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Leading for Change

Viewing Change as a Positive

by Dr. Gaea Hock

There are very few people who enjoy change. It is forced upon us when we need to upgrade our phones, get a new car, learn a new software program, or pull up to order at our favorite drive thru and discover they changed the menu layout. But one thing is certain: Change is inevitable.

As educators, we experience change throughout our years in the profession. I remember learning how to create presentations with ClarisWorks while in college and then this magical program "PowerPoint" was available when I started to teach. Now my students use Canva to create engaging visual teaching materials to strengthen their lessons. Currently, we are learning how to harness AI to decrease our lesson planning time and improve student learning.

How we go about embracing and navigating change will ultimately impact the success of any change we encounter.

Take for example how we utilize technology to communicate with our students, parents, and community members. Does your program have social media accounts to keep key stakeholders aware of upcoming events? I personally love seeing posts from the agricultural education program in my community and across the nation. This form of communication has the possibility of linking us to each other and sharing the awesome things our young people are accomplishing.

The types of students we have in our programs is constantly changing and shifting. I visit classrooms throughout the year and talk to teachers about who they are educating. There are not as many "farm kids" as there were a few decades ago. Instead, we are working more and more to educate our future consumers, policymakers, and taxpayers. The students in the agricultural education program come from different backgrounds and lived experiences. Are we able to adapt and change our pedagogy to match their unique interests? Have we modified our curriculum to do a better service to their future career goals and industry needs? Do we welcome all students into the agricultural education program?

Change is hard. I struggle to learn new systems and processes but try to stay positive and keep moving forward. Helping our students learn how to navigate and lead change is an important part of our jobs as educators. If they recognize something should be done differently or there is a need to create something new, then we as mentors should help them learn how to do that and support them throughout the process. Allow students the opportunity to identify areas that could be improved or enhanced. Ask them to think of something they would change. It could be a small adjustment to a current program or the creation of an entirely new program.

Change can lead to conflict. There is a chance not everyone will agree with the changes being made. The attitude we use to approach and navigate changes in our "normal" routine can lead to either a positive or negative result. If we display a positive attitude when asked to change our behaviors, methods, procedures – then the result will be more positive. Working to navigate change in a positive manner while coping with any conflicts that arise make us better educators, leaders, and professionals.

In this issue of the magazine, you will read articles that will challenge how you are integrating and supporting change in your program. I enjoyed reading the articles and reflecting on how we can be more purposeful when helping teach our young people how to identify and incorporate change in their leadership roles. I hope you are also able to reflect on how you can look at change from a positive lens and utilize the tools to change for the better.

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If You Ain't Changing, You Ain't Leading

by Dr. Adam Cletzer

Famously, there are more than 27,000 definitions of "leadership" in the literature. Hardliners will say you should pick just one, but I often waffle depending on the context. The definition that has informed this edition belongs to Heifetz's adaptive leadership theory, which, to paraphrase badly, goes like this: "If you ain't changing, you ain't leading."

Much of the work I see being done in agricultural leadership development prepares people to be what Heifetz would call "authority figures." Authority is when a group selects you to do a job, and then you do that job. It doesn't matter how well you do it—or how charismatic, visionary, inspirational, or motivational you are while you do it—if you're just doing the job you were authorized to do, you're not leading. For Heifetz and me, leadership begins when you go beyond your authority to challenge an organization to adapt to the ever-changing world around it so that it might continue to survive and thrive. Everything else is just making the trains run on time. I'm sure this is disappointing.

Think about the opportunities to practice leadership we typically give young people. "Please plan the annual awards banquet—now in its 35th year!" "Please carry your team to victory following the rigid rules of this state competition." "Please host this workshop within the narrow parameters dictated to you." "Please be the president of our organization; here is a 20-page handbook." These are all great opportunities for young people to work together and play an important role in the organization. These are also the opportunities of an organization that wants to develop people leaders will perpetuate the organization as it is. I tend to believe that young people are not given as many opportunities to practice making change as they probably should.

> Leadership begins when you go beyond your authority to challenge an organization to adapt to the ever-changing world around it so that it might continue to survive and thrive.

Consequently, later in life they tend to be less prepared when it comes to making change. Studies of students in colleges of agriculture (COA) have found that, when compared to their peers across campus, they feel less capable of engaging in socio-cultural discussions. This is an important indicator because from these discussions of difference we can get at important change-related questions like, What are our organization's values? What defines us? What is important to us? Where are we going next? (My mind goes to FFA's should-girls-be-allowed-to-wear-pants debate, which was really about values.) They also feel less prepared in addressing issues that require cognitive complexity—issues where there isn't a clear, correct solution to be found. Another national report highlights the following areas where COA graduates need improvement: navigating change and ambiguity; dealing constructively with conflict (a necessary ingredient for most change); and identifying and analyzing problems.

In our traditional programs so focused on event planning and competition, when do young people have the opportunity to navigate ambiguity or analyze truly complex problems? When do students have the opportunity to engage with difference? When do students get to help an organization adapt by reassessing its values and priorities? In short, when do the kids get to practice making change? These are the types of questions addressed in this issue.

The edition is organized into two broad parts. The first is conceptual. It's full of ideas that I would like for you to read and ask, What would this look like in my program? For instance, adopting the social change model, which absolutely views leadership as being for change and young people as agents of change. How might putting it at the core of your leadership program change the way you do leadership development? Perhaps you might replace your advisory committee with a change management team. There are also a surprising number of concepts from physics, including "swing weight," and "focus friction," which the authors have deftly applied to our type of leadership programs. Several authors discuss how you might expand leadership opportunities beyond the traditional officer roles—that is, how you might transition from a hierarchical leadership model to a distributed

model. Rosch tackles what I view as the central issue of this edition: managing the tension between tradition and progress.

The second part is practical. These articles focus on practical things you can try or programs you can emulate. Stone explains his model for a chapter without year-long officers. Leman explains a research method for engaging youth in examining their organization through social science. There are heuristics for thinking through change in your organization and several leadership program exemplars. There are toolkits to download and real people who want you to reach out to them for advice.

It is entirely possible to provide opportunities for young people to lead meaningful change within your programs and organizations — and keep your sanity! My philosophy of youth leadership development can be traced to two ladies who ran the 4-H state council in my home state. Each year, as they welcomed a new team of a dozen state officers, they asked them, appropriately, “How are you going to make the best better?” Wrapped in that question was the implication that they needed to change things, and that they would be given the power to do it. They were guided to look at a large, complex organization full of competing traditions and factions and ask, What is important to us this year? What is our organization about now? Where are we going next?

It is important to make the trains run on time. It is important to have a great 35th annual awards banquet, or win the state competition, or execute a great workshop, or run an organized meeting. All of those skills are critical to the day-to-day of an organization. Leading through change, however, takes a separate set of skills that our young people also need. I hope this edition provides food for thought, and maybe a few pointers, as you prepare them to help our programs and organizations survive into the future.

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Developing 21st Century Leaders - the Tension Between Tradition and Transformation

by Dr. David M. Rosch

It starts with the jacket, of course. 90 years of tradition! You can't separate FFA – and, therefore, agriculture classrooms in high schools across the country – from that blue corduroy. FFA jackets can be favorably compared to Yankees pinstripes or specific combinations of Greek letters in the way wearing them evokes a community's traditions and strength. Lisa Barger, quoted on the FFA website, states, "...wearing the FFA jacket helps [FFA members] feel like they are part of something bigger than themselves. They feel part of their chapter and community..."

To effectively point to a simple fabric as a symbol of community cohesion and history is a towering strength within the scholastic agricultural community! It takes a close, values-driven, and passionate community of members continually investing in itself over generations to create the kinds of meaningful traditions where textile can evoke such feeling. And...

And... Any towering strength comes as part of a package with related weaknesses. Think of the extroverted social person who easily gets off track on a task when someone new walks in the room. Or the hugely successful company (say, Blockbuster Video) that struggles to drop their core business in the midst of a changing market. What makes someone extroverted is, in part, the desire to engage new people, leading to difficulty staying focused on a single task. The exemplary processes that lead a company to dominate others directly result in executives who hesitate to dismantle those structures for an uncertain future. Every strength can be considered a weakness in a different context or circumstance – each represents two sides of the same coin.

Which brings us back to those corduroy jackets, worn by FFA students for the past 90 years. What makes FFA – and by extension, agriculture classrooms in secondary schools – strong is its values-based community, its history, its consistent culture and curriculum, and yes, its traditions. Parents of FFA students can see in their children's experience some of their own memories and key learning points. Today's high schools teach basic agribusiness and agricultural sciences, manage a variety of experiential learning enterprises like greenhouses, and involve their students in a large variety of CDEs that have not changed much over the years. The tenets of evaluating meat have not changed much, fundamentally. Nor the skills by which students are judged as public speakers, for example. Given such consistency, a corduroy jacket today represents many of the same things that a corduroy jacket from yesteryear represented. And...

And... communities and cultures that are rich in traditions and shared values struggle with adapting and innovating. And our community struggles to adapt and innovate, the leadership development and adaptive capacities of its young people suffers. Many readers might remember that it wasn't until 2016 (2016?!?) that girls were officially allowed to wear pants (and, for example, a hijab) as part of their formal FFA uniform. Even Augusta National golf course, famous for its barriers to women, allowed them to join as full members almost a half-cen-

The FFA jacket helps members feel like they are part of their chapter and community.
Photo courtesy of the National FFA Organization.

tury earlier. Again, waiting until 2016 to allow girls to wear pants is part of the same coin that helps FFA students access a sense of community and tradition simply by donning their jacket. Traditions and transformational capacities often find themselves in tension.

And at this point we might be ready to address the elephant in the room, provided no points of order. We need to talk about the place parliamentary procedure holds in the overall leadership education of students in high school agriculture experiences. Parliamentary procedure is an AWESOME tool for a single individual to coordinate the communication of a large community of people who need to stay organized and coherent when addressing an explicit and stable agenda that is known within the group. Its attributes show up as strengths when: groups are large, order is one of the highest priorities, agendas are pre-determined, and explicit hierarchy exists in that power rests with certain individuals for advancement of those agendas. Founded in Greece, enacted in more modern societies by Anglo-Saxon tribes and later polished by what those tribes became – the House of Commons in British Parliament – "parli pro" was established to protect the community from an unruly individual (or individuals) derailing a meeting with their own priorities. This is a beneficial tool! And...

