures designed for flexibility. The structure influences a member's ability to change by providing an environment that may or may not support the productive reasoning process (Argyris, 1997). A rigid structure discourages members from engaging in the productive reasoning process, but a flexible environment encourages the process (Argyris, 1997; Morgan, 1989). Focus group participants suggested that ISUE was inflexible when participants sought resources to provide at-risk programming efforts.

To overcome these barriers ISUE could adopt a different programming model, provide information to key stakeholders about at-risk audiences and ISUE's role as a public organization, and develop a long-term response to at-risk programming efforts. If ISUE adopts a programming model that is more collaborative and inclusive of multiple perspectives, current staff would need collaborative skills and knowledge about diverse family life in order to provide successful at-risk programming efforts.

Some staff might welcome a different model, but other staff may be reluctant to give up their status as "expert" and resist efforts to work with others. Some staff may opt to leave the organization, while others may undermine programming efforts, hoping ISUE will return to the previous model.

Terry (1993) suggested that problems associated with the organizational structure are best addressed by seeking changes within the organizational power. Typically, the
organization's leaders make the decisions regarding the organization's resources. If ISUE leadership support at-risk programming effort, these individuals may act as catalysts and change the organizational structure so more resources are available for at-risk programming efforts.

Organizational Leadership

The leadership within the organization is directed by the mission, vision, strategies, and personal styles of the individuals in management positions and plays a significant role in organizational change (Barr & Huff, 1997; Conner & Patterson, 1982; Kono, 1990; Trahant & Burke, 1996). The organizational leadership is viewed as a "transformational" target (Trahant & Burke, 1996) and changes at this level usually lead to changes in the organization's structure and members.

The focus group comments suggested that the participants seemed to view the current leadership as a hierarchy, where changes in work responsibilities come from the top (Rogers & Hough, 1995). Staff expected the administration to clearly define their roles and responsibilities toward at-risk programming efforts.

The participants' comments that suggested current leadership was responsible for determining workload issues are consistent with the ISUE administrative study (Broshar & Jost, 1995). This study determined that the management styles predominantly used by ISUE administrators typically find leaders providing specific directions for staff, insulating staff from any controversies, and assuring staff that the organization is doing good things. These leadership characteristics do not promote an environment supportive for the productive reasoning process because staff are not encouraged to discuss the pros and cons of
controversial issues nor encouraged to question the activities of the organization. In addition, none of the current management characteristics seemed to reflect the participatory, transactional, and visionary leadership perspectives that Manz, Bastien, and Hostager (1991) deemed necessary for sustained organizational change efforts.

Staff may seek to replace current personnel with leadership that is more supportive of these efforts. But staff may some individual and could replace current leadership with someone less supportive of at-risk programming efforts. Or staff may seek to reposition current staff so individuals supportive of at-risk programming will work with staff who provide these services. Staff may opt to increase support for at-risk programming efforts by educating the current leadership about the CYFAR Initiative and its positive impact on program participants. Current leadership may embrace these efforts and provide additional support for at-risk programming efforts.

Terry (1993) suggested those problems with the organization's leadership might best be addressed by changing the organization's mission. ISUE's mission is generated from the organizational culture. Thus, ISUE staff members will need to critique the current mission and change the mission to reflect ISUE's commitment to at-risk programming efforts.

Organizational Culture

Organizational culture represents the unwritten and covert behavior patterns of the organization and basic assumptions of the organization (Schein, 1990). The organizational culture is very difficult to define, and change only occurs through the process of productive reasoning (Argyris, 1997). Using the productive reasoning process, the organization members critique the organization's actual versus intended behaviors, determine
inconsistencies, and then seek to correct the inconsistencies in themselves and the organization. The organization's culture is a key factor in organizational change efforts. The culture provides members an environment that may or may not be supportive of individual and organizational change efforts (Barr & Huff, 1997; Kono, 1997). Cultures that are constructive help individuals with change but stagnant cultures continue in the same old patterns.

The organization's culture is difficult to change because most organizational members believe that the unwritten and covert patterns of the organization are immune to change. Staff usually focus change efforts on the organization's members, the organizational structure, and the organizational leadership in an attempt to overcome these taken-for-granted ideas. For example, to change a culture to support a new program staff, one would need to convince the organization's members that the new program is a priority, change the organizational structure to support these efforts, and persuade the current ISUE leadership to provide support for these efforts.

The six assumptions identified in research question one are all part of ISUE's organizational culture that appears to hinder at-risk programming efforts. ISUE's organizational culture appears to be stagnant. Staff support traditional programming efforts and do not view at-risk programming efforts as part of their regular work. Staff will need to use the productive reasoning process staff to challenge and change these assumptions. The inability of staff to change one or all of the assumptions has the potential for continually limiting at-risk programming efforts.

Discussion following research question one identifies a number of possible organizational strategies for each assumption that could increase ISUE capacity to program
for at-risk audiences. These strategies are summarized in Table 9. To change the ISUE culture, staff will need to use the productive reasoning process to change the various targets of organizational change and thus lead to changes in the assumptions (Argyris, 1997). The six assumptions suggest that the introduction and acceptance of at-risk programming efforts within the ISUE organization is a much deeper issue than just providing resources.

**Table 9. Possible Strategies to Change ISUE Organizational Assumptions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assumption</th>
<th>Strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One&lt;br&gt;At-risk meaning</td>
<td>Increase individual knowledge of at-risk audiences.&lt;br&gt; Increase staff and stakeholders’ knowledge about their role with at-risk audiences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two&lt;br&gt;Lobby support for at-risk programming</td>
<td>Change individual attitudes about at-risk audiences and programming efforts.&lt;br&gt; Develop individual skills needed to work with at-risk audiences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three&lt;br&gt;Different programming model</td>
<td>Adopt a different programming model.&lt;br&gt; Develop individual attitudes/skills needed to use new programming model.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four&lt;br&gt;Support from ISUE leadership</td>
<td>Retrain or retool current leadership style.&lt;br&gt; Encourage current leadership to adopt changes in the decision-making system, reward system, and resource system that would support at-risk programming efforts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five&lt;br&gt;Regular Extension work</td>
<td>Communicate to staff and public ISUE role with at-risk programming, organizational policies, procedures and structures that limit at-risk programming efforts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Six&lt;br&gt;Agriculture is ISUE primary mission</td>
<td>Encourage ISUE staff to critique personal assumptions and organizational policies, procedures and structures that limit at-risk programming efforts.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
to address the programming needs. A critique of the circumstances of change influencing at-risk programming efforts, the six assumptions, and the potential targets of change suggest that at-risk programming efforts will never be fully appreciated, accepted, or urged forward by the organization until many ISUE actions are challenged and changed. Terry's (1993) action wheel helps staff realize the interdependent relationship of all organization's actions and the limiting factor each action has on at-risk programming efforts.

Summary

The study identifies a number of assumptions related to individual, organizational structure, leadership, and organizational culture that inhibit ISUE's at-risk programming efforts. This study describes assumptions dealing with ambiguity about the term "at-risk," a lack of understanding about at-risk audiences, and skepticism among Extension staff as to the relationship between at-risk programming and traditional Extension programming efforts. Extension staff described working with at-risk audiences as a major change in organizational priorities and questioned administrative and other key stakeholder support for this change.

Focus group participants identified a number of circumstances of change that limit ISUE's work with at risk audiences. These circumstances included the following: (a) a lack of staff understanding about at-risk audiences and their role with at-risk audiences; (b) staff attitudes toward at-risk audiences and at-risk programming efforts; (c) staff workloads; (d) staff skills needed to work in collaborative programming efforts; (e) a lack of organizational support and resources for at-risk programming efforts; (f) conflict between stakeholders about ISUE role with at-risk programming; (g) and limitations of the expert programming model.
The study identifies a number of possible organizational change strategies that could increase ISUE capacity to program for at-risk audiences. Participants identified individuals, the organizational structure, ISUE leadership, and the organizational culture as possibly the focus of change efforts. Organizational change strategies included the following: (a) increasing Extension staff understanding and knowledge about at-risk audiences and their role in at-risk programming efforts; (b) increasing administrative support and resources for at-risk programs; (c) adopting new organizational systems (decision-making, reward, resource management, and communication) that support at-risk programming efforts; and (d) changing the current organizational culture that doesn't view at-risk programming efforts as part of the regular Extension work.

The study found that the introduction and acceptance of at-risk programming efforts within ISUE is a much deeper issue than just providing resources to address the programming needs. For ISUE to fully support these efforts, changes must be made at all levels of the organization. Addressing these changes is a difficult process, and to sustain these efforts ISUE staff must engage in the productive reasoning process and change individual and organizational assumptions that limit these efforts (Argyris, 1997).
CHAPTER 6. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to examine the individual and organizational assumptions that contribute to or inhibit Extension staff programming efforts with at-risk audiences. To better overcome resistance to change and create sustained change, the organization's members must seek to examine their both personal and the organization's underlying assumptions. Changes to assumptions that hinder the change process are considered central to creating sustainable organizational change (Argyris, 1997). The information generated from the study is designed to help Iowa State University Extension build capacity for at-risk programming efforts and to answer the following research questions:

1. In what ways do the assumptions held by ISUE staff support or hinder organizational change efforts designed to enhance the quality and quantity of programming for at-risk audiences?

2. What circumstances of change are influencing Iowa State University Extension (ISUE) staff ability to program for at-risk audiences?

3. What are possible organizational change strategies that could strengthen ISUE's programming efforts with at-risk audiences?

An interpretive research approach was used in this study. Focus groups were conducted with Extension staff to gain insight into how staff viewed at-risk programming efforts, typical or potential barriers to these efforts, and staff development training needs. This chapter will include a summary of the literature review, a description of the setting, a review of the findings, conclusions drawn from the study, recommendations, and suggestions for future research.
Summary of Literature Review

Lindblom (1997) concluded that a fundamental barrier to change is an individual’s cognitive inability to step back from one’s present situation and take a dispassionate, objective view of the messages being received and the messages one sends to others. He proposed that individuals are unable to step back because they possess deep-seated assumptions that deny them the opportunity to rationally address issues (Lindblom, 1997). Argyris (1997) suggested that individuals could overcome their assumptions by using the productive reasoning process.