And... most educators know (and may have even publicly displayed a poster of) the famous Margaret Meade quote, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed individuals can change the world. In fact, it's the only thing that ever has." There are few brief statements that so clearly summarize some of the key tenets of modern leadership education. Indeed, most post-secondary institutions teach leadership attributes that emphasize building relationships and coalitions, engaging in adaptive and innovative thinking, and creating positive change across differences and cultures. They emphasize that leadership should be practiced in a less hierarchical structure that deemphasizes who is "the leader" and who is "everyone else." The curriculum is based on the presumption that the world is diverse and constantly changing, that organizations need to be agile, and that good ideas can come from anywhere. And, that small groups of committed people can, indeed, accomplish great things. Yet think of who those small groups of committed people often find themselves in conflict with: people running meetings where order is a high priority, agendas are set by those in power, and rules are set identifying who is "in charge."

> Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed individuals can change the world. In fact, it's the only thing that ever has.

Let's pause here. No one is advocating that FFA drop parliamentary procedure as an attribute in its curriculum or traditions. (I can imagine the point of order raised at that suggestion). The problem isn't parli pro, per se. Still... think about how deeply the attributes of parliamentary procedure are immersed in how high school agricultural students learn how to lead. They learn that certain people who have titles are in charge, and that those people determine who has a voice and when they can speak. They learn that there is a procedure for discussing new ideas; a procedure that, in part, requires several formal steps and community support. Not only is parliamentary procedure embedded in how high school students learn how to engage with their peers in meetings, a national competition exists in FFA to recognize those students who are most proficient in practicing it. Students involved in high school agriculture are unequivocally learning important skills – how to advance agendas in orderly and coherent ways, how to keep records of discussion, how to speak in front of others, and how to follow rules to achieve personal success. And...

And... where do they learn how to have messy and sometimes chaotic discussions with those who are different from them and might not recognize a formal authority? Where do they learn how to break some rules after recognizing circumstances where those rules may be what is holding back an organization's progress? Where do they learn that "changing the world" does not often occur by following a pre-set formal agenda, or by receiving an exemplary evaluation from a "judge" in how a meeting was managed? In these contexts, the formal, ordered, hierarchical structures of high school agricultural student organizations seem in direct opposition to learning those types of skills. National studies of the leadership capacity of agriculture-focused students bear this out. Again, parli pro isn't the problem, per se. Still, it is emblematic for how strong adherence to tradition might be stifling students' ability to lead in the 21st century.

Which brings us back to those jackets. The valued traditions celebrated across generations of students are part of the same culture that leads agricultural educators and their students to struggle when faced with issues that do not lend themselves to formal, or-

dered, and hierarchical responses. They are whole cloth; two sides of the same coin. We don't want to lose those traditions and end up ejecting both baby and bathwater.

So what can be done? Even if the coin is imperfect, don't throw it on the ground. Pick up more coins! Not only will it make for a richer experience for students, it will better prepare them for the broader world they will soon be joining as adults. Every coin has two sides. Anyone who has spent time helping students develop the messy and chaotic skills of collaborating across cultures knows that those same students sometimes struggle with enacting order and hierarchy when necessary. The idea isn't to only have one coin in your pocket, but to have several, and to recognize when to pull out which as an educator, knowing it will have strengths and weaknesses that show up differently in different contexts.

Teach parli pro... and recognize that a meeting of a handful of students doesn't need such formality or structure. Prepare students to follow rules and recognize authority... and recognize how adherence to those rules and authority might also limit their potential for success in responding to and leading change or navigating ambiguity and changing value systems. Honor the past and respect the tradition... and question when doing so might depress innovation, inclusion, and new ideas. Don the jacket with pride... and recognize that it might not go with everything.

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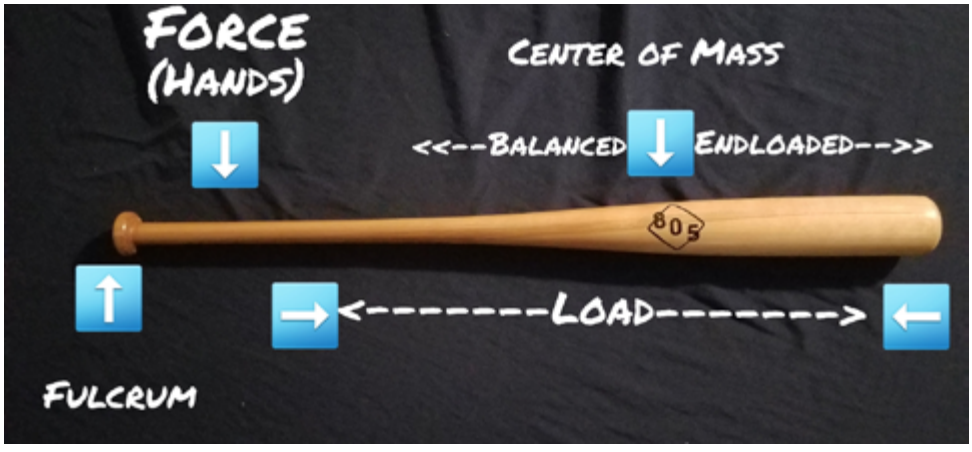
"Swing Weight": Impacting Ag Ed's Moment-of-Inertia in Youth Leadership

by Dr. Lindsay Hastings

My youngest daughter has decided this year that softball is "her sport" and is now playing on a competitive team. God help me — the back of my vehicle is a complete disaster now. Lawn chairs, bat bags, helmets, cleats, you name it. The second I clean it all out, it all gets thrown back in. Sigh. I give up. With this move to competitive softball came a need to upgrade her bat. The old aluminum hand-me-down wasn't going to work anymore. Drat. While my credit card is still recovering, I learned that selecting a bat is more than length and weight — it's also about *swing weight*. Swing weight is how the bat's weight is distributed along the bat's length, which ultimately impacts moment-of-inertia. And moment-of-inertia can largely make the difference between a nice hit and a home run. Enjoy your new bat, dear. I'd better see at least three home runs dedicated to your mother in your post-game interviews with ESPN...

Lately, though, I've been thinking about swing weight in my work as a leadership professor — how can I help to improve "moment-of-inertia" for those who have the most direct contact with youth leadership efforts? Agricultural education teachers are, in many cases, in the most potent position to meaningfully develop leadership capacity among students. But to most, leadership in agricultural education has been largely associated with the FFA officer experience. While certainly a "nice hit," adjusting the "swing weight" might dramatically improve agricultural education's moment-of-inertia in youth leadership efforts. In this article, we'll cover three ways we might adjust our "swing weight."

First, adjusting the "swing weight" may require improving how we advocate for the importance of youth leadership efforts within agricultural education. Specifically, there are two meta-trends worth mentioning when we talk about the importance of youth leadership. The first trend is the impending transfer of wealth. The U.S. is poised to experience the largest transfer of wealth in its history as $75T is projected to transfer between older and younger generations by 2060. In Nebraska, for example, we have learned from the Nebraska Community Foundation that several rural counties are already in their peak wealth transfer periods. Interestingly, though, wealth transfer is only half of the picture. In 2023, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that individuals aged 45 and older held 54% of all management occupations in the American workforce. So, not only will we transfer $75T by 2060, but we will also transfer over half of all management occupations within the next 20 years. So, what does this mean for our "swing weight" in advocating for the importance of youth leadership efforts within agricultural education? These meta-trends mean that early leadership development experiences will become increasingly important in preparing a young workforce to shoulder the burden of sizeable leadership and wealth transfers. My friend Becky Reichard at Claremont Graduate University wrote a great chapter with Susan Paik in the book *Early Development and Leadership* to argue that waiting until adulthood to develop leadership is too late as youth are more malleable and can potentially demonstrate a stronger impact from intentional development. Another buddy of mine, John Dugan — who used to run the Multi-Institute Study of Leadership and is now running the Center for Expanding Leadership and Opportunity within the Aspen Institute — wrote a meta-review of key empirical studies related

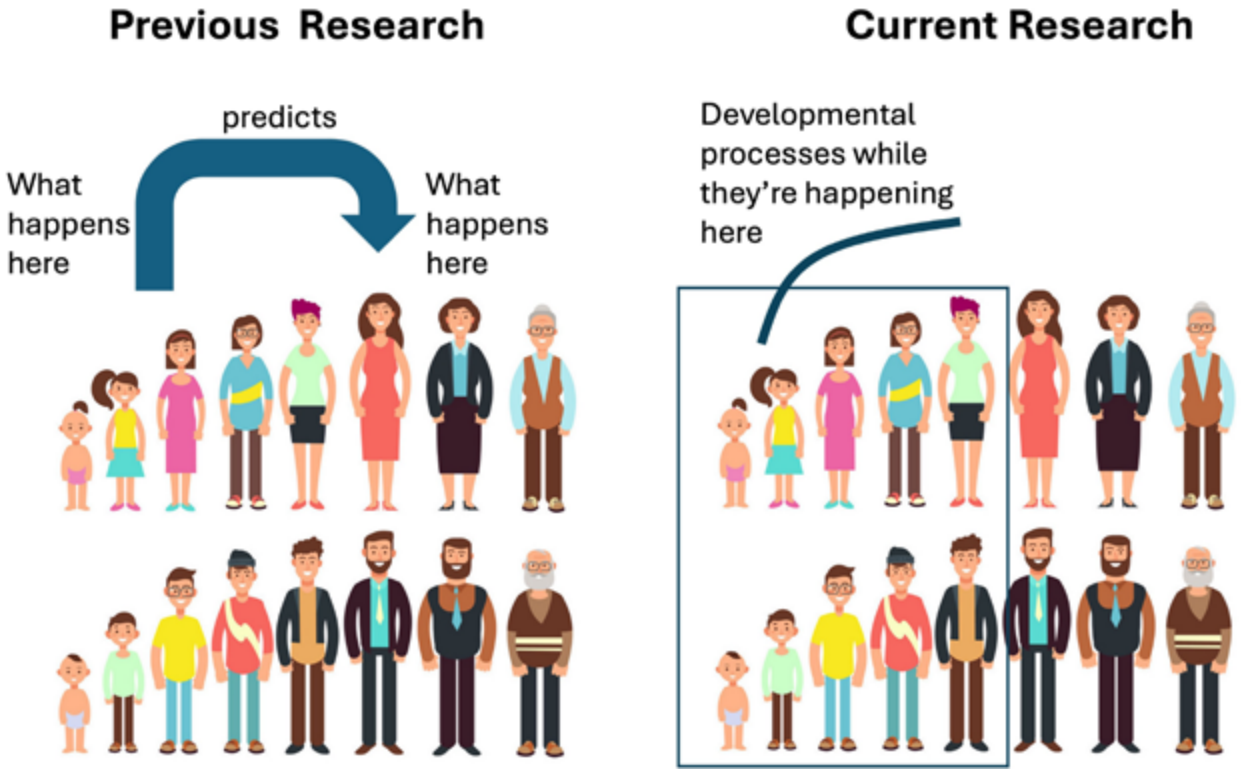


Swing weight in baseball and softball bats indicate how the bat's weight is distributed along the bat's length, which ultimately impacts its moment-of-inertia.

to college student leadership development for *The Handbook for Student Leadership Development* and summarized that pre-college leadership skills and knowledge are among the strongest predictors of leadership efficacy and capacity in college, indicating that K — 12 leadership experiences can substantially impact future leadership competence. In short, early leadership development experiences are critical for a young workforce that will likely assume leadership roles earlier in their career than previous generations.