Individuals who use the productive reasoning process continuously critique their actual behaviors against their intended behaviors to identify mismatches (Argyris, 1997; Kovoor-Misra, 1996). Individuals sustain changes by changing the assumption that led to the error. Individuals within organizations can also use this process to promote organizational change efforts. Organizational members who use the productive reasoning process can identify and change policies, procedures or organizational assumptions that led to mismatches between the organization’s goals and actual behavior (Trahant & Burke, 1996).

Argyris (1997) identified the difficulty in realizing organizational change without changing individual beliefs that conflict with the proposed organizational change. An individual or an organization that only changes behaviors but not the underlying assumptions which supported the old behavior cannot sustain the new behavior over a period of time (Argyris, 1997).

As stated earlier, Terry (1993) challenged staff to use his action wheel and to think about problems in different ways as they seek solutions. The action wheel could aid staff in
the productive reasoning process by identifying areas within an organization where inaccurate assumptions may exist.

Successful organizational change efforts also consider the circumstances of change that impact the organization. The circumstances of change represent the many internal and external events that influence change efforts such as laws impacting the organization funding, staff beliefs and attitudes, and the public perception of the organization. Some circumstances of change occur at the macro level of society while others happen at the micro level of the organization. The circumstances of change influencing organizations include the following: (a) human and social, (b) legal, (c) economic, (d) political, (e) ethical, (f) market, and (g) technological (Kovoor-Mirsa, 1996; Staniforth, 1996; Tichy, 1989).

Typically the organization's leadership has more control over certain aspects of the organization and individuals in the organization than over many of the external circumstances of change. By focusing on these certain targets in the change process, an organization can strategically plan and produce change. Goodstein and Burke (1991), Kovoor-Misra (1996), Stewart (1989), and Trahant and Burke (1996) identified four targets of organizational change – individual, the organization's structure, leadership, and (d) the organization's culture.

Many organizational change initiatives have costs. To minimize costs in terms of lower productivity, leadership typically focuses on one target, hoping it will be the catalyst for other organizational changes (Stewart, 1989). Trahant and Burke (1996) concluded that focusing on "transformational" targets (i.e., the organization's leadership and culture) usually, but not always, leads to changes in the organization's structure and members. An
organization may promote earlier adoption of a proposed change by focusing on several targets of change at the same time (Trahant & Burke, 1996).

**Summary of Iowa State University Extension**

Iowa State University Extension Service was created in 1903 to serve the social and educational needs of the state's rural and farm populations. ISUE has undergone structural changes, faced financial challenges, and adopted new technologies throughout their existence. During the late 1980s and 1990s, ISUE has introduced issues programming through National Initiatives. Some staff suggested that significant organizational changes would need to occur in order to achieve the Initiative's programming goals.

**Summary of the Study's Implementation**

Focus groups were selected as a method for this study to explore the complexity of the issues by capitalizing on the diversity of participant's experiences with at-risk audiences. Participants for a purposive sample of Extension staff were recruited from a list of names generated by the Children, Youth, and Families At-Risk (CYFAR) Committee. Individuals not directly involved in at-risk programming efforts and staff with primary responsibility for at-risk programming were recruited to provide a diversity of opinions and attitudes toward at-risk programming efforts. No member of the CYFAR Committee was included in the sample.

A total of three focus groups were conducted with Extension staff in November 1995. Each focus group lasted approximately two hours and had either six or seven participants.
All focus group discussions were audiotaped, transcribed, and analyzed using the software program NUD*IST.

Summary of the Study's Findings

The assumptions identified in this study emerged after a detailed analysis of the focus group transcripts and represent the predominate sentiment of focus group members beliefs about the ISUE organization, at-risk audiences, and at-risk programming efforts. All the assumptions appear to limit Extension staff work with at-risk audiences and limit the organization's ability to change.

Assumption 1: A lack of clarity about the meaning of the term "at-risk" offers Extension staff a justification not to provide at-risk programming.

Assumption 2: At-risk populations cannot help Extension gain political or monetary support for their program.

Assumption 3: A different programming model is needed for at-risk programming efforts.

Assumption 4: The current Extension leadership does not support at-risk programming efforts and this limits at-risk programming.

Assumption 5: At-risk programming efforts are not viewed as part of the regular Extension work.

Assumption 6: The primary mission for Iowa State University Extension is agriculture.

The first and second assumptions demonstrate the need to change the staff skills, values, attitudes, and behaviors. These assumptions show that the current staff prefer to give services to individuals who support and sustain the organization's activities. The assumptions also reflect the difficulty in accomplishing organizational change without changing individual assumptions (Argyris, 1997).
Assumptions three and four demonstrated that changes are needed within the organization's structure and leadership before at-risk programming efforts will increase. Assumption three suggests that the current programming development model is inadequate for at-risk programming efforts. Assumption four indicates that visible support by ISUE leadership could increase at-risk programming efforts.

The last two assumptions affirm the need to change the ISUE culture. Staff perceive that the current culture does not embrace at-risk programming efforts as part of the customary work of ISUE, nor does the organization value these activities.

Focus group participants identified a number of circumstances of change influencing ISUE's ability to expand programming for at-risk audiences. Participants identified Extension national focus on programming for children, youth, and families at-risk (CYFAR), as having a positive influence of these efforts. Other circumstances of change identified by focus group participants are viewed as barriers to expanding at-risk-programming efforts.

These barriers included (a) conflicts between key stakeholders about Extension's work with at-risk programming efforts; (b) a perceived lack of organizational support for at-risk programming efforts; (c) lack of staff knowledge about the term "at-risk" and the at-risk audiences; (d) an unwillingness to work with at-risk audiences; (e) the current programming model; and (f) limited resources to support at-risk programming efforts.

Possible organizational change strategies that could strengthen ISUE programming for at-risk audiences were reported under the four targets of change. The targets of organizational change represent aspects of the organization and individuals in the organization who could become the focus for the change process. Focus group participants identified current ISUE staff, the organizational structure, the organizational leadership, and
the organizational culture as potential targets for change. Participants implied that some current staff might not have the knowledge or skills to work with at-risk audiences or other agencies. Other participants questioned current staff's understanding of the at-risk population as being adequate to meet the needs of this audience.

Focus group participants suggested that redesigning the current organizational structure, in particular, the current programming model, the communication system, the reward system, the decision-making system, and the resource system could increase at-risk programming efforts. Participants also indicated that observable support for at-risk programs by ISUE leadership could encourage these efforts. Staff also indicated that changing the ISUE organizational culture to one that acknowledges at-risk programming efforts as an organizational priority would increase the quality and quantity of programs.

Conclusions Drawn from the Study

The CYFAR Initiative calls upon ISUE staff to expand services to non-traditional audiences, and current staff seem to be struggling with issues on how to expand current services or develop new services to reach this audience. This study demonstrates that for Iowa State University Extension to create meaningful and sustained change in expanding at-risk programming efforts, individual and organizational assumptions need to be exposed. Staff must be provided with training opportunities that change assumptions about working with at-risk audiences.

Focus group participants identified items within the organizational structure, the organizational leadership, and the organizational culture that they perceived needed to be changed before at-risk programming efforts would increase. Thus, the study recognized that
providing additional staff development training or new job descriptions is not sufficient in itself to sustain organizational change. Issues related to organizational culture, structure, and leadership must also be addressed in the change process.

**Recommendations**

A preliminary report (see Appendix H) was shared with the Families Extension staff at an inservice session in April 1995. This information was also shared with the Expanded Family Nutrition Education Program staff at an inservice session in May 1996. Each of the groups was asked to reflect upon the initial findings and identify strategies that ISU Extension needs to initiate in order to increase programming efforts for children, youth, and families living in at-risk environments. Some of the following recommendations came from these information-sharing and strategy sessions. The recommendations will be reported under the targets of change categories.

**Individuals**

- Provide staff training that clarifies and defines the term "at-risk" and provides information about the needs of at-risk audiences.
- Hire new staff who blend strong facilitative skills with subject-matter expertise.
- Provide collaboration training for Extension staff and community partners.
- Dialogue with staff about the assumptions of working with "at-risk" citizens.
- Train staff to use the asset-based approach to education to compensate for the needs-based approach.
- Hire new staff who enhance diversity of Extension staff.
- Release staff who are unwilling to support new changes or different job responsibilities.
Organizational Structure

- Explore ways to involve at-risk audiences in defining needs, planning programs, and participating in educational activities.

- Adopt a reward system that acknowledges and prizes staff who do innovative programming with children, youth, and families at risk.

- Determine best use of existing resources – monetary and non-monetary – for at-risk programming.

- Foster communication at all levels of the organization and with external partners regarding the priority of at-risk programming efforts.

- Adopt a programming model that is more collaborative and inclusive in design.

- Adopt a training system that allows staff input into topics and issues presented.

Organizational Leadership

- Develop a unified and focused message to all of Extension and our partners about our role with at-risk programming.

- Encourage upper administration to show support for "at-risk" programming.

- Recruit Extension council members who represent or are from "at-risk" groups.

- Ask citizens from "at-risk" groups to serve on referendum committees.

- Reorganize and/or retool current leadership to reflect support for at-risk programming efforts.

Organizational Culture

- Reacquaint Extension staff with their historical mission of bringing education to the disenfranchised.

- Reacquaint Extension staff with their public organization mission of providing services for all populations, services that are not limited to agriculture.
- Encourage staff in using the productive reasoning process to address assumptions and beliefs about "at-risk" issues and programs.

- Ask staff to write and broadly share impact statements about current CYFAR program efforts.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Staff use of focus group interviews provided a timely method to identify some barriers to at-risk programming efforts within ISUE, but these interviews seemed to accentuate the needs of the organization. Future research might include identifying supportive organizational components within ISUE that have the potential to increase at-risk programming efforts. Researchers could then identify how these positive components could be utilized to increase at-risk programming efforts.

This study sought to identify personal and the organization's assumptions that either supports or hinders Extension capacity to provide at-risk programming efforts. The study also sought to identify circumstances of change influencing ISUE and identify potential targets for organizational change efforts. A national organizational change survey, part of the CYFAR evaluation collaboration, gathered information about organizational change outcomes related to the CYFAR mission between September 1997 and July 1998. The survey recognized states that were successful at addressing organizational change efforts in support of the CYFAR mission.