Second, adjusting "swing weight" to improve agricultural education's moment-of-inertia in youth leadership may involve talking about what we know and, more importantly, what *we don't know* in youth leadership. The journal *Leadership Quarterly* published a special issue in 2011 on longitudinal investigations of leader development, with particular attention paid to the impact of childhood experiences on adult leadership outcomes. The majority of the studies published in this special issue were from the Fullerton Longitudinal Study (FLS) — a comprehensive longitudinal study that was launched in 1979. In 2008, the FLS participants completed a series of leadership assessments. Research from the FLS linked parental modeling, family environment, self-concept and self-esteem, intrinsic academic motivation, and personality factors (e.g., extraversion) in youth with adult leadership outcomes — such as leadership potential and emergence as well as motivation to lead. Other than perhaps self-concept and self-esteem, youth leadership efforts can't really play much in that sandlot. Youth leadership programs are not going to change a student's personality or change parental modeling. We need to learn more! More recently, we have been focused on researching how youth leaders develop *while they are developing*. My colleague L. J. McElravy and I have been studying predictors of youth leadership life skills and developing a psychometric measure of positive youth leadership identity. We have learned through these research efforts that youth leaders often rely on influencing capabilities rather than leadership positions and that youth leadership life skills are largely influenced by things like cognitive empathy, trait-based emotional intelligence, psychological capital (HERO; hope, efficacy, resilience, optimism), self-efficacy, motivation to lead, and identity — now we're talking about things that can be impacted by youth leadership development efforts! Most recently, we have been researching the relationship between leadership identity and leadership competency development in youth, hypothesizing that the development of positive youth leadership identity and leadership competency might have a spiraling effect — the development of positive leadership identity predicts leadership competency growth and that competency

Previous and current youth leadership longitudinal research.



growth predicts further gains in leadership identity over time. While this is an interesting hypothesis, we need living laboratories to test it! This is why adjusting "swing weight" may need to involve talking about what we know and what we don't know in youth leadership. Agricultural education could become one of the most important youth leadership laboratories for understanding how youth leaders develop *while they are developing*.

Third, adjusting "swing weight" to improve agricultural education's moment-of-inertia in youth leadership may need to involve thinking differently about what it means to *do* youth leadership efforts. Historical approaches to youth leadership development have involved (a) event-driven programs (the 2-day or 5-day workshop or conference), despite their inconsistency with what we know about adolescent development, (b) training all students or officers on a 'silver bullet' leadership theory and model (e.g., transformational, servant), despite knowing whether or not those theories match the leadership demands of the position or organization, (c) reliance on individual leader development, despite relational and team-based competencies needed for 21st-century leaders, and (d) extensive leadership development focus on things that don't develop, such as personality. Unfortunately, these approaches — especially over time — have not reliably documented their intended results and have drawn extensive criticism in the field as a result. Youth leadership efforts in agricultural education have not been immune to these criticisms. In response to these criticisms, more innovative thinking in youth leadership development has looked to (a) embed individual and collective leadership development within everyday experiences, (b) intentionally space leadership development event-based experiences and use developmental interactions such as mentoring and coaching in between programming events, and (c) create opportunities for just-in-time reflection via prompted journaling or regular small group discussions.

Once upon a time, I was a mechanical engineering major and adored my freshman physics class (don't tell my friends — they'll never let me live that down). So, I secretly-but-still-acted-like-I-was-too-cool loved learning about swing weight. And while I'm sure rotational inertia hasn't made the list of potential themes for the 2024 National FFA Convention, I still maintain that agricultural education's inter-curricular approach provides the ripest environment for changing the moment-of-inertia in youth leadership efforts. Small adjustments to "swing weight" via how we advocate for the importance of youth leadership, how we talk about what we don't know in youth leadership (but could know through agricultural education), and how we might re-engineer youth leadership efforts have the power to elevate agricultural education to the premier destination for youth leadership efforts. The emergent workforce that is in our agricultural education classrooms right now likely won't be afforded the opportunity to amass significant leadership development experiences in adulthood before assuming senior leadership roles. Impacting moment-of-inertia better in early leadership development experiences through agricultural education might mean the difference between weathering the wealth and leadership transfers and thriving because of them.

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Trophies or Triumphs: Exploring Student Agency and Success

by Catlin Goodwin, Tiffany Marzolino, & Dr. Aaron McKim

I look up at my classroom clock and gasp. I told my significant other I would be home by 6 pm, but it's 6 and I'm still working. I hurriedly grab my keys and head for the door. I can work more on this community event when I get home.

This vignette may be relatable for agriculture teachers. Planning and hosting FFA-related activities can take a lot of time out of a teacher's day, especially when they are the ones in control. But it's not without its benefits. Taking control of program activities is a means of risk mitigation. If the teacher does the work, they know it's been done appropriately. The teacher sets the date, makes arrangements with other professionals in their school, communicates to alumni and friends, identifies community partnerships, and works with administrators and colleagues to get the plans squared away. At this point, the teacher has peace of mind because, not only have they identified what needs to be done, but they have checked all those boxes themselves. All students need to do is show up. When the event comes, the students shine; the event goes smoothly, and students receive compliments from attendees for their hard work.

There are alternatives to smooth, teacher-controlled planning. When students have control of program activities, much more time, thought, and flexibility are required. Students set a time for a planning meeting, and the teacher needs to attend. Officers have urgent questions as they work through their checklist. Students divide tasks; yet, some are unsure how to do their job. So, they turn to their teacher for guidance. How should they word their email to the elementary principal? How do you research catering companies nearby? What should they say on a phone call to a local business?

Throughout this whole process, some students check in and update the team on progress, yet others do not. At this point, if not before, doubt sets in. Teachers may ask themselves, "Do I trust students enough to get the tasks done? When do I step in? Who is responsible for ensuring the tasks are complete?" Then, after more time and effort, the event comes. If it goes well, students receive a lot of compliments. If it goes poorly, upset guests seek out the teacher to ask what went wrong.

Comparing the scenarios, opting for control is a rational decision made by agricultural educators; however, this decision is unfavorable for two reasons. First, when teachers exert control of program activities, the resulting learning environment is not aligned with program outcomes. Most programs exist with the goal, in part, of enhancing students' abilities to independently solve problems and seize opportunities. When the teacher is directive, students cannot be expected to develop independence. In contrast, an environment where student agency is supported involves students cultivating independent problem solving by strengthening decision making, motivation, and outcome internalization.

The second reason teacher control is unfavorable is because it creates a treadmill of tasks. As introduced, teacher control is the product of pursuing externally defined success (e.g., recognition, status). To achieve "success," agriculture teachers adopt a noble sacrifice mindset in which they invest additional time, energy, and control. When that investment fails, teachers increase their investment in hopes of achieving the outcome. Thus, teachers are on a treadmill of ever-increasing tasks. Many ride this treadmill all the way to achieving the externally defined goal. However, that achievement is unfulfilling. Teachers want to see student effort result in success. When success is experienced because of the teacher's noble sacrifice, achievement is hollow. Instead, teachers must step off the treadmill, clarify a goal of developing independence, and craft an aligned environment.

Stepping off the treadmill can be a challenge. After all, some have learned treadmills don't immediately stop when someone steps off. There is a period when the belt keeps moving, whether we want it to or not. Seeing all the

tasks pile up can make it seem like we're losing control, and many have a felt need to step back on to continue moving forward. But, at this pivotal moment, teachers must recognize the long-term trap of continuously paving the path *for* their students and opt to move forward *with* their students.

The difference between working *for* students and working *with* students is where the teacher stands. In traditional leadership perspectives, the leader – in this case, the teacher - stands in the spotlight and decides what is the best action *for* the students. However, in shared leadership, the teacher takes a background role, providing students *with* support and guidance as they carry out their vision. When teachers think critically about their desired outcomes for students, the transition from traditional to shared leadership perspectives becomes essential. Rather than enacting the role of controlling leader, teachers play the role of supportive coach (Zhu et al., 2018). Supporting the change to shared leadership starts by creating a cohesive environment, building student autonomy, and encouraging collective trust (Sanfilippo, 2024; Zhu et al., 2018).

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Create a Cohesive Environment

Cohesive environments are marked by a common purpose and mutual support (Sanfilippo, 2024; Zhu et al., 2018). When leadership teams connect activities to their larger purpose, motivation and engagement increase. In their role as supportive coach, teachers help students identify their shared purpose, or the "why" all students can champion. Then, teachers help students create an environment of mutual support to work toward their shared purpose. Mutual support is realized when team members help each other, provide meaningful feedback, and advocate for themselves and others in a safe environment. Creating a cohesive environment sets the foundation for students to increase their power and collective resources to create action and change.

Build Student Autonomy

In traditional leadership perspectives, the teacher directs the work of the students and provides incentives to increase motivation. However, in a shared leadership perspective, the teacher helps students build their autonomy through self-motivation and self-direction (Bligh et al., 2006). Teachers help students develop self-motivation and self-direction by encouraging and reinforcing self-motivated and self-directed behaviors, as well as by sharing strategies and suggestions for aligning student work to outcomes and managing processes (Carson et al., 2017). When teachers help students develop their capacities for self-motivation and self-direction, students develop autonomy and personal growth, and teachers' loads lighten in the long-term.