A comparison of ISUE's survey results against this study could identify areas within the organization that have changed to increase at-risk programming efforts. Researchers could also compare ISUE change efforts with change efforts in three states (Wisconsin,
Delaware, and North Carolina) that were reported for doing exemplary jobs in demonstrating organizational changes that increased at-risk programming efforts.

Researchers and organization members could research and develop alternative scenarios describing the future of at-risk programming efforts within ISUE. Team members could strategically plan and produce organizational change efforts that reflect the selected scenario.

This study demonstrated that to create meaningful and sustained change in an organization, individual and organizational assumptions need to be exposed. Staff must also be provided with training opportunities that change perceptions and philosophies about working with at-risk audiences. However, the study recognized that providing additional staff development training or new job descriptions is not sufficient in itself to sustain organizational change. Issues related to organizational culture and leadership must also be addressed in the change process.
APPENDIX A. RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

Recruitment Questionnaire

Name ________________________________

Job Title/ county/area ________________________________

Telephone Number ________________________________

E-mail Address ________________________________

Hello, This is Diane Klemme, and I am calling from Iowa State University. I am presently a graduate student and working with Karen Shirer on the Children, Youth and Family At-Risk Committee. We are asking a selected group of Extension staff to join us for a focus group discussion about the staff training and educational needs in relation to the CYFAR project. Your comments will be part of a larger sample so I want to assure you that your confidentiality will be protected.

The focus group for your area is scheduled for:

Date: 

Time: 

Location: 

The discussion will last for approximately two hours. As a thank you for your time – we want to give you a resource book to take home. I will bring some books along such as: Leadership and the New Science, Stewardship and the Courageous Follower.

Do you have any questions?

Are you willing to participate in this group?

IF THEY ANSWER YES (JUMP UP AND DOWN)

Great! You will be receiving a letter of confirmation about this information. If you need additional directions or need to cancel, please call me at 515-292-1172 or e-mail me at dklemme@iastate.edu. Thank you very much for your cooperation. We look forward to your input.

IF THEY ANSWER NO

I'm sorry you are unable to participate. Thank you for your time.
APPENDIX B. ANSWER SHEET FOR RECRUITMENT

What is CYFAR?

Children, Youth and Families At-Risk Committee (State Level): Goal is to improve the ability to help families who are at risk to raise children, who are healthy, contributing citizens. Also the committee hopes to improve the well being of children youth and families at risk.

Who is funding this?

The CYFAR committee receives a Federal Extension Grant as part of a 5-year plan to develop a common vision in regard to the CYFAR project.

How will this information be used?

The data will be used in developing the Capacity Building Institute: Which will be offered to aid Extension Staff in professional development.

Who else is going to participate?

Three focus groups will be conducted -- eastern, central, and western Iowa. The groups will consist of CEEDS and Field Specialists. The project also plans to conduct 3 coalition focus groups and 3 consumer focus groups.

Will this be confidential?

Your comments are part of a larger sample that will have no individual identification.

Questions people asked me:

Number in group? Hopefully 6-9
Will questions be sent ahead of time? NO
Can I get names to coordinate travel? YES
APPENDIX C. CONFIRMATION LETTER

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

University Extension
October 13, 1995

Staff Name
Address
City, State/Province Zip/Postal

Dear [Recipient]:

Thank you for volunteering to participate in our children, youth and families at risk focus group to be held:

Date:
Time:
Location:

The focus group will last approximately 2 hours and focus on questions in three key areas:

1. Key ingredients to successful programming with children, youth and families living in at-risk environments
2. Typical or potential roadblocks and barriers to success
3. Staff development training needs, both in terms of content and process

We hope to use the information from the focus groups to initiate staff development activities that will enhance Extension's capacity to reach children, youth and families who are at-risk populations. The focus group will be audiotaped and later transcribed for data analysis. All comments gathered from the focus groups will be compiled into one large report. Names, geographic areas or other descriptors will be removed after the data are transcribed.

Again, thank you for your participation and I look forward to meeting you on the (DATE). If you have any questions or unable to attend the focus group please contact me at: dklemme@iastate.edu or 515-294-1172.

Sincerely,

Diane Klemme
Research Assistant

Karen Shirer
Assistant Director to Families
APPENDIX D. FOCUS GROUP SCRIPT

Introduction: Thank you for taking time out of your busy schedules to participate in today’s focus group. My name is Diane Klemme and I’m a research assistant working with the CYFAR grant. This is xxxxx xxxxxxxx and is the project associate. Today, xxxxx will be taking notes and will provide a summary at the end of the discussion. As many of you are already aware, ISU Extension has made a commitment to expand programming for children, youth and families at-risk and violence prevention. While these efforts involve working more effectively with people who are already involved in Extension, these efforts also include working with, at least in some areas, new groups of people. Our goal today is to discuss what you see as some of the key ingredients for working with programs related to children, youth and families at risk. We also want to talk about what you view as some of the training and education needs for Extension staff as we begin expanding at-risk programming. In this information gathering process, we plan to conduct nine focus groups around Iowa. These groups will include Extension staff, coalitions, and consumers.

The comments today will be audiotaped so I ask that you please speak one at a time. I want to assure you that what you say is for our information gathering purposes only. Your comments will be part of a larger report so you need not worry that your name will be attached to your comments. I do ask that you use your professional judgment when discussing today’s comments and process with your peers. As a token of our appreciation, you will have the opportunity to select a resource book at the end of today’s focus group.

Are there any questions before we begin?

1. Let’s begin by going around the table and introducing ourselves. Tell us your name, position and the geographic area you serve.

2. Next I would like us to go around the table again and share with the group your experiences working in the area of children, youth and families at risk.

3. Now I would ask you to think about programs you feel are exceptionally good at reaching children, youth and families living in at risk environments. What makes these great programs?

4. Now think about extension colleagues who you think are exceptionally good at working with at-risk issues. What characteristics do these people possess?

5. Think about working with children, youth and families who are at risk versus working with “less vulnerable” children, youth, and families. What do you see as similarities of working with these two different groups?

CUE: In what way does working with CYFAR use the same set of skills, attitudes and knowledge as working with “less vulnerable” groups?
6. Now what do you see as the differences between working with children, youth and families at-risk and less vulnerable groups?

7. What are some of the major barriers or roadblocks that seem to prevent Extension staff from being successful in working with children, youth and families at risk?

CUES: What about some of these? Do any of these seem to be major barriers?
- insufficient resource
- wrong staff
- staff morale or motivation
- lack of good staff training
- conflicting philosophies/approaches
- receptivity/degree of support for CYFAR programming
- organizational support
- racism
- poverty
- poor staff attitude

8. What factors might influence more staff to increase their involvement with children, youth and families at risk issues?

9. We are going to shift gears and focus on the knowledge, skills and attitudes that research has shown people need to work effectively with children, youth and families at risk. You are being given a list of these capacities. I would like you to take fifteen minutes and note your top ten. Please feel free to get up and refill your coffee cup and grab a snack. We will begin again at ........ to discuss your selections. I will be collecting the capacity list at the end of the focus group so please do not put your name on it

BREAK

10. Let's begin again by listing everyone's top FIVE. (list on flip charts- need easel)

11. Now that we have this list, let's review the items noted in relation to the different levels within the organization. How important do you think each of these capacities is for CEEDs? For field specialists? I'm just going to make a grid and we can do this by a quick show of hands. (ask capacity listed at each level)

12. What other knowledge, skills or attitudes do staff need for working effectively with children, youth and families at risk efforts?
13. Let's shift gears again, I want you to think back to past inservice training experience and recall some of the better ones. Tell me what made them so unusually good? (give people time to think)

CUES:  
What happened before training?  
What happened during training?  
What happened after training?

14. In 1996, ISU Extension CYFAR committee is initiating a staff development program called the “Capacity Building Institute” for reaching children, youth and family living in at risk environments. ISUE staff will have an opportunity to participate in training and educational programs that will promote effective programming for youth and families living in at risk environments.

Who should participate in the institute?

What suggestions would you give the CYFAR committee as they develop the institute?

How might the committee get non-receptive staff more involved?

If you could put one topic in the institute, what would it be?

15. Our purpose today was to identify training needs for ISUE staff. This is part of the multi-year plan by ISUE to more effectively reach CYFAR. Have we missed anything?

16. XXXXX will now share her summary of today’s discussion.

17. Any comments?

I thank you for your time. Please be sure to select a resource book from the table.

SUPPLIES NEEDED
name tags  
refreshments -- coffee, juice, cookies, cups, napkins, cream, sugar, spoons  
tape recorder and microphone (extra tapes and batteries)  
handout - capacity list  
flip chart/paper and markers  
easel for flip chart  
resource books to be given to group
APPENDIX E. CAPACITY BUILDING FACTORS CHECKLIST

Definition of capacity: the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that enable individuals and organizations to effectively reach children, youth and families (CYF) living in at-risk environments. Learning these capacities can begin with reading books, participating in inservices, or taking graduate courses. But capacity building also involves learning by experience, feedback, and reflection that lead to changed assumptions and beliefs about prevention education.

1. **Collaboration**
   - _a) knows how to initiate, facilitate, maintain, and evaluate collaborations_
   - _b) actively participates in community task forces working with CYF-related issues_
   - _c) establishes coalitions or task forces and shares their leadership with other community partners who work with or are interested in prevention programming_
   - _d) uses community resources and referral systems to meet the needs of children, youth, and families who participate in their programs_
   - _e) uses communication skills such as negotiation and conflict management to overcome turf issues and resolve differences_
   - _f) moves beyond networking or sharing information with other and organizations to creating a shared vision and mission_
   - _g) works with others to change systems as well as provide educational programs for youth and families_

2. **Program development process**
   - _a) is currently involved in designing and developing programs for CYF_
   - _b) focuses on causes in the planning process and knows that addressing short-term problems and symptoms is not adequate_
   - _c) engages youth, parents, and other community members in assessing community problems and finding meaningful solutions_
   - _d) responds to the needs of children, youth and families_
e) includes potentially controversial issues in programming (e.g., violence prevention, sexual harassment, teen sexuality)

f) continually learns about innovative approaches for reaching audiences like teen parents, single parents, and people enrolled in the Family Investment Program

g) incorporates services that link individuals to community resources and the world of work

h) encourages voluntary participation in all programs and services

i) helps youth and families acquire basic skills and promotes informal support among their peers

j) designs and implements an evaluation plan that encompasses needs assessment, process evaluation, and outcome evaluation

3. Knowledge base

a) understands the ecological, risk-focused approach to prevention

b) accommodates different learning styles in educational programs for youth and adults

c) uses principles of child and youth development throughout the program planning and delivery process

d) understands the principles of family support and resiliency and their organization's role in this approach

e) participates in staff development and training related to children, youth and families

f) accesses the electronic databases via the Internet for the most current research, models and resources

4. Embracing diversity

a) understands different cultural and ethnic values and traditions

b) acknowledges and values the diversity of family life
c) is aware of personal values, perceptions, skills, and prejudices when serving diverse audiences

d) modifies programs and manages assumptions and lead to evaluating alternative scenarios

6. Supporter for children, youth and families living in at-risk environments

a) has a clear, long-term commitment to supporting children, youth and families living in at-risk environments

b) clearly understands and communicates the value of prevention programming

c) educates youth and families to advocate for their own needs at the local, state and national levels

d) educates policy makers (local, state, and national) on children, youth and family issues

e) creates public forums in communities for bringing together diverse viewpoints for addressing issues related to children, youth and families

f) regularly updates governing boards and councils on programming for children, youth and families

g) advocates for the reallocation of organizational and other resources to support programming for children, youth and families

h) supports changes in the systems and conditions that place children, youth and families at risk

i) uses an organizational change process (like Senge's learning organization) to create support for children, youth, and family programs.

7. Fundraising and resource development

a) explores how to use existing resource to serve children, youth, and families in new way

b) knows about sources of private and governmental funding

c) continually refines proposal writing skills
d) write applications for outside funding to support programs that reach children, youth, and families

e) collaboratively submits funding applications when appropriate

f) effectively manages and administers funded projects
APPENDIX F. HUMAN SUBJECTS APPROVAL FORM

Checklist for Attachments and Time Schedule

The following are attached (please check):

12.☐ Letter or written statement to subjects indicating clearly:
   a) purpose of the research
   b) the use of any identifier codes (names, #’s), how they will be used, and when they will be removed (see Item 17)
   c) an estimate of time needed for participation in the research and the place
   d) if applicable, location of the research activity
   e) how you will ensure confidentiality
   f) in a longitudinal study, note when and how you will contact subjects later
   g) participation is voluntary; nonparticipation will not affect evaluations of the subject

13.☐ Consent form (if applicable)

14.☐ Letter of approval for research from cooperating organizations or institutions (if applicable)

15.☐ Data-gathering instruments

16. Anticipated dates for contact with subjects:

   First Contact   Last Contact

   November 3, 1995   November 9, 1995

   Month / Day / Year   Month / Day / Year

17. If applicable: anticipated date that identifiers will be removed from completed survey instruments and/or audio or visual tapes will be erased:

   January 30, 1996

   Month / Day / Year

18. Signature of Departmental Executive Officer

   Jude K. Brown   10/19/95

   Department or Administrative Unit

   FCS Education + Studies

19. Decision of the University Human Subjects Review Committee:

   ☒ Project Approved   Project Not Approved   No Action Required

   Patricia M. Keith   10/17/95

   Name of Committee Chairperson   Signature of Committee Chairperson
APPENDIX G. PRELIMINARY REPORT

Staff Development Assessment for the
STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY PROGRAMS FOR CHILDREN, YOUTH AND
FAMILIES LIVING IN AT-RISK ENVIRONMENTS

Preliminary Report
For
Families Inservice

Aprile 17, 1996

Prepared by
Karen Shirer, Ph.D.
Diana Broshar       Diane Klemme
Iowa State University Extension to Families
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This focus group study would not have been possible without the assistance of many dedicated people. We are grateful to JaneAnn Stout for her moral and financial support of this project. A special thanks to Rhonda Wiley-Jones, Pat Anderson, and Jane Hayes-Johnk for the inservice training that gave a forum for trying out the idea of this study. The CYFAR committee gave their guidance and support in identifying possible sites and participants, and will have the opportunity to use this information in future planning activities. Beverly Berna, Janet Brown, Jody Elliott, Ann Lohman, Bob Owen, and Sharon Wasteney provided local coordination for the various focus groups. We want to especially recognize all the Extension staff, community partners, and citizens who gave of their time and selves to participate in the focus groups. Without them this project would not have been possible.

The focus group team was made up of Diane Klemme, Diana Broshar, and Karen Shirer. We worked together learning the nuances of focus group interviews, writing the questionnaires, securing locations, recruiting participants, moderating and co-moderating, reviewing transcripts, paying the bills, summarizing the findings, preparing the poster session, and writing this report. It truly has been a team effort!

This project was partially funded by the Extension Service U.S. Department of Agriculture, under special project #95-EYAR-1-2010.
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INTRODUCTION

All children and youth face some degree of risk as they grow from birth to adulthood. However, trends show that a growing proportion of Iowa children are at higher risk for negative outcomes due to family, community, social, political, and economic conditions beyond their control. These negative outcomes include infant mortality, poor health, child abuse and neglect, undernourishment, substance abuse, crime and violence, teen pregnancy, and academic underachievement.

Iowa State University Extension (ISUE) is concerned with improving the ability of families to raise children and youth who are healthy and contributing citizens. Extension wants to improve the well-being of all children, youth, and families, especially those who are at risk for not meeting their basic needs. Our efforts focus on increasing the capacity of parents and professionals to meet the needs of children and youth, and on increasing community support for families and youth with limited resources.

In 1995, ISUE was awarded a 5-year state strengthening project grant from the Cooperative State Research and Education Service-USDA titled Strengthening Community Programs for Children, Youth and Families Living in At-Risk Environments. The project's purpose is to strengthen our organizational capacity for programming with children, youth, and families living in at-risk environments. The project goals are: (1) to carry out a comprehensive plan for expanding statewide capacity for implementing community-based initiatives for children, youth, and families; and (2) to provide support for two targeted community projects to establish family-centered programs.

This report describes the organizational capacity assessment conducted by ISU Extension as part of the first goal of its state strengthening project. The assessment was designed to obtain information about the: (1) key knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed by staff for successfully reaching children, youth, and families at risk; (2) barriers that inhibit staff from effectively working with at-risk audiences; and (3) priority needs to be addressed by staff development activities.

This report is a draft of the final report which will be completed by Fall 1996. It contains a description of the research approach and the findings from the study. The final report will also include recommendations and conclusions.
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

Purpose of the Study

This assessment was designed to determine the current capacity of ISU Extension for effectively working with children, youth, and families living in at-risk environments, and to identify personal and organizational barriers that hinder them from effectively reaching these audiences. Three groups of people participated in a series of 11 focus groups: (1) Extension field staff in county director and field specialist positions; (2) community coalitions; and (3) consumers of educational programs and services for at-risk families.

The findings of this assessment will provide guidance to Iowa's five-year state strengthening project that was launched in summer 1995. It will provide information to guide the development of resources and curriculum to support community-based initiatives for children, youth, and families; and to design staff development activities for ISU Extension staff and their community partners. The report will also be shared with key decision makers both within and outside of Extension so that they might reduce the barriers that staff and others encounter when working with at-risk audiences.

A training needs assessment conducted by the Search Institute and the Minnesota Extension Service provided the initial framework for this study (Saito, Blythe, Krueger, & Walker, 1992). This earlier study discovered what Extension staff, volunteers, non-Extension youth workers, and youth understood about the keys to successful youth work, about strengths and barriers of programs, and about what assistance they believed would be helpful. This current study is unique in that it focuses only on Iowa, and not the entire nation, and examines both youth and family programming in a collaborative community environment.
Rationale for Using Focus Groups

Focus groups have been used for many years in the business sector for marketing research about products and services. In recent years, educational and other non-profit organizations have found focus groups to be a useful method of gathering information about their programs and services.

Focus group interviews were selected as the method for this study in order to capture the richness of experiences and the complexity of the issues for Extension staff, collaborators, and program participants. Group interviews can also be particularly helpful when trying to uncover differing opinions among groups of people. This qualitative perspective creates a dialogue among participants in an attempt to see how respondents define the situation, gaps, and how those gaps can be resolved.

Focus groups provide a relaxed and informal environment that enhances reflection and is respectful of differing points of views and values. Ideas are refined as they are presented, challenged, and discussed by focus group participants. The process permits program developers to uncover unanticipated incentives and barriers to participation in programs or use of services.

These focus groups provide useful information for planning and designing products, programs, and marketing strategies for children, youth, and families programs. However, this information can not be generalized to all Extension staff, all collaborations, or all consumers in Iowa. The logistics of focus groups prevent large sample sizes and, therefore, statistical analyses can not be conducted as with large-scale surveys.

Description of the Focus Groups

A total of nine focus groups were held in communities around Iowa from November 1995 through February 1996. Groups ranged in size from five to twelve participants. Ideal focus group size is six to nine people.

Three focus groups were held for each of these groups of people: 1) Extension family and youth field specialists and CEEDs representing all subject areas; 2) community coalitions focus groups were held -- one in an urban neighborhood and two in more rural communities; and 3) consumers of human services and/or participants in educational programs designed for children, youth, and families at risk.

Separate interview guides were developed for each of the three types of focus groups. Each guide contained a series of questions designed to elicit participants' perceptions and opinions about: (1) key ingredients or characteristics of successful programming with children, youth, and families living in at-risk environments; (2) typical or potential roadblocks or barriers to successful programming; and (3) staff development training needs, both in terms of content and process.
Recruitment of Focus Group Participants

Participants were recruited for the focus groups by a variety of methods. Extension staff were recruited from a list of names generated by the Extension Children, Youth, and Families At Risk committee. The Extension groups were made up of County Directors and Field Specialists. The groups were designed to include both staff not directly involved in at-risk programming and staff with primary responsibility for at-risk programming. No members of the CYFAR committee were included in the focus groups. The Extension focus groups were held at locations in the western, central, and eastern parts of the state.

Community coalitions were selected based on staff recommendations and interest; an effort was made to involve at least one urban and one rural coalition. The county Extension education director invited coalition members to participate in the focus group.