Encourage Collective Trust

As teachers help students create a cohesive environment and build autonomy, students gain confidence in their ability to trust team members. Teachers support collective trust by encouraging students to share ideas and struggles and to recognize peers' team contributions. By enacting the role of supportive coach, the teacher can help students identify their individual and collective strengths and use them to collaborate effectively.

When combined, the creation of a cohesive environment, built student autonomy, and encouragement of collective trust transform leadership perspectives from traditional, top-down approaches, where the teacher maintains control of the program, to horizontal, shared approaches, where the teacher coaches students, who control the program. As control is distributed among students, the two desirable outcomes described previously are realized. First, as students develop agency, they practice authentic leadership skills, learning to own their decisions, self-motivate, and internalize the consequences. Further, when teachers reduce their control over programs, they realize the successes their students can accomplish independently, thus gaining satisfaction and power in their students' achievements.

What if Students Fail?

When SBAE events engage community members and consist of many moving parts, teachers may be tempted to take control, reducing mistakes and preparation time; however, in this situation, students experience little growth. When students lead an event, there might be mistakes, overlooked opportunities, and maybe even a piglet running loose in the park! But let's be honest, those things happen when the teacher is in control too. Failure is an opportunity for growth. When teachers experience failure, they internalize and grow. When students in a supportive environment experience failure, they internalize and grow. Teachers must decide which outcome they most desire.

Teachers struggling to manage overflowing tasks and limited student development may feel the need to take control of the SBAE

program to mitigate risk and showcase some form of "success." However, this short-term solution leads to long-term dependence on the teacher. Alternatively, teachers can adopt a shared leadership perspective. Though it takes time to create a cohesive environment, build student autonomy, and encourage collective trust, through shared leadership perspectives, students' roles shift from passive task completers to agents of action and change, allowing students to build agency and authentic leadership skills while simultaneously reducing teachers' workload in the long-term.

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I look up at my classroom clock. It's 3:30 pm. I feel weird – there's nothing for me to do today after school. My students have the event handled. Today, I may just beat my partner home.

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Equipping Youth as Community Change Agents: Reshaping Perspectives on Service and Volunteerism

by Carrie N. Baker & Dr. Sarah A. Bush

Today, young people play active roles in shaping and enacting positive change in their communities (Checkoway, 2006). Research suggests younger generations, like Generation Z, are well-informed about current events, participate civically, and value social activism (Buzzetto-Hollywood et al., 2021). For many students, opportunities for civic participation often happen through school groups or organizations. Agricultural youth programs like 4-H and the National FFA Organization typically have a high level of focus on community engagement and service. We see this through FFA's "Living to Serve" motto and 4-H's commitment to "giving kids a voice to express who they are and how they make their lives and communities better" (4-H, n.d.).

The intention behind these initiatives is to prepare youth to be active and engaged citizens in their current and future communities. However, much of the service completed within these organizations are short-term volunteer engagements or annual club/chapter projects with varying levels of youth interest and investment. This model does not provide students with autonomy and/or help them understand how to transfer what they learn to create change in their communities.

To shift our perspectives on community service and volunteerism in 4-H, FFA, and other school-based settings, we must recognize that participation alone does not lead to development outcomes (Arnold, 2018; Roth et al., 2010). Instead, successful engagements capitalize on student strengths and passions in ways that benefit their community and provide meaningful skill development. A revised model places greater emphasis on *purpose* with specific and tangible outcomes that equip young people as community change agents. We overview the social change model (SCM) of leadership development (Komives et al., 2017) as an approach for equipping youth

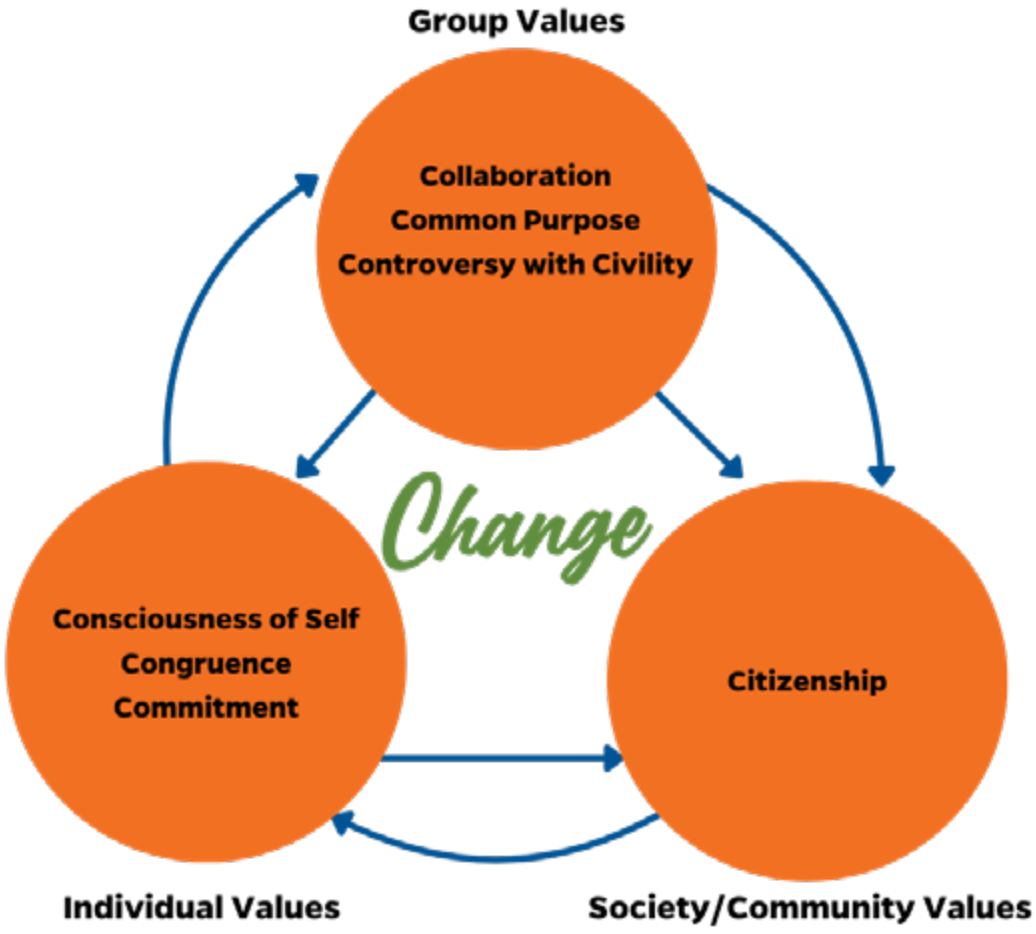

Figure 1.
The Social Change Model (SCM) of Leadership Development
Note. Adapted from Higher Education Research Institute (Astin & Astin, 1996) and Komives et al. (2017).

to serve and lead locally. We offer tangible tips that educators, chapter advisors, and youth organization leaders can use to help young people identify, align, and apply their interests and skills for service and long-term community engagement.

Social Change Model of Leadership Development

The SCM was created under the premise that leadership should be socially responsible and change-focused (Komives et al., 2017). While this model was developed by the Higher Education Youth Institute (HERI) (Astin & Astin, 1996) with college students, it provides guidance for how individuals working with youth can encourage socially responsible leadership. The expanded SCM (Figure 1) includes seven 'C values' that fall into three domains—individual, group, and society/community—and all impact one another (Komives et al., 2017).

The model provides a framework for developing individuals while also considering the importance of shaping and promoting group and societal values. While many youth leadership programs work to develop individuals, foster teamwork skills, and incorporate some community engagement, few combine these three concepts to help youth develop a holistic understanding of their own ability to serve their community long-term. Therefore, it is important for those working with youth to create programs and initiatives that not only promote individual values and growth, but also build their capacity to reflect on and apply values in the other two domains to drive change.

Individual Values

The individual values represented in the model are *consciousness of self*, *congruence*, and *commitment* (Komives et al., 2017). Most youth development programs focus on consciousness of self and aim to help youth develop a strong sense of self. This often comes in the form of personality assessments, analysis of personal beliefs, values, and attitudes, and/or developing an understanding of emotional intelligence. While this can be a great start to helping youth understand who they are, they also need to develop an understanding of how they can live a congruent life and be committed to things they are passionate about.

Congruence includes acting consistently with one's identified values, beliefs, attitudes, and emotions (Komives et al., 2017). For young people, this is a time to explore these traits and test their personal limits. Youth may struggle to feel fully congruent at times and should understand that most individuals are not. However, discussion of personal accountability and responsibility for actions can help youth to develop a strong sense of congruence. Adult leaders should create opportunities for youth to dialogue with their peers and receive feedback on how they are perceived by others as acting in alignment with their own values.

> "Our youth-serving agricultural organizations have a responsibility to produce leaders prepared to tackle societal issues..."

Understanding individual values is often intertwined with exploring passion and where students invest their time. Oftentimes, youth—especially high-achieving youth—are over-committed. While exploring passions is important, adult leaders should encourage youth to critically think about how their involvement aligns with their passions, individual values, and strengths. This exercise will help them to prioritize their time and skills to engage with groups and organizations where they feel most intrinsically motivated. Often this means guiding them toward opportunities where they feel confident in their ability to contribute to the vision and mission of the organization. When youth can uphold their commitments without feeling burnout, they often feel a higher sense of congruence and become more self-aware of their own constraints and limits.

Group Values

As students develop their individual values, they should also be challenged to consider how various groups they are part of align with their values. For example, in a FFA chapter, advisors might facilitate discussion with members on how the organization's shared vision and mission are similar or different from their own personal values. Using this information, advisors or other teachers can help students find other community and/or school-based organizations that also support these values and their ability to be congruent. When it comes to collaboration with groups outside of your chapter, it is important to take into consideration that you may have a higher level of commitment from members when working with organizations that match their values. Each officer team will have their own common purpose that may dictate a need for different and new partnerships. This facilitates the transition to thinking about shared values of a group.

SCM names group values as *common purpose, collaboration,*

and controversy with civility (Komives et al., 2017). Common purpose represents the responsibility each group member has toward creating their shared aims, values, and vision (Komives et al., 2017). While your chapter may have an overarching vision and mission, each new officer team should work with the current membership to establish collective aims and a vision for moving the organization forward. Giving youth a voice and having a shared purpose within the organization will lead to greater investment and collaboration with others in the group. Collaboration in this model is the group's collective contributions, which includes using individual skillsets and strengths. These groups also participate in controversy with civility, which requires creating space for individuals to present differing viewpoints and create multiple solutions to drive the organization forward (Komives et al., 2017). Developing these group values prepares youth who can participate more productively as members of their wider communities.

Society / Community Values

The final value, included in the society/community domain, is *citizenship*. For youth to be productive citizens and enact change, they must have strong individual and group values, and a greater purpose. Citizenship occurs when someone actively takes responsibility for how they contribute to society through community engagement (Komives et al., 2017). Most youth leadership programs provide opportunities for short-term engagement. They typically do not include intentional experiences that challenge youth to apply their strengths and passions long-term to better their local communities and society, at large.

Our youth-serving agricultural organizations have a responsibility to produce leaders prepared to tackle societal issues like feeding a global population. These organizations play a vital role in helping students become more aware of community and global issues and their potential role in addressing them. One way for organizations to do this effectively is by building practical, transferable learning and service experiences around the SCM.

Let's consider the school-based agricultural education (SBAE) model. The incorporation of classroom instruction, leadership development, and experiential learning provides a flourishing environment to promote the seven C's. However, true integration requires critical reflection of curriculum and application-based components. For example, while it may be easier to have members participate in the same annual service project, it would be more productive for their overall growth and citizenship development for officer teams to co-create yearly project initiatives with membership. These yearly initiatives should be based on the common values and vision identified by the group at the start of the year. At the individual level, members should be encouraged to take on SAE projects with service-based components that align with their personal values.

To best equip our youth as community change agents, there needs to be a greater focus on citizenship through leadership development experiences. Some questions to ask:

- How often are you providing opportunities for students to consider how they may contribute to their community through their individual values, passions, and strengths?
- How often do you focus on congruence and commitment?
- Do you take time to establish shared goals and a vision?
- Is there discussion about the role of your group in enacting social and community change? And how can youth contribute to both?

As teachers, advisors, and adult leaders, we should routinely reflect on how the three value domains are intertwined in our programs and how we might be more intentional about integrating each in instruction, activities, and service to help our students become more active, engaged citizens in their community, the agricultural industry, and the world.

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Making your Program Bulletproof in Today's Pace of Change

by Dr. Curtis Friedel

The pace of change continues to move faster in today's world. Advancements in technology have enabled more work to be done, at a quicker pace, and involve more collaboration than ever before. As an example, it is estimated that the Bronze Age lasted approximately 2,100 years before progressing to the Iron Age. For comparison, there is a 66-year span between the Wright brothers first powered and sustained flight of an airplane, and Neil Armstrong becoming the first person walking on the moon.

Said another way, the pace of change today is the slowest it will ever be again in your lifetime (Morgan, 2020). We often consider how change affects us personally, in the day-to-day aspects of our work and personal lives. Have we fully considered how much this pace of change affects the local mission and vision of our agricultural education program?

> Complex change will require more adaptive and more innovative individuals working together, with mutual respect for each other's diversity of thought brought to the table.

The Advisory Committee

When I was an undergraduate student preparing to be an ag teacher, my advisor, Dr. Marvin Hoskey, taught the importance of having an advisory committee for the agricultural education program. There was a handout he provided, with a chart used to list members and potential members and the diversity of thought they may bring to the table. Categories on the table included demographic differences such as age, gender, race, positions of leadership, experiences, and representations of the diversity of agriculture in the area. The purpose of the table was to provide a structure for considering individuals who have diverse perspectives of local agriculture to be on the advisory committee. Instead of asking friends and individuals who think similarly to join the committee, the goal was to bring multiple perspectives. One of the first things I did as a newly minted and employed agricultural instructor was to put together an advisory committee based on this table.

Advisory committees are great for evaluating the curriculum of an agricultural education program and providing insight on the latest agricultural developments, with respect to both technology and the workforce. Individuals serving on the advisory committee can be a tremendous resource to both the agricultural instructor and the agricultural education program. The question is, is the advisory committee still enough of a resource to meet the challenges of exponentially increasing pace of change?

Connecting People to Change

We know from nearly 50 years of published research that each of us has an innate and stable preference in our orientation towards change. This preference is a dimension of our personality. Some of us are more adaptive; that being more structured in our thinking, prefer more detail, and prefer incremental change with focus on efficiency, and more regard for group consensus (Kirton, 2011). Some of us are more innovative; that being less structured in our thinking, preferring more global and tangential thought, and preferring more disruptive change with less regard for group consensus (Kirton, 2011). Completion of the KAI (Kirton's Adaption-Innovation Inventory) can determine where one is positioned on the adaption-innovation continuum. Completion of the KAI provides the respondent a number between 32, indicating strong adaption, and 160, indicating strong innovation, with a mean of 95. The continuum has a normal distribution curve, with most people scoreing in the middle, having a milder preference of being adaptive or innovative. That is, 68% of the general population are positioned between 78 (more adaptive) and 112 (more innovative).

There is no ideal position on the continuum. One's preference to be more adaptive or more innovative is not related to one's intelligence, motivation, values, experiences, learned skills, age, culture, ethnicity, or race (Friedel,

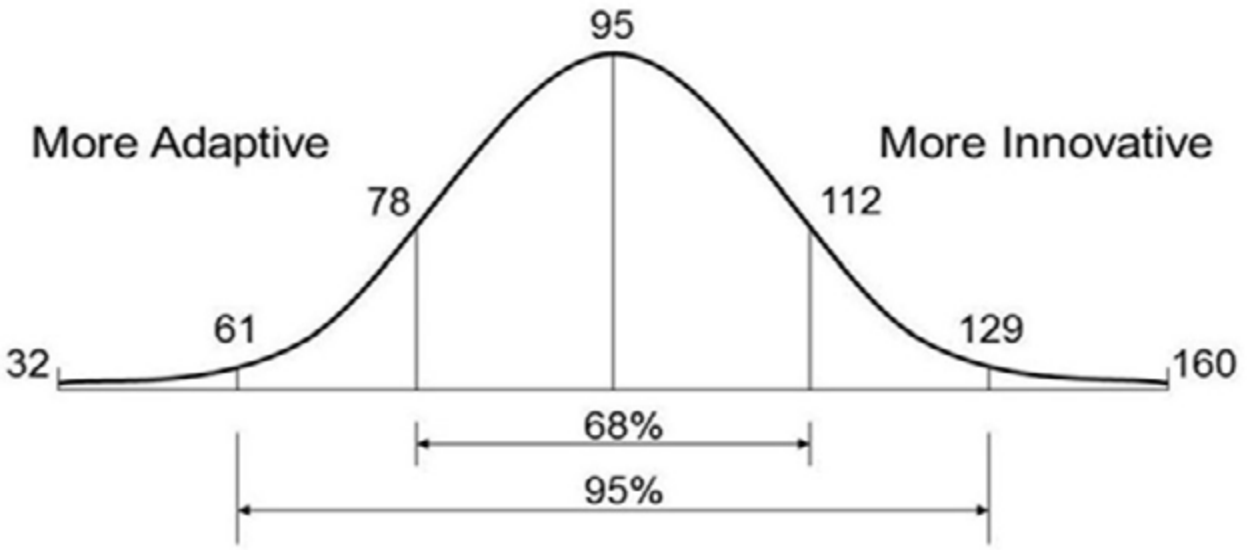

Figure 1. Normal distribution of KAI scores across the adaption-innovation continuum.

2014). It is truly an indication of cognitive diversity, each of us having advantages and disadvantages in our preference to solve problems.

This means that two people could be of different age, intelligence, race, learned skills, and backgrounds, and still prefer to solve the problem the same way because they are positioned at the same place on the adaption-innovation continuum. Many change frameworks examine the process of change. If change isn't working well, there is a review of the process. The adaption-innovation continuum focuses on how people engage with change. The process for change could be great, and people are still resisting change. This may be because the proposed change misaligns with one's preference for change. In accepting and agreeing to change, the more adaptive will prefer more structure, and the more innovative will prefer less. If I had known about the adaption-innovation continuum as a new agricultural instructor, I would have included it as a category in my table to better incorporate diversity of thought in my advisory committee.

What Change is Needed?

With the adaption-innovation continuum in mind, one can now consider change and measure its size (large or small), complexity (simple or multifaceted), speed (fast or slow), and style (adaptive or innovative). Each of these are independent of each other. The question then becomes, what change is needed?

The answer to this question will vary for each agricultural education program. It should be noted at this point that many people define the word innovation differently. In many groups, the word innovation is synonymous with new technology, or new way to implement, or new change in general. With the adaption-innovation continuum, we are referring to innovation as a style of change (Kirton, 2011). We can have adaptive new change and innovative new change. Which is better? It depends on the nature of the problem. The proper solution to address the needs of the problem should bring more advantages than disadvantages as the way to move forward.

Knowing that each of us has an innate and stable preference for adaption or innovation can help a team or committee reduce conflict and improve collaboration. First, there is recognition that we each think differently and one's position on the adaption-innovation continuum has no relationship with how smart, skilled, motivated, or loyal to the committee in achieving its goals. This can help members of the team recognize that disagreement isn't personal, or that disagreement is an indication of someone being less intelligent. They simply prefer to think more adaptively or more innovatively than you. Second, a more thoughtful conversation about the nature of the problem can occur and if the problem requires a more adaptive or more innovative solution. Sometimes a member of the team has more influence, and their preference to solve the problem more adaptively or more innovatively carries more weight. This could take your agricultural education program in the wrong direction. Recognizing this, it is important to create a safe space for evaluating problems and solutions so that merit can be fully placed on the idea, and not on who came up with the idea.

Building Change Management Teams

The adaption-innovation continuum could be incorporated into the work of the advisory committee, and could also be used to build change management teams (see Deszca, et al., 2019). A change management team is a group of individuals tasked with organizing and accomplishing a particular change which has been determined to be needed. It is for the tasks that are larger than the capacity of the agricultural instructor, to which these tasks are increasing in number. Change management teams vary in size and structure, but commonly are self-regulated with members having designated roles and responsibilities. They tend to have fewer than 10 members, meet bi-weekly, have access to all information, and act quickly (Deszca, et al., 2019). A change management team could be set up to revise curriculum, develop new programs, improve facilities, etc. Each change management team can be dissolved once it has accomplished its task, with members being rewarded for their work. Complex change will require more adaptive and more innovative individuals working together, with mutual respect for each other's diversity of thought brought to the table.