Consumer focus groups were recruited by a local Extension contact. One consumer focus group was arranged to reflect cultural diversity. Participants represented low-income parents who were involved in prevention education programs, receiving services or volunteering in grass-roots neighborhood associations. Lack of child care was found to be a potential barrier for participating in the consumer focus groups.
Analysis of Focus Group Information

Analyses of the focus group data involved three simultaneous activities: (1) narrowing the collected data to be dealt with; (2) organizing the data for analysis; and (3) drawing and verifying conclusions.

All focus group discussions were audiotaped and then transcribed for entry onto the computer for the purposes of analysis. The software package Data Collector was used to organize and code text data. Field notes were kept by the moderator and assistant moderator of each focus group. Both transcripts and field notes were analyzed for the purposes of preparing this report.

The data was analyzed by the following steps:
1. Transcripts and field notes were read one group at a time.
2. Emerging themes were identified from the data.
3. Themes were organized by focus group type and following six key questions:
   What are the key ingredients or characteristics of successful programs for children, youth and families and the staff who work in them?
   What are the capacities that people need to work effectively with children, youth and families in at-risk environments?
   What are the roadblocks or barriers to developing successful programs?
   What kind of staff development activities would enable Extension and community partners to offer more successful programs?
   What is your reaction to the term "at risk"?
   What is Extension's image with the public and what can Extension do to reach a broader audience?
CHARACTERISTICS OF SUCCESSFUL PROGRAMS: What are the key ingredients or characteristics of successful programs for children, youth and families and the staff who work in them?

Participants in all three types of focus groups were asked to identify key characteristics of successful programs and the staff who work in those programs. Here are the themes that emerged from each kind of focus groups.

Extension staff said that successful programs:
- develop programs within and by the community-community initiated and driven.
- involve learners in community action planning, represent diverse viewpoints, create partnerships.
- recognize that families are diverse and that most families have strengths and dreams.
- focus on assets, capacities, and strengths rather than just deficits or needs.
- help families access community resources and services; provide one-on-one support.
- strive for empowerment-limit use of expert model.
- offer activities for different age levels; flexible and adaptable to emerging needs.
- work for long-term solutions and not short-term involvement; maintain a sustained effort.

Coalitions said successful programs:
- offer activities in convenient, central location.
- offer services at low-cost.
- network and collaborate with other agencies.
- provide early intervention at-risk situations; focus on prevention.
- focus on whole family and their diverse needs.
- acknowledge parents' role as children's first and most important educators.

Consumers said successful programs:
- offer low-cost, affordable services and activities.
- make activities available at convenient times and locations; provide transportation.
- provide 24 hour accessibility-on call.
- offer programs for the whole family; encourage quality time with children.
- provide on-site child care and educational opportunities for children.
- support diversity.
- teach appropriate skills-consumer skills, parenting, etc.
- focus on assets and strengths of participants; tailor programs to individual needs.
- provide a safe place to share concerns and receive support/network with other parents.
- offer at-home services - workers willing to visit families in their homes.

Comments by participants included:

"... (programs) operate under the condition that you're working with them, not just providing to them... too limited if you just walk in and say 'we're coming in as the experts.'" -- Extension
"...collaboration is another one, involved in other agencies in the community. Also letting communities decide that this is what's needed, versus someone telling them what's needed." — Extension

"I think we do better in those programs where we accept parents where they are, recognizing that they are positive impacts on their children's lives, regardless of their plight." — Coalition

"...vision sharing. Very often it's pretty easy to network, but to get a shared vision is a lot harder." — Coalition

"...the human factor have to be in these programs. You can give somebody all the information. You know, you can hand 'em books and pamphlets and all that, but, you know, it doesn't matter if you don't have the human factor." — Consumer
BARRIERS TO SUCCESSFUL PROGRAMS: What are the roadblocks or barriers to developing successful programs?

Many barriers and roadblocks that make it difficult to effectively program with children, youth and families were identified by focus group participants. Some barriers relate directly to Extension and others relate to all family-serving initiatives.

Extension staff identified these roadblocks or barriers:
• traditional Extension paradigm; the bureaucracy; not Extension's role; lack of administrative support
• federal priority but may not be local or state priority; mixed messages from different levels
• programming with limited-resource audiences not valued by organization; not a current organizational priority
• staffs' negative attitudes
• general sense of anger among staff; staff burnout
• staff role overload and lack of role clarity; not enough time; takes too much time to work with at-risk audiences
• racism and a limited understanding of different cultures
• "at-risk" term lacks shared meaning; labeling at-risk audiences—what do we mean by risk?
• can't provide education until audiences' basics needs are met
• local stakeholder opposition
• limited-resource clients don't vote, won't help pass referendum
• collaborating agencies who don't understand Extension
• deficit focus or a needs approach to programming
• "expert" mindset, do the program and then leave the community

Coalition members gave these roadblocks or barriers:
• lack of qualified staff
• staff view that says "it is easier to fix problems than empower participants to work through process"
• time needed to develop working relationships between collaborators; personnel turnover leads to re-establish relationships
• difficulty in recruiting various ethnic and cultural groups as employees and participants
• covering a large geographic area, multiple counties
• basic needs of participants not being met
• services not offered to accommodate the schedules of the working poor
• lack of money to support coalition activities, financial constraints of participating agencies; yet receiving funding may inhibit coalition-building
• lack of available child care
• transportation problems for participants due to agencies locations
• lack of leadership that leads to problems implementing strategies
• lack of communication and networking among agencies; no continuity and coordinated response
• confidentiality regulations that restrict interagency communication

Consumers experienced these roadblocks or barriers:
• poorly trained staff
• little or poor communication
• shortage of minority staff
• scheduling difficulties, inconvenient times and inflexible schedules
• lack of child care
• no transportation
• limited space and facilities for program activities
• insensitivity to confidentiality issues
• inflexible agency rules and regulations
• inaccessible staff
• poor marketing of programs and services
• not individually tailored to learner

Comments by participants included:

"I hear people say, 'I don't have time to work with at-risk, because they require so much one-on-one kind of interaction.'" -- Extension

"A mindset. It goes back to the very first question . . . about they (staff) need to be non-judgmental . . . and willing to try new things. Not be confined to a box. Willing to think outside the box." -- Extension

"We like to think we're in the expert role. And I don't think by any means that's an appropriate role here." -- Extension

"I think the other difficult thing, at least from my perspective, is actually knowing what they (consumers) have gone through. I have not had the same experiences." -- Coalition

". . . another barrier is time. Sometimes it's easier to fix it than empower them to come up with a solution." -- Coalition

"It comes down to dollar and cents again. And there are people, if you attach a fee to it, there are parents who can not afford that." -- Consumer

"My experience has been with people who are worried about doing it 'by the book.'" -- Consumer

"They (agency staff) make you feel like you want to be there. It's like 'Oh, you just want to be a low-life. You don't want to do anything. Lazy bum.'" -- Consumer

"I had one (agency) woman bend over backward to help but she was clueless . . . she would have been stuck because she didn't know where to go for me." -- Consumer
STAFF AND VOLUNTEER CAPACITIES: What are the capacities that people need to work effectively with children, youth and families in at-risk environments?

Capacities are defined as those knowledge, skills, and attitudes that enable staff and volunteers to effectively reach children, youth, and families living in at-risk environments. Here are the kinds of capacities that the focus group participants suggested that staff and volunteers need.

Extension staff identified these capacities:
- employ staff who are warm, accepting, empathetic, positive, sensitive to socio-economic differences, non-judgmental, and avoid stereotyping
- collaborate with and involve others; build relationships
- focus efforts while seeing the big picture
- possess strong problem-solving skills
- balance technical skills with their artful application
- know about community resources and referral information
- understand the situation of limited resource families
- devote time and commitment to the priority
- possess personal tools for avoiding burnout
- incorporate critical thinking skills
- acknowledge and value diversity of family life

Coalitions gave these capacities:
- are non-judgmental; have empathy for participants' situations
- personally invest themselves in helping facilitate change
- identify participants' strengths
- understand political realities
- possess strong communication skills
- build participants' trust—are not viewed as "outsiders"
- use practical application with a sound theory base
- employ staff who
  - understand their role as facilitators.
  - empower participants.
  - serve as advocates for participants.
  - understand the cultural environment of the program setting.
  - are competent, knowledgeable, well-trained, and caring.
  - have well-trained volunteers, respectful of participants.
  - demonstrate flexibility, creativity and openness to new ideas.

Consumers identified these capacities:
- employ well-trained staff, who are willing to listen and help, and reach out and empower participants.
- incorporate community resources and volunteers
- employ workers who will visit families at home
- are well-trained and knowledgeable
• listen and help
• respect confidentiality of participants
• allow participants to make decisions and suggest alternatives-not intrusive
• provide objective assessment of situation
• identify participants/family strengths-not just needs
• express empathy; treat participant with dignity and respect
• know about the democratic process and help others understand the political process
• possess strong communication skills; communicate well with diverse populations
• have strong time management skills
• are flexible and adaptable to change
• identify local, untapped resources and talents to help solve problems

Comments by participants included:

"In addition to caring, people that are working with these families need to come in at a level that is not above those families... not only in the way they dress, but by their language and how they speak to people." -- Extension

"I think they have to have an understanding of the at-risk situation. What it's like to be on that side of the fence..." -- Extension

"... flexibility, and tied to that, creativity. It's a world of government regulation and you need to do these within the confines of these (government regulations)." -- Coalition

"You have to make judgments non-judgmentally." -- Coalition

"They do need to be flexible, because not everybody has the same time slot that they can be there." -- Consumer

"... they're very caring. They take you from where you're at, and they work a lot with you. They give you verbal pats on your back, which you don't get otherwise." -- Consumer

"They listen to your personal needs, and they don't put you in this group. They keep you as an individual." -- Consumer

"They help you make your own decisions, as opposed to telling you what to do." -- Consumer
EFFECTIVE STAFF DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES: What kind of staff development activities would enable Extension and community partners to offer more successful programs?

Staff development activities, like inservice training, reading books or taking graduate courses, provide important vehicles for developing the capacities needed to work effectively with children, youth and families. Here are suggestions from Extension and coalitions for creating more effective staff development activities.