Change Management Teams shouldn't replace advisory committees. Rather they can work hand-in-hand. Advisory committees still maintain usefulness in helping the agricultural teacher have deeper thought in the mission and vision of the overall program. Change management teams can be used to help the agriculture teacher keep up with the pace of change in today's world.

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Change Without Friction is No Change At All: Approaches for the Organizational Leader Experiencing Change

by Jeremy Elliott-Engel, Alison White, & Joe Rand

"*There are two things that everybody hates. Change and the way things are.*" (Shower Thoughts, 2018). While humorous, this dynamic reflects a real challenge leaders face in responding to ever-evolving education and industry needs. Change processes can be thoughtfully managed to increase their success. However, even when skillfully addressed, change is still hard, especially within sociocultural issues like racial equity and LGBTQIA+ inclusion. To lessen the fear and friction associated with change and support sustained momentum, leaders can create holding environments designed with stakeholders' zone of proximal development in mind, work to understand and mitigate shifting focus friction and use clear mission-based messaging. In this article, we will discuss these adaptive change management strategies and use a timely example from 4-H Youth Development (4-H) programs to illustrate their use.

> Remember to keep the focus on finding shared understanding around the mission, and help individuals understand that change does not always mean loss.

The foundations of agricultural leadership have been rooted in supporting the industry and communities dependent on it to adapt and respond to change. Agricultural education and Extension education evolved from a need to support agricultural producers in responding to the industrialization, commodification, and continued technological advances that have shaped the agriculture industry. Agricultural education and the industry continue to face forces that necessitate change and adaptation.

Those who do not adapt, or see the industry adapting to meet their needs, may choose to leave the agriculture industry altogether. Today, less than 1% of the U.S. population are agricultural producers, and as of 2023, the average age of a U.S. farmer is 57.5 years old (Buys et al., 2023; Omang, 2024). Thus, placing the sustainability of agricultural production, which is essential for our rural economic prosperity and national security, at existential risk. Adaptation by the agricultural industry is informed continuously by market forces, but also social and environmental factors. With the world's food production needs predicted to grow by 70% by 2050, food production and ag-related industries will require an ever-expanding and diverse workforce to meet the global population's needs. The industry needs to change and adapt to changing demographics to encourage the contributions of potential talent that ensures its future.

However needed the change, it can cause tension with those who are comfortable with the status quo. This is true for the individual and a group of individuals that comprise an organization. While individuals often base decisions on their own emotional regulation, logic, and perceived best interests, organizations must make sense of the environmental factors that necessitate change and the feedback of individual internal and external stakeholders. This process invites friction, as it evokes each individual's perspectives. As Rogers (1963a; b) identified, some will readily engage, and others will be more hesitant. Kirton (1984) identified that each individual has a different problem-solving style. Thus, we bring our own understanding of the problem and potential solutions through the innate lens. Additionally, sociocultural influences, like religion, media, peer group dynamics, education, and socio-economic class, affect how we understand the issue as individuals and groups. As groups of people make meaning of change, there are complex layers of individual and co-created understanding at play, making this process rarely smooth.

A leader's role is to help set organizational objectives in clear alignment with the organization's

mission and to facilitate environments and structures that support the organization's members while they adapt to change. Heifetz and Laurie (1997) call this the holding environment. A well-crafted holding environment creates a productive level of challenge or tension, wherein individuals can engage with a difficult issue with enough psychological safety to explore a diversity of perspectives while avoiding overwhelming frustration, disengagement, or other unproductive responses. The concept of a space that iteratively shifts to maintain productive discourse invokes the idea of a zone of proximal development (ZPD).

ZPD is defined by Vygotsky (1978) as the "distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under… guidance or in collaboration" (p.86). During change processes, the ZPD is a space in which stakeholder buy-in and sustainable progress regarding complex changes can be realized in a holding environment facilitated by leadership through sharing clear mission-oriented objectives, welcoming open dialogue, setting communication norms of psychological safety, and maintaining a commitment to seek solutions (Savick, 2022).

Another element of ZPD relative to adaptive change management lies within the leader's responsibility to assess what stage of change they are in, are they at:

- Contemplation: They acknowledge that there is a problem but are not yet ready to address it, or lack the motivation or confidence to make a change;
- Preparation/Determination: They are getting ready to change;
- Action/Willpower: They are actively changing behavior or engaging in ongoing maintenance (Raihan & Cognburn, 2023).

Identifying a high percentage of members within the contemplation stage is not a call for inaction. Rather, it alerts the leader to intentionally craft a holding environment where members can collaboratively identify the need for change. A skilled facilitator can help individuals connect the need for change to the organization's mission, and build motivation for solution-seeking to create a productive ZPD.

When organizational change strategies prove unsuccessful in achieving a productive zone of proximal development within the holding environment, the organization may experience shifting focus friction. Shifting focus friction results from individuals' deep appreciation for the program offered combined with a feeling of opportunity loss (perceived or real), and a misunderstanding of the organization's mission and objectives (Elliott-Engel et al., 2021).

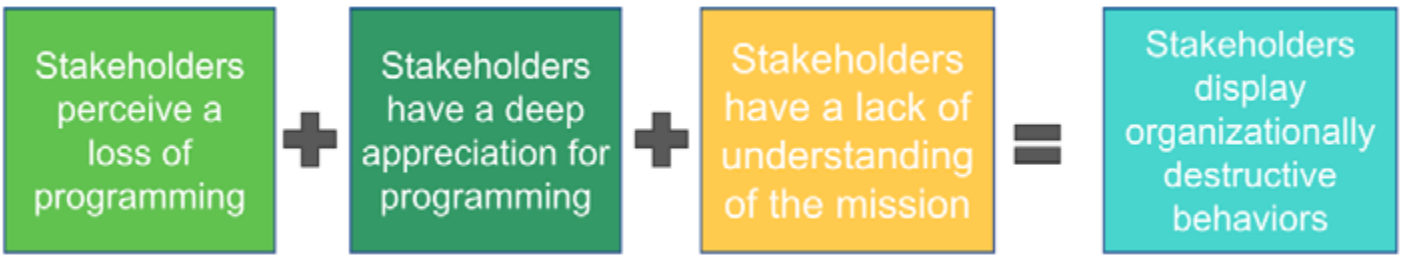
This pushback on organizational change often manifests as threats (e.g., negative social media campaigns, use of political power to threaten the organization, threats to job security to the individual communicating the need for change) or actual loss of participation or resources.

The heightened emotion stakeholders display may daunt leaders facing this type of pushback. However, within this response, there lies an opportunity to activate the deep care stakeholders hold in favor of engaging towards solutions, instead of against it. The shifting focus friction framework illuminates the opportunities for leaders to:

- Identify common ground between opposing positions by acknowledging stakeholders' deep appreciation for the organization's programming and work to frame difficult dialogue within mutual values;
- Explore perceived or actual losses to seek appropriate solutions and craft targeted messaging;
- Pinpoint areas of mission misunderstanding and craft clarifying messaging designed to create a shared understanding of the organization's mission.

When initiating or communicating a need for adaptive change, leaders are better positioned to identify their stake-

Figure 1. The Model of Shifting Focus Friction (Elliott-Engel et al., 2021).



holders' change readiness stage, craft a holding environment, and consider ZPD within their response to pushback when they understand some of the common themes of negative responses they may receive.

For example, pushback related to sociocultural initiatives in youth programming, agricultural-related programming in particular, often manifests within four themes as demonstrated through an analysis of commentary on National 4-H Council's Facebook posts from a June 2020 post about racial inequities in America and four Pride Month posts from June 2021 (White et al., 2022). These themes can be extrapolated in reference to other sociocultural changes in youth agricultural education and youth programming.

1. This topic is political. *"Most of US farmers are not super liberal politically. ...If 4H goes to far to the left they will lose those farm kids..."*
2. This topic is inappropriate for youth. *"This is not what young kids should be thinking about."*
3. This topic is inappropriate for an agricultural organization. *"Wow....4H, let's stick to agriculture and not issues that need to be left at home. I am done with you."*
4. This topic isn't necessary. *"There is no need for this, I have never seen any discrimination of any kind in 4-H."*

Within challenging conversations like these, Shifting Focus Friction is on clear display as stakeholders worry that a program they have a deep appreciation for is changing in a way that affects their participation, and from their perspective, the change is misaligned with the program's purpose. When managing emotionally ladened organizational change, mutual trust and respect are likely at risk between leaders and stakeholders (Patterson et al., 2002). Sharing clear mission-based communication within thoughtful holding environments responsive to the ZPD of stakeholders is key to beginning to resolve friction and rebuild the mutual trust and respect necessary to navigate change. For example, let's craft a general mission-based message in response to the Shifting Focus Friction displayed by stakeholders in the 4-H example above that could be used in messaging or to open dialogue.

In this example, we will:

- Acknowledge their deep appreciation for the program and our mutual values.
- Connect the change to the program's mission.
- Address the identified friction theme/s (e.g., *"This topic is inappropriate for agricultural education," and "This topic is political."*)
- Acknowledge their ZPD and invite future conversation.

We value your commitment to 4-H and know the program is important to you and your family. It's important to us too, and we are so proud of the life-changing opportunities 4-H provides youth and their

(LEFT) 4-H members teaching about LGBTQ+ allyship at the 2022 National 4-H Healthy Living Summit in Bethesda, MD.
(RIGHT) 4-H youth examining polymers during a 2023 summer science camp.

communities. As a public access program dedicated to research-based positive youth development, we must ensure youth of all identities know they are welcome and supported in our programs and continuously work to craft environments where all youth experience authentic belonging, which is at the heart of youths' success in 4-H.

Our National 4-H Mission is "to provide meaningful opportunities for all youth and adults to work together to create sustainable community change." Our work towards increasing access and equity within our program is central to our mission and cuts across the over a hundred project areas we offer, from agricultural science to STEM to healthy living to citizen engagement.

4-H's commitment to welcoming and supporting all youth is about positive youth development, not projects, as we know a broad diversity of people are present in all communities and industries, rural and urban alike. 4-H programs should be as diverse as the communities they serve, bringing together many kinds of families, cultures, faiths, and other identities and experiences. Youth and communities thrive when they learn to work across differences to respect and value the individual perspectives diversity brings.

In addition, we recognize that political figures also share messaging affirming and supporting youth who experience marginalization related to their identities, which can blur the lines between politics and research-based best practices of positive youth development. Our mission and work are aligned with these positive youth development practices, not politics.

Conversations about these topics can be difficult and ones that some members of our 4-H community may not fully understand or feel comfortable discussing. While we may not agree on when and how to hold these conversations, hopefully, we can agree that all youth deserve to be heard by and strongly supported by programs like 4-H, which promise all youth a place to belong while working and learning in partnership with caring adults.

Please reach out if you have questions about 4-H's access, equity, and non-discrimination practices or if you need support in identifying how your family's participation in 4-H programming works within our positive youth development practices.

This example of a written communication is just one way leaders can respond when they experience a stakeholders push-back. The goal of a leader is to help moderate the distress individuals are experiencing as they engage with change. This is the leadership work of keeping individuals within the ZPD (Seibel et al., 2023). Our communication example demonstrates a framework that will help you either establish a communication or organizational change strategy for your organization, whether the accusation is that the changes you are trying to implement are seen as being political, inappropriate for youth/agriculture, or the topic isn't necessary. Remember to keep the focus on finding shared understanding around the mission, and help individuals understand that change does not always mean loss. You can be successful if you find ways to share understanding of the opportunities gained from the changes. Finally, the work of a leader is constant and ongoing. You will move the organization forward if you are intentional, engaged with your stakeholders, and focused on where you need to move the organization. Remember though, your path is not always a direct line, but if you are focused on keeping your stakeholders in the ZPD then you are making progress, which results in trust building, and the more trust there is the more movement you will be able to create towards the change you want.

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Creating Transformational Change Through Authentic Community Connections

by Caitlin Luck & Catlin Goodwin

It is no secret that the successes of many school-based agricultural education (SBAE) programs lie in their connections to the local community. Connections between SBAE programs and communities provide significant opportunities for leadership development and community change. But the extent of these outcomes relies heavily on the strength of the connections.

On one end of the scale, SBAE programs and communities have unidirectional connections, known as transactional, where either the program or the community benefit from the relationship. These types of connections are typically stand-alone events or programs. For example, it can be easy to invite community organizations or speakers into your classroom and ask them to share specific content or experiences. While these opportunities can certainly have an impact on students, stand-alone opportunities can be perceived as transactional by our community partners and often leave our students struggling to make connections to remaining coursework.

On the other end of the scale, SBAE programs and communities have multidirectional connections, known as transformational, where the relationship is mutually beneficial. These types of connections are typically more long-term commitments. For example, monthly visits to a local nursing home allows community members and students to mutually benefit from improved conversation skills and social connections that are maintained over time. Transformational connections, characterized by rich, authentic relationships between SBAE programs and communities provide the greatest opportunities for transformational change. But relationships at this level are difficult to build and maintain.

Authentic Community Conversations: A Toolkit

Whether you're new to a community or have been there for years, identifying, establishing, and maintaining new connections with your community can be a daunting task. In 2023, I helped to reopen an agriculture program at a comprehensive high school, learning a lot about community relationships along the way. In the process, I created a toolkit with strategies and documents to help myself and others make authentic community connections. In this article, we share portions of the toolkit to help other SBAE teachers and leaders create or reinvigorate community connections.

> "Encouraging students to see the value in their community can help students identify opportunities to contribute."

Phase 1: Identify Partnerships

Use an Asset-Based Perspective: It can be easy to identify perceived problems within the community, yet we forget how focusing on problems shapes how students view their community. We have to ask ourselves, what community work is already being done in our area and how can we support/highlight these initiatives? Avoid identifying problems to solve in the community; rather, identify opportunities to support the ongoing interventions. Encouraging students to see the value in their community can help students identify opportunities to contribute. This will increase social capital and lead to continued buy-in from students and from potential partnering organizations.

Engage in Your Community: Identifying potentially successful partnerships requires active engagement in the community. As you become more involved in your community, you can gain a real sense of the work being done by these organizations and evaluate how a potential partnership will work for your program. The complete Authentic Community Connections toolkit includes an example structure for recording potential community partnerships.

Cast a Wide Net: Knowing where to begin identifying organizations for partnerships can be overwhelming. But, taking a broader lens can be helpful. Focus less on how the community partner will fit into precise class-

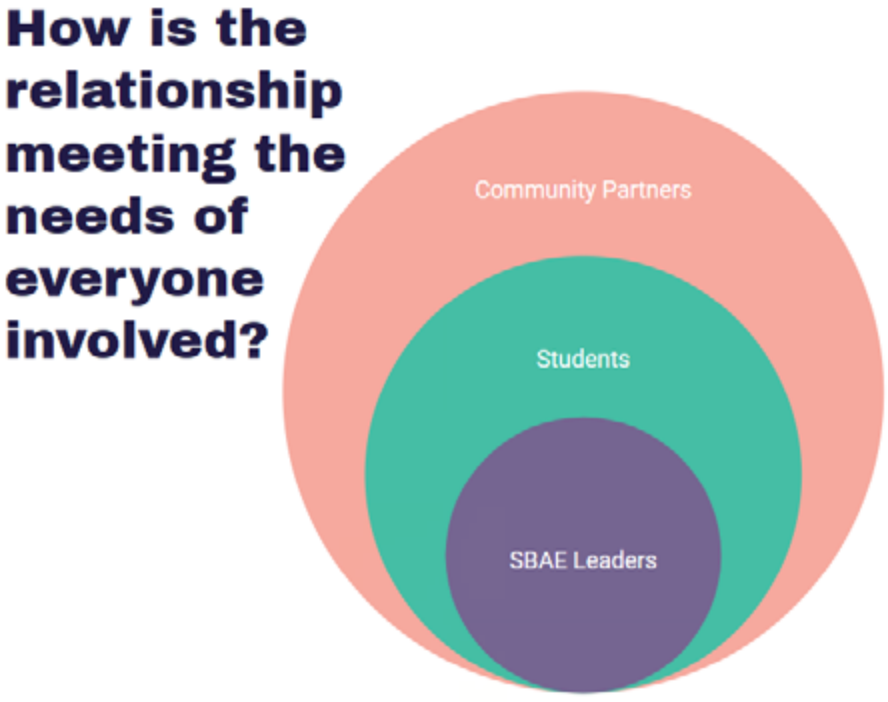
room content and instead imagine how a group fits into the wider thematic sense of your course or program. Maybe you don't know exactly how the program can benefit from connections with the local Master Gardeners, but you do know they would be a great resource for plant science curriculum, FFA activities, and SAEs. Creating a "resource map" and visiting potential groups may help to build a sense of what kind of work a community group does and who might be a member you want to reach out to. As you seek community partnerships, you may want to explore additional questions located in the complete Authentic Community Connections toolkit.

Phase 2: Establish Relationships

Immerse Yourself in the Organization: Once you have identified potential partnerships, be willing to engage yourself in the community group through observations, conversations, and shared activities. To create mutual trust, and avoid transactional connections, you must be present and willing to actively engage with community partners.

Establish Shared Expectations: To avoid conflict and competing goals, make your goals and expectations clear and create a space for the community partners to share theirs as well. Then, identify a shared purpose that the program and the community group can use to co-create visions for engagement and activities. Creating a shared vision with community groups is essential to making the experience authentic and meaningful for all parties.

Engage Your Students: Just because you are the teacher or program leader doesn't mean you need to create all of these partnerships on your own. Encourage students to form community partnerships as well. Students who have lived in the community for a time can identify their existing partnerships as a starting point for the program. Students who are new to the area can help identify, engage and secure other partnership experiences for their program. Intentionally engaging students in the community will increase student ownership and engagement in activities with community partners as well as foster a safe learning environment for students to build citizenship and trust in their communities. Additional strategies for engaging students in creating community connections can be found in the complete toolkit.



(TOP) Consider building transformational community connections in three key phases. (BOTTOM) Community connections should meet the needs of everyone involved.

Phase 3: Maintain Connections

Reflect on Shared Vision: After immersing yourself in select community groups and establishing shared expectations for collaboration, the focus shifts to maintaining connections. Reflection and open dialog is a starting point for you and community partners to ensure your goals, expectations, and shared vision are met. Often, reflection is thought of as a concluding event. However, co-reflection throughout the partnership will allow you and community partners to identify ways in which the partnership is working as well as opportunities to strengthen the relationship. Reflection in process can also help you and the community partners determine if your partnership is meeting the goals, expectations, and shared vision and, if not, how to adapt. Community connections in any capacity should also be coupled with opportunities for students to reflect and debrief on experiences so they can think deeply about their learning in the experience and evaluate how their learning connects to big picture concepts.

Respond to Feedback: As with any impactful experience, meaningful feedback is essential to determining the effectiveness of the collaborative partnership and whether the initial shared goals/vision are still upheld. It can be difficult to come to terms with a partnership that doesn't meet the needs of all involved. Feedback should be sought regularly and the value of the partnership experiences should be considered often. Needs within the community are constantly evolving and the priorities of the partnering groups may change over time. Being cognizant of these developments is critical to remaining transparent and responsive to changing situations. An example form to elicit partnership feedback can be found in the complete toolkit.

As we know, relationships aren't built overnight. They require time and trust to maintain authenticity. Approaching community connections in this way can create transformational opportunities for SBAE programs and communities. However, to create meaningful relationships, you and community partners must be open and willing to share your respective areas of expertise and skills with one another to work toward a shared vision. The demands of teaching or leading a SBAE program can be overwhelming for educators in all seasons. However, with authentic community connections, you and your community can work together to support your shared visions of student and community growth.

Access the toolkit here!

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Stationed by the...

by Scott Stone

Each and every time I listen to opening and closing ceremonies, I am reminded of the responsibilities of each FFA officer. In fact, if you crack open the FFA Manual, you can find a more detailed list of officer responsibilities. Serving in officer positions is an excellent opportunity for our students, until it is not.

As an ag teacher, one of my most dreaded times of the year is FFA officer selection. There are only a few ways these can play out. First, the only person who is happy is the new president, and the rest of the candidates are upset. Secondly, the new president is happy and the incoming sophomores are ecstatic that they got an office. Or everyone is mad because they do not feel the right people got cut and they are not in the right positions. Next enters the parents who are mad their child did not get the office they deserved. I have faced all the above scenarios over the course of my teaching career. In fact, one year I had three young ladies who were best of friends, until the officer selections took place. All three ladies were selected as officers, but only one was president. The two who were not selected as president refused to talk to the person who was for the next year. It made for a miserable year and decreased the effectiveness of the officer team.