Extension staff made these suggestions for staff development:
• involve learner in the planning and conducting of the training
• involve the learner in team activities and small group discussions-experiential in nature
• promote the participatory model and challenge the expert model
• incorporate reflection and application of learning
• recognize the importance of comfortable physical surroundings
• use appropriate teaching methods for the objectives
• include "pre" assignments-if limited, are helpful
• locate inservice close to home; limit time for traveling; use audio cassettes
• pay attention to participants' social needs
• promote critical thinking
• maintain a flexible format-adapt to changing situations of learners and learning styles
• use a formal process for selecting participants
• encourage voluntary participation

Coalition members made these suggestions about staff development:
• promote interaction and participation; limit lecture and Iowa Communication Network use
• provide networking opportunities; start an Internet discussion page
• market activities appropriately-clear description and overview of training
• allow time for reflection and implementation discussion
• provide handouts; limit note taking and overhead use
• arrange comfortable physical surroundings; tables provide writing surface
• bridge gap between research and actual programming
• consider locations with local dining out and shopping opportunities if traveling out of community
• de-emphasize participants' job status in training activities-everyone opinions equally valued
• generate topics from participants
• participate as a team from a community
• attended by front-line staff; include volunteers and consumers
• challenge thinking and see application of information to present situation
• focus on research from minority populations; current research typically focuses of middle class, European-American perspective
• include information on how to create coalitions which are sensitive to cultural differences
• look at assets versus deficits in training
Comments by participants included:

"... method fits the objective. I've been in some inservices where I really wanted to go and get some information. I really wanted somebody to lecture, to give information ... all they did was share ignorance in the group." -- Extension

"There are times when you really go to try and work on a problem ... then it is not appropriate to have somebody standing up in front of the room telling you what to do, but need to learn some processes and to practice those processes." -- Extension

"Is there a piece of training that could be face-to-face, participatory, and a piece of it that might be done over the ICN or satellite?" -- Extension

"... how you measure a successful conference ... by what you're doing differently a couple of weeks after the conference is over, not how you feel about it once the conference is ended." -- Coalition

"A real basic thing would be how we as professionals join with the clients that we're serving. Because every family situation is unique, some kind of skill building and how you connect (with families), and how you develop that relationship while you're trying to work with them." -- Coalition

"I think training with practical application is probably the thing you come away feeling the best about, because we can talk theory and ideal settings, but sometimes we need more ..." -- Coalition
"AT RISK" TERM: What is your reaction to the term "at risk"?

Lengthy discussions occurred in the Extension and consumer focus groups about the use of the term "at risk". There were differing viewpoints about whether or not this term should be used. The following themes emerged from these discussions.

Extension staff:
were uncertain about the meaning of the term "at risk"; it lacks a shared meaning. "What do we mean by risk?"
thought the term labeled people unnecessarily and negatively.
believed it gave a deficit focus or needs approach to programming.
expressed that the differences between at-risk and non-at-risk audiences is a matter of degree. "Aren't we all at risk?"

Other themes about "at risk" expressed by Extension staff:
Do we take an assets approach or deficit approach to programming? Do we meet people's needs or build their capacity?
There was disagreement about whether or not the term "at risk" was offensive; one's reaction to the term is dependent upon one's perception.

Consumers:
disagreed about whether or not the term "at risk" was offensive but that one's reaction to the term is dependent upon one's perception.
considered "at risk" less negative than "crisis" but identified the need for crisis intervention.
believed the term has been over-used and may have lost meaning for people.
thought it was used in the past to insure that individuals who needed programs were getting them; funding programs and recruiting audiences are often tied to definition of risk.
associated "at risk" with child protection services and child abuse prevention; it provides opportunities to help families and provide child care services.

Consumers thought the term "at risk":
identified individuals who are not doing so well; for example, the homeless or people living in crowded conditions. Having money doesn't mean that a family does not have problems.
raises a warning or red flag and suggests the potential for dangerous situation or harm; serves as a wake-up call that something needs to be done before the situation worsens.
alerts others who can help people in need; any at-risk situation can go either way-worsen or get better; need to address concerns before they worsen.
may make people feel like a victim.

Other themes expressed by consumers related to "at risk":
Some people do not want to admit to their at-risk behaviors. They may be embarrassed about needing services.
Sometimes people will not seek services because they fear their children will be taken away.

Coalitions:
identified individuals with high needs; high maintenance thought the term lacks a shared meaning; no one know what it means suggested that income level is not always a good indicator of at-risk believed the term stereotypes many different groups does provide some individuals with extra services expressed the concern that we may be worrying about labeling people and not enough about ways to reach at-risk audiences

Comments by participants included:

"But does a group like this need to worry about the words? We need to worry more about what we can do ..." -- Coalition

"Well, no matter what word you' going to offend somebody." -- Coalition

"There's 208 different definitions that I've found through looking at what legal definition in this country to what at-risk kid are." -- Coalition

"... one that require multiple services, that require ongoing services..."-- Coalition

"I really have a hard time defining people that way (at risk). And I'm going to be open and upfront about that. I have a hard time categorizing people." -- Extension

"... risk is a relationship. It's the relationship of the person to their environment. And the quality of the environment is probably more of a determining factor." -- Extension

"If each one of us around the table, who are our colleagues, have a different definition of what does it mean if you're at risk, then how can we focus our programming with at risk. If there's not some very concise, easy to remember definition that we as Extension, or as an organization say ... is the at-risk definition for what we are going to try to do." -- Extension

"... it waves a flag to say, 'there's something wrong here', maybe that's what it's supposed to do ... we're labeled 'at risk' but there was a risk in our household." -- Consumer

"But as far as the term at risk goes, it does carry a negative connotation with it, but on the other hand maybe that's not all bad. Because by saying you're at risk, they're saying 'There is a problem here.'" -- Consumer

"... a wake-up call ..." -- Consumer
EXTENSION'S IMAGE: What is Extension's image with the public and what can Extension do to reach a broader audience?

Only consumer focus groups were specifically asked about their image of Extension and suggestions for reaching a broader audience. Two of the five coalition focus groups addressed these issues during the discussion process. Themes related to their comments are also included.

Consumers: did not attach a negative stigma to participating in Extension programs or going to the Extension office like that attached to the Department of Human Services or other agencies. historical view of Extension as the Department of Agriculture Extension and as dealing with rural and farm issues. saw Extension as providers of - horticulture information. - 4-H activities including summer camps. - nutrition education. - hotlines for gardening and canning questions. recognized that Extension also deals with youth, family, and community development plus many other areas. thought of Iowa State University; it is a diverse institution good about giving resources. generally acknowledged that people use Extension as a resource. expressed having little or no knowledge about Extension programs and services.

Consumers thought Extension could reach a broader audience by: acknowledging its images with the public and seeking ways to change these images. better market programs and services beyond agriculture and 4-H. target marketing efforts to reach the intended audience. using the schools to help identify children with multiple risk factors. using a variety of advertising approaches including - posting information at clinics and other medical facilities. - providing information to AEAs, schools guidance counselors and teachers. - distributing timely "seasonal" fliers. - promoting by word of mouth. - canvassing door to door. - mailing newsletters directly to parents. - placing information at commodity distribution. - including inserts with assistance checks. recognize that word of mouth may not reach everyone who needs information. send informational pieces home with school children that are printed on colored paper-are more likely to reach parents. may be difficult for Extension to recruit minorities because of it's fairly homogeneous staff and geographical area.

Coalitions advised Extension to:
thoughtfully screen which Extension staff serve on collaborative efforts in communities. Some staff members lack the communication and collaborative skills to work effectively in coalitions. market Extension educational programs and services across the state more effectively.

Comments by participants included:

"... to be candid my first image is of the Department of Agricultural Extension." -- Consumer

"If you want to change that (agriculture and rural image), if you want to broaden that to create a different image, you've got to acknowledge what it is and find a way to change it." -- Consumer

"I think that something Extension has, is the fact that you don't have a stigma with Extension." -- Consumer

"I think a cheap way for Extension to get their word out ... if somebody is helped by Extension, say, 'If this has helped you, tell somebody else.'" -- Consumer

"There were so many programs available ... it comes to marketing ... but we don't know about them." -- Consumer
REFERENCES


APPENDIX H. CODING SCHEMA

Code #

1 Position
   CEED
   Field Specialist
   youth
   family
   community
   nutrition and health
   resource management

2 Present employment experiences with at-risk audiences

3 Employment history/past experiences with at-risk audiences

Circumstances of Change influencing Programs

51 Human and social
   personality characteristics exhibited by staff
   attitudes toward programming by staff
   attitudes toward programming by participants
   support of programming by participants
   attitudes towards participants by staff
   attitudes toward staff by participants
   relationships between staff and participants
   familial structures

52 technical
   objectives of programming
   implementation of programming
   skill-related training
   physical environment
   communication structure between staff and participants
   definitions of terms

53 political
   resource allocation
   staff allocation
   priority structure/who decides
   political strength of individuals
   stakeholder response
   local/county
   state/national
legal
regulations regarding programming
regulations regarding budgetary expenses
regulations defining audiences

market
target audience for programming
participant image of organization

economic
support for programs
  local
  state/national

ethical
moral obligation of organization
moral obligation of programming efforts

**Targets of Change**

individual
staff characteristics associated with positive at-risk programming

organizational structure
job description/performance review
work load
resource allotment

organizational leadership
organizational direction
stakeholders response

organizational culture
attitudes toward programming
needs vs. asset approach

Narratives involving survey

**Training Needs**

cultural
values identified in training
attitudes toward training

technical
structure of training
environment
objectives of training

93 political
selection of training topics - who decides

94 ethical

95 market
who attends training
how is training publicized

96 economic
payment of training

97 legal
APPENDIX I. MEMBER CHECK LETTER

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
University Extension

July 12, 1996

Dear Focus Group Participants:

Enclosed you will find a preliminary copy of the results of the focus group research. The information in the report is from three extension focus groups, three consumer groups, and three community coalitions. Two additional community coalition focus groups were added to the study; however, at the time of this report these transcripts had yet to be analyzed. I have included the individual summaries for each of the groups. The last two summaries will be added to the final report.

Thank you for your participation in the focus group, and I hope you find the information useful. I do ask that if you have any concerns about the information, comments about the report, and items that need to be clarified, please send this information to me on the enclosed response form. You may also send comments via e-mail. My address is dklemme@iastate.edu

Again, thank you for your participation in the focus group.

Sincerely,

Diane Klemme  
Research Assistant

Karen Shirer  
Assistant Director to Families
APPENDIX J. SUMMARY SHEETS OF ADDITIONAL FOCUS GROUPS

Summary of Focus Group D

What makes a coalition work?
- A common purpose or goal - the group sees a need
- mutual trust among members
- fluid model - no rigidly defined roles
- need to break down turf issues/guardedness by discussion
- need to make time schedules and relationships work
- need articulation about individual services agencies - helps eliminate duplication
- eliminated all participants to get involves
- sending cross community teams to conferences generates discussion among group
- core group meets with a variety of local agencies in their setting
- community history of interaction with others - many bridges already built - not starting from ground zero
- person-to-person relationships create an environment of sharing and support
- identification of need to deal with whole families - realize education and family interaction are linked
- common philosophy - everyone wants it to work
- develop trust with families
- positive community attitude - can do attitude
- sharing staff time for projects
- resources
- front line people need to feel support of community agencies
- staff understanding of expanding not replacing jobs
- need diversity of skills within the coalition
- front line staff don't need to see flow charts
- need to make accessibly possible in rural area where formal support may not be viewed positively
- group respects the administration
- individuals involved highly respected and know their stuff
- individuals at a good spot in the burnout cycle
- know peoples character - personality types
- forces you think about your original passion

What doesn't work in a coalition - barriers?
- Belief one sole best qualified service provides - role rigidity
- time and schedule conflicts
- understanding the purpose
- money issues
- turf issues - treat to peoples job
- difficulty to be inclusive
• confidentiality issues
• grant rip away cooperative efforts - become competition
• staff overworked
• jargon
• system burnout
• own systems may be a barrier

Advice to Coalitions getting started:
• front line staff don't need flow charts - understanding of importance of identify needs and then figure out who is going to do what
• start talking - start to build the idea
• be realistic about the time - takes time to work
• be careful not to flood individuals with services - take time
• develop ownership of the project
• use each other as a sounding board
• identify bottom-up ideas - recognition of front line staff knowledge regarding service delivery
• need a can do attitude
• value the negative input - sometimes the best way to improve
• use the consortium model - more of a marriage - sharing vision and resource without taking credit
• need shared supervision and vision
• cross training among agencies' staff
• realize it hard to trust the system without first trusting the person
• ability to ratchet up or down the vision - got to protect you own self and belief system
• group needs to be safe and staid - need a certain amount of work/job/life experiences

Reactions to the term at-risk
• think of high needs
• other terms suggested high maintenance - draw a lot of energy and resource; high resource; high opportunity
• income level not always a good indicator
• think of potentially harmfully to children
• at risk macro level social concern micro level individual and family

Staff development suggestions
• involve front line people in the planning
• use appropriate complete advertising
• want pragmatic ideas - things that worked
• provide resource to take home
• challenge thought on way currently doing it - show new way of doing and provide a working model
• varied format - can't sit all day
flexible schedule - ability to come and go to different sessions
• don't need to spoon feed people
• agencies need to collaborate themselves with staffing - don't need several fliers
  advertising similar programs
• location is important - limit travel time
• cross community team allows opportunity to talk - eliminates need for entire
  organizations having to attend
• use the ICN and technology - start an Internet discussion page
• need to be hands on
• works best as teams
• need to pick your battles
• need to decide army vs. small group vs. elitist model
• make sure the model fits
• can't afford the "experts"
• need to decide process vs. pathways

Suggested Topics
• how to go back to your system and share with others
• confidentiality issues
• changing paradigms - new thought processes
• change organizations perception of how services must be delivered
• training the trainer
• using local resources
• how to work with other organizations
• national security - what do we need to be secure
• managing systems in changing times
• DISC workshop - how I fit with other people
• cross training efforts
Summary Focus Group E

What makes a coalition work?
- the group needs focus/goal and/or have an end product in mind
- need a diversified group, including multigenerational members
- patience, commitment, trust, and dedication
- willingness to put neck on the line for a cause
- acknowledgment that change takes time and is difficult
- need a family base
- strong leadership

What are the challenges/barriers in coalition work?
- How to determine who should be a part of the coalition. Suggestion from the group included church affiliation; however some thought minorities may view church participation as an obligation based on sponsorship.
- Committee work and volunteer work biased toward Europe-American heritage; not view the same in other cultures.
- hired staff personnel may decrease volunteerism
- identification that minorities have different attitudes toward living in the United States - some legal; some illegal; some plan on staying; some plan on returning to country of origin
- lots of discussion in coalition but need follow-up and action to keep members engaged
- fear of minority groups invading turf and becoming the majority
- generational difference regarding minority interaction - older Lowans less accustomed to minority groups and more distrustful
- cultural differences regarding social interaction and expression of ideas within a group
- language barrier - some frustration that some minorities unwilling to learn English
- cannot assume what is true with one minority group is true of another minority group; one example - priority of education for children
- differences within minority communities causes friction within groups
- differences in educational levels of minorities may influence their motivation to learn the English language; parents may not want children to learn English language
- acceptable behaviors in one culture not viewed as acceptable in school situation

Reaction to at-risk term:
- broken home
- negative term/offensive
- stereotypes many different groups
- has so many meanings; no one knows what it means
- good because it also provides some individuals extra services
- suggestions included: exceptional; target group
- question raised as to the group need to worry about words vs. actions
Training suggestions:
- hands on examples that can be used at the local level
- focus on research from minority populations; present research typically focuses on middle class, European-American perspective
- include information on how to create coalitions that are sensitive to cultural differences
- specific training - narrow topics; don't try to cover everything at once
- need groups to attend vs. one person attending sessions
- provide resources to take back to local level
- review program funding and impact policies
- limit expert approach
- great training makes participants see something in a completely new way
- look at assets versus deficits in training
- include small group work
- limit lecture - need a good speaker if you are going to lecture
- need to acknowledge family orientation and organization when setting time and length of activities
- cultural differences in meeting structure styles; some minority groups like trust building period prior to meetings

Summary comments from participants
- concern expressed regarding the English language bill in Congress
- suggested the need to learn to work together
- suggested making decisions on consensus and as Christians
- one key issue to address is the unique conditions of living in a small town
- suggested the need to get to know each other - possibly using personality type inventories
- suggested hope and cooperation are more important than competition
- concern expressed regarding violence in society
FOCUS GROUP RESPONSE FORM

CONCERNS ABOUT INFORMATION:

COMMENTS REGARDING REPORT:

ITEMS WHICH NEED CLARIFICATION:

GENERAL COMMENTS:

Please return to:
Diane Klemme
311 MacKay Hall
Iowa State University
Ames, IA 500010
or
e-mail dklemme@iastate.edu
APPENDIX L. REPRESENTATIVE CHECKS QUESTIONS AND FINDINGS

Thinking about the Focus Group Findings

As you review the posters and report for the focus group findings, please think about these questions and jot down a few notes about your thoughts. You will be using these questions in small group discussions later.

1) What is one item in the focus group findings that you found surprising?

2) What is one item that confirms an opinion you already held?

3) What is one item in the report or posters that needs further clarification?

4) Who else needs to review this information?
Results of Families Inservice on Focus Group Findings
April 17, 1996

Question 1. What is one item on the focus findings that you found surprising?

Group 1
• Extensions' attitude toward "at-risk" / feeling of anger.
• Recognition that all staff do best job of communication and collaboration – getting this out in the open is important! and follow up.
• Someone said that "at-risk" don't vote and pass referendums – disturbing that staff would /will make decision based on this belief.

Group 2
• We ask same questions and get same answers and then operate the same way.
• Not as surprising as reinforced about collaboration agencies don't understand one another.
• Turnover with agencies as a real issue, especially when working multi counties.
• Have to decide whether impact or contact numbers are important.

Group 3
• 24-hour "on call" (consumer need).
• Ask for workers to come to home - reality can be mixed message.
• Staff's negative attitude; racism.
• "Not valued by organization".
• Discussion of "at-risk" term – clarify.

Group 4
• Consumers not bother by term "at-risk".
• That programs needed to be available 24 hours to be successful.
• How individualized consumer want programs to be.

Group 5
• Someone would admit need to learn information, not just "share ignorance".
• Capacities needed: surprised by high degree of overlap between list three groups.
• Term "at-risk" was less problematic/offensive to consumer than professionals.

Group 6
• None.
• Uncertainly about definition of "at-risk".
• At-risk = non-voters.
• Anger among ISUE staff.

Group 7
• 24 hour assess/on-call
• Programming with limited audiences not valued by system.
• Barrier – anger in system (staff) referring to Extension or other agencies?
• Limited resources audiences don't vote - won't help pass referendums.
• Poorly trained staff (consumers).
• Little/poor communication.
• People coalitions limit ICN use willing to travel to get localized personal interaction.

Group 8
Extension staff on coalitions not well-adapted to work on coalitions.
Provide 24-hour accessibility – hot line, casino -WWW, technology.

Group 9
• Client - 24 hour service exception.
• In-home visits desired.
• Casual dress – what is appropriate (group meetings)?
• Consumers want "well-trained" staff ...what about Extension staff's perception?

Group 10
• Perception - poorly trained staff (barrier).
• Extension staff need facilitation skills.
• Lack of critical thinking skills.
• Surprised that Maslow hierarchy not more evident.

Group 11
• Confidentiality consumer not wanting to share information.
• P.25 coalition advised Extension staff be screened to participate in coalitions.
• P.18 limit lecture and ICN for staff development.

Group 12
• 24 hour accessibility /on call p. 10.
• Extension paradigm – 3 am What can we do?
• Staff confuse about term "at-risk" but coalition members knew.
• Extension saw it more negative that consumers.
• Staff negative attitude and anger.
• P.11 remember one person said the ?consensus–OPPOSITION.
• Consumers said Extension not well trained in coalition work – surprise to us.
• Inflexible in scheduling – we work all hours of the day.

Group 13
• The overall honesty of peoples responses.
• We continue to not do a good job of marketing what we do.
• Surprised at emotion connected with term "at-risk".
Group 14
• Diversity of staff opinion about inservice polarity.
• Consumer and coalition comments on need for well trained, well informed staff.
• 24 hour accessibility?? Extension?
• P.13 staff feel like what it is to be poor, etc. Extension agencies?
• Poorly trained staff.

Question 2. What is one item that confirms an opinion you already held?

Group 1
• Collaboration agencies don't understand Extension.
• "At-risk" definitions are varied - we don't communicate.
• Public thinks Extension is Ag.
• People think we work in the "expert" model.

Group 2
• Aren't a lot of us, so collaborative efforts that more time.

Group 3
• Staff overload, lack of time.
• Role to empower, not "expert".
• All need to review list by consumers on page 15.

Group 4
• People want one-one personalized to their needs.
• Market Extension better.
• Extension staff want focus.
• Participation and interactive preferred to lecture.
• All roadblocks noted by staff.
• Importance of collaborative efforts.

Group 5
• Marketing -- importance of public relations and lack of understanding of Extension.
• Empower versus fix.
• Human element /one-on-one.
• Importance of measuring success by behavior change.
• Some staff don't have the skills needed to effectively represent Extension on coalitions (or with clients).
• Recommend on p. 25 image change.
• Maybe staff pr./system doesn't' have a clear, overall sense of our purpose.

Group 6
• Extension viewed as non-threatening.
- Need to be nonjudgmental.
- ISUE staff are under a lot of stress.

Group 7
- Collaboration agencies/consumers don't understand what Extension is.
- Services don't accommodate working poor.
- Covering large geographic area/multiple counties is barrier to working with those agencies.
- Money is razor-edge sword
- Importance of flexibility and sensitivity.

Group 8
- Still viewed by many as an agricultural organization.
- Others have uncertainty about the meaning and use of term "at-risk".
- Not much common understanding of "at-risk".
- A lot of talk about empowerment confirmed my opinion.
- Problems with the "expert" coming in, we need to work with, not talk at.

Group 9
- Assume we need to understand audience but how do we get experienced for this.
- Involve participants in planning.
- Differing opinion on term "at-risk".
- Lack of leadership in communities to sustain programming.

Group 10
- Staff anger and burnout.
- Extension staff need facilitation skills.
- Lack critical thinking skills.
- Focus on whole family and quality time with children.
- Focus on assets/strengths versus deficits.
- Locally driven programs.
- Lack of child care (barrier).
- Racism – lack of cultural understanding/respect.

Group 11
- Limit overheads.
- No one really listening to consumers needs.
- Know the consumer groups (match dress, language, actions).
- Extension needs different image.
- Extension needs to market itself.

Group 12
- Continual theme of cultural awareness.
• Need for child cares and transportation.
• Nonjudgmental quality, warmth and human element.
• Focus on whole family, are we losing this quality?

Group 13
• "Expert" mindset reflects system-culture.
• Lack of communication between the group that did this effort and RFP staff.
• Extension staff not seen as permanetn player.
• Commitment it takes to do one-on-one, colation building... (CEED’s too).
• Don’t get recognized /get credit from system for ding that work.

Group 14
• That consumers are intelligent and have valid well thought out comments.
• Not an "agency" (Extension).
• Questioning of use of term "at-risk" -we may be in leading position in reassessment.
• General sense of anger, overloads etc. among Extension staff.
• Racism and limited understanding of different cultures and role of outsiders.

Question 3. What is one item in the report or posters that needs further clarification?

Group 1
• Who were the consumers in the focus groups?
• Importance of a state-wide effort versus county or area programs.
• definition of "at-risk".
• Extension councils' roles.

Group 2
• Who were the consumers?
• How will the target audiences be defined?

Group 3
• "At-risk", define audience.
• How much time should we field specialists spend in direct teaching to "at-risk"? How much time/training those who have direct contact?

Group 4
• Should we be comfortable only reaching minorities as "at-risk" audiences?
• Clarify term "at-risk".
• How do consumers define well-trained, knowledgeable?

Group 5
• Offer suggestion that staff (Extension and others) need first-hand exposure to what real life is like…
• Comparisons of responses between the three group - what are their similarities/differences?
• What does Extension do about "expert" role? We need to be experts (highly-informed, credible), but not have attitude of "experts here to fix things…
• "Visiting expert" role - when to move one? (We're suppose to move one) How do we prepare group for use to move on?
• Responses to Question 2. (barriers/roadblock) how pervasive are some of those attitude across the entire staff? Example: Concern: do most (or many) Extension staff feel low-income groups are not a priority audience?

Group 6
• Need concise set of recommendations and needs.
• Value of coalition work versus individual efforts versus Extension image and marketing needs.

Group 7
• What question were asked and how?
• Agency (consumers) What agencies?
• Community ownership - delicate balance creation programming - research base.
• Experience of Extension staff - demographics, numbers, experience.
• How were focus group members selected:
  • Positive/negative orientation it Extension?
  • Experience with Extension?
• First the target group the consumer? Limited resource ? Define "at-risk".

Group 8
• Uniform, clear and concise definition of "at-risk".
• Consumer identified time management as a capacity needed for staff and volunteers to work effectively. What were consumers' referring to ?
• What about the effect of geography? Large areas?
• Easier to fix a problem than empower people.

Group 9
• Consumers' views on what constitutes "well-trained" staff.
• What is appropriate in our investment (time, energy, etc.) in coalition building? Advocacy? (What role?)
• What are consume "confidentiality" issues?

Group 10
• How to move forward with "assets" approach.
• Clarification on "sample" selection - extension "hand-picked".
• Definition of common ground and shared vision.
Group 11
- How do consumers/coalitions what to get their education
- How can staff be rewarded for working wit audience that required lots of time?

Group 12
- Anger of staff, what's' it connected to, what's the root? Attitudes?
- At risk perception. Consumers no problem, for us it may be.
- Make-up of groups How many council members involved?
- At-risk - Does it mean minority, low income? For councils and others? "Reaction".
- Education versus service.

Group 13
- Were consumer respondent really "at-risk", and how were they selected to be a part of the focus group?
- Were focus groups biased? Extension staff selected?
- Where does Extension want to fit regarding percentage of time devoted to this clientele? (Not a politically powerful audience)
- Staff roles need to be clarified.

Group 14
- What is "at-risk"?
- Who are the consumers?
- Who do we tell our numbers, etc. to?

Question 4. Who else needs to review this information?

Group 1
- Extension councils.
- Community leaders.
- Other Extension staff.
- Our local coalitions, agencies.

Group 2
- Anyone who we intend to work with including target audience.

Group 3
- Comments and Frustrations
- P.8 "collaboration"? When other agency has money; we aren't included in planning, etc.
- How to fit our "standards" in with group size very small.
- Progress or behavior change?
- Time and distance.
Group 4
- Social Service agencies.
- Health and human service component of legislature.
- Extension administration and other Extension staff.
- Local policy makers.
- Extension councils.

Group 5
- All public and private schools.
- Extension councils.
- CEED's as priority, but also all Extension staff.

Group 6
- Extension councils (concise version only).
- Wide variety of administrative staff.

Group 7
- Schools boards and committees.
- Pieces should be share with certain groups – uncomfortable with sharing what people said about Extension.
- Administration.
- Front line staff (Extension).
- Focus group participants.
- Extension councils.

Group 8
- Issue committee.
- Extension Administration.
- All Extension staff.
- Extension councils.
- Coalitions.
- Human service partners.

Group 9
- Community coalitions and committees.
- Extension councils.
- Focus group participants.
- Internet groups.
- Consumers (teaching, media) tools reflect of media.

Group 10
- Is material readable, user friendly? Who is it for?
- Legislature and decision makers.
- Those who hire/evaluate.
- Those who monitor confidentially issues.

Group 11
- County Extension councils.
- All Extension staff.
- Local coalitions.

Group 12
- Youth staff.
- Community staff.
- Really total staff including: field and campus, program assistants-Iowa concern, Ag staff, office assistants, and councils.

Group 13
- Everyone in Extension system including Extension councils.

Group 14
- Everyone in state – publicize.
- Councils, especially image part -other programs.
Results of EFNEP Workshop on Focus Group Findings
May 7, 1996

Question 1. What is one item on the focus group finding that you found surprising?

Group 1
• Consumers wanting 24 hour on call.
• That consumers could see in the future or the community need, when they are so overwhelmed with their immediate needs.

Group 2
• 24 hour on call
• Help with political process (they want more empowerment in general terms from us).

Group 3
• Wanting 24 hour services.
• Individually tailor to their needs.
• Need to include learner in each step of the process.
• People want continuation of programs and will volunteer to help others.

Question 2. What is one item that confirms an opinion you already held?

Group 1
• The removal of all barriers such as transportation, costs, child care, resources, etc.
• Confirms needs of diversity, some have not heard of Extension.
• Respectfully teaching and sharing at their (consumers) level, empowerment and responsibilities for their outcomes.

Group 2
• Diversity as strong points (lots of affirmations).
• Long-term commitment needed/desired.
• Community-initiated programs.
• ISU Extension has a "stigma – how to make it cool?"

Group 3
• Clients want one-on-one services.
• Clients want someone who cares and is willing to listen.
• For some, childcare and transportation are real problems.
• Less lecturing and more interactive learning.
• Low cost but not free.
• Allow learners to be part of the decision making process.
Question 3. What is one item in the report or posters that needs further clarification?

Group 1
• How to involve parents.
• How to include "pre" assignments if limited.
• De-emphasize participants job training status in training activities, everyone on equal footing.

Group 2
• Low cost...free, sliding scale or what?
• Does DHS get a copy of this study?

Group 3
• What is the "expert model"?
• How do we redirect resources to accomplish wanted changes?
• To what extent do we involve learners?
• We need to know clients expectations.

Question 4. Who else needs to review this information?

Group 1
• Clients, consumers, coalitions.

Group 2
• Directors of DHS program and long-term needs of family.
• ISU Extension marketers acknowledge the ag image and change it publicly.
• ISE Extension personnel, how to be less homogeneous.
• Legal dept., child care and transportation.
• Trainers do staff development for F. S. Families, not for potential clientele.

Group 3
• County Extension councils.
• Staff.
• State administrators.
• Program leaders.
• Community leaders.
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