Teaching in a small rural school, our FFA members are involved in everything. They have to learn to balance their time and make all their commitments. As a parent of two FFA members who were involved in everything, I have watched several tears shed because they were overwhelmed and other officers would not help because the job was not on their list of responsibilities.

While attending a workshop at the NAAE convention, I listened to Parker Bane discuss a new concept that their chapter was using. The concept was one I had never heard of before, but it offered a new perspective on leadership. The concept was to function with an executive committee instead of set officer positions.

After returning home, I sat down with my teaching partner and discussed the new concept. We both agreed it was worth a try. We pitched the idea to the current officer team. To say it was openly accepted was a stretch. The students had a lot of concerns. We worked through the concept and drafted a proposed constitutional amendment. The chapter voted to adopt the new officer concept; it was implemented the following year. Our chapter has been functioning under the new system for nine years and it has worked well.

> “It is the experience that matters, not the title.”

So, what is different, you might ask? We do not have a single person designated as the president, vice president, secretary, treasurer, reporter and sentinel. Instead we function as an executive committee. The students are elected to the committee with the expectation that they will have different roles each month. Each member of the team will serve as president, vice president, secretary, treasurer, reporter and sentinel at least one time during the year.

We start the planning process at our officer retreat and assign meetings and positions to each member of the team. We make a chart so each officer knows what role they play at each meeting. This is done with input form the students. So, for example, if a student plays baseball in the spring and does not have a lot of extra time, we have them do their large parts in the fall and winter. We have implemented the rule that as long as we have enough senior officers, they will serve as president at one of our major events such as a banquet and degree ceremonies.

This system of distributed leadership has benefited not only our chapter but each member of the team. Instead of “that is not my job,” everything has now become our job. For example, one of our largest undertakings is the chapter scrapbook. Under the old system, it was the reporters’ responsibility to complete the scrapbook. They would spend hours in the ag building before and after school working on it, usually by themselves. The advisors would also spend hours training the reporter on what to do. Under the new system. The scrapbook is a shared responsibility. The team divides the tasks and supports each other. Now we have teams working in the ag building supporting each other. This has also cut down on the retraining that has to take place the following year. Returning members of the committee have experience and can train new members of the committee. This system of shared responsibilities has allowed all the officers to have buy-in for each project or activity.

Now you might be asking, why can't you do this under the traditional system of officer positions. The answer is you can, but it also increases the "that is not my job" excuse. Students on the executive committee know that everything is their job. We share responsibilities. This system also allows us to explain to parents that their son or daughter is responsible.

Another variation we have also witnessed is having a president and secretary and everyone else serves as a vice president. This system does work well, the vice presidents never have the responsibility of serving as president and secretary.

Another major benefit of the executive committee concept is that students are prepared for service in other organizations. We all know that students use experiences as a stepping stone and building block for other positions. Now when an FFA officer is running for a student council office, does serving as sentinel in the FFA prepare them to be student council president? Yes there are foundational skills learned, but the specifics of the role are not necessarily transferable. Under the executive committee system, each one of the FFA officers has the experience of being president for a month and can more comfortably and seamlessly transition into the role of student council president.

Another benefit we see to serving in multiple roles is when students apply to be area, district, or state officers. The students have a bank of experience in each position and can effectively deposit those skills and traits in whatever office they are elected to.

One of the major complaints we have with this system is that parents are worried about their position. They are concerned about what title they are going to put on applications. Our answer is that they can list whatever position they want. It is the experience that matters, not the title.

Our students need leadership experiences if we are to prepare them for leadership positions in their careers and communities. We have our students for four years. One way we have found in our chapter is operating with an executive committee and not specific positions. Shared responsibility prepares students for whatever life throws at them. So the next time you hear the famous line "Stationed by the..." ask yourself if your current system is producing the desired outcome you need, or are there other options that can be explored?

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Driving Change Using the ADKAR Method

by Jenna Large & Dr. Tobin Redwine

Change management as a discipline has evolved and matured over the past 30 years. John Kotter, Jeff Hiatt, and other scholars have researched and refined change management theory.

Research tells us that for changes to be successful, we must prepare, equip, and support *individuals* moving through changes so they can successfully adopt the changes (Kanitz et al. 2023). Organizational change can only happen when individuals change.

Large-scale change for an agricultural education program, school, or group of students starts at the *individual* level. The Prosci ADKAR® model (Hiatt, 2006) outlines five outcomes an individual needs to achieve for a change to be successful. They include **A**wareness, **D**esire, **K**nowledge, **A**bility, and **R**einforcement.

- **A**wareness: Change begins with understanding **why**. This is about the awareness of the need for change, not simply the awareness that a change is happening. This might seem like semantics at first, but the difference is important. This step addresses the **why** for change and the risk of not changing.
- **D**esire: Change involves **personal decisions**. Once we understand why a change is needed, the next step is making a personal decision to support and participate in the change.
- **K**nowledge: Change requires knowing **how**, or what to do during the change and after the change. While building knowledge is an important part of change management, successful change does not begin with knowledge.
- **A**bility: Change requires **action** in the right direction. This is when individuals demonstrate or take part in the change.
- **R**einforcement: Change must be **reinforced** to be sustainable. It's natural to revert to what we already know. So, not only do we need to make the change, we need to make it sustainable by identifying different mechanisms and approaches so the change stays in place.

Let's see how ADKAR works with a change in an agricultural education program.

In this hypothetical scenario, let's assume an agricultural education program has seen an increase in enrollment numbers. Class sizes last year were over capacity and enrollment numbers are even higher this year. After much discussion, school officials have decided to add another agriculture teacher to the department. Teachers and leaders can use the ADKAR model to help identify key decision points and mitigate change resistance.

- **A**wareness: To communicate with students, staff, and the community, school officials should share information about the trend of increasing enrollment numbers, and optimal student-teacher ratios for safety. That is **why** a new position is being added.
- **D**esire: Now that students, staff, and the community are aware of why the change is needed, the next step is for each of them to make the **personal decision** to support the program growth by encouraging qualified candidates to apply for the opening, support the hiring and onboarding process, and help the new teacher feel welcome once they are hired.
- **K**nowledge: Students, staff, and the community need to know how the new teacher may change the dynamic

The ADKAR model outlines five outcomes an individual needs to achieve for change to be successful.

and offerings of the program. Encourage the new teacher to share what courses they will offer, how they will engage with the FFA chapter, and what experience they bring to the table that will enhance the program. Students need to know **how** the teachers will divide responsibilities and who to go to for different topics and events.

- **A**bility: As the school year begins, students will demonstrate **action** by enrolling in new courses, joining new teams, and showing their ability to discern when to engage with each teacher.
- **R**einforcement: Students and teachers commit to redirecting questions and needs to the right teacher until the division of responsibilities becomes natural and **reinforced** in memory.

As another example, let's see how ADKAR works with a change across a school district.

In this second hypothetical scenario, a school district has decided to purchase and use a new learning management system (LMS). School officials have announced that all staff and students will begin using the new system when school starts in August. School officials and leaders can use the ADKAR model as described below to navigate the change and set staff and students up for success.

- **A**wareness: To communicate with staff and students, school officials should share information about why a new LMS is needed, why the specific LMS was selected, and why the August deadline was set. This is the **why** for the new LMS and established timeline.
- **D**esire: Now that students, staff, and the community are aware of why the new LMS is needed, the next step is for each staff member and student to make the **personal decision** to lean into learning about the new LMS system and commit to using it. Deciding to be a part of change is more than an obligatory adoption, but a choice to support change. Leaders can ask for stakeholders to choose to be part of the change process and communicate shared vision and buy-in.
- **K**nowledge: Staff and students need to know **how** to use the LMS. This could include synchronous and asynchronous trainings, step-by-step job aids outlining processes, and other knowledge-building activities to develop skills needed to use the new LMS.
- **A**bility: In August, staff and students will take **action** by using the new LMS and demonstrating knowledge of the system and processes by completing regular tasks and responsibilities in the system.
- **R**einforcement: Staff and students will use the LMS properly until the new processes and system become part of the regular school day and routine. The change will be **reinforced** by giving and receiving feedback to one another. When tasks are not completed or completed incorrectly, feedback will be given to redirect or correct actions.

> No matter the size, when implementing or managing change, anticipate resistance and plan for it.

When change occurs, **resistance** is a natural, common reaction. No matter the size, when implementing or managing change, anticipate resistance and plan for it. Resistance exists when an individual hasn't decided to accept the change (**D**esire) or there is a lack of **A**wareness and **K**nowledge about the change. To overcome resistance, an individual needs to understand the change(s) ahead and their role in the change. Before change occurs, consider using these strategies:

- identify what resistance to change might look like
- identify the potential risks related to resistance
- prepare and equip the right people to address resistance
- establish a system or process to identify and respond to resistance

That way when resistance occurs, you're prepared to identify the root cause(s) of resistance and address it right away.

In the instance of adding another agriculture teacher to the agricultural education program:

- Resistance might look like students preferring to take classes with teachers they already know instead of taking a class with the new teacher, or students preferring to travel and compete in FFA events with advisors they feel comfortable with.
- The risk in this resistance might be low numbers in classes with the new teacher, or low participation in events or activities they lead.
- Consider encouraging specific students, such as FFA chapter officers, to step up and lead by example. This might look like taking a class with the new teacher or signing up to be on a CDE team they will coach.

- Be prepared to ask students to lean in and try something different that the new teacher is leading.

In the instance of navigating a new, districtwide LMS:

- Resistance might look like students or staff avoiding conversations about the new LMS or finding reasons to miss trainings. It could also look like finding alternative ways to complete tasks without using the LMS.
- The risk in this resistance for students and staff could be missing important information or tasks, and the risk for the school district might include missing important data that is used to inform decision-making, and missing data that parents might access through the LMS about their child's performance.
- Consider encouraging students and staff to share success stories early and often. Create time for them to ask questions and share best practices that save time and energy. This can organically convince others to engage.
- Meet with students and staff to address resistance by asking questions to identify barriers and roadblocks that are preventing them from using the LMS. Be prepared to share more about why this change was made and why it matters to the school district.

As you face the next change in your program, school district, or even your personal life, consider using the ADKAR model to help. Additionally, consider cultivating a network of key stakeholders for support and collaboration. That might mean intentionally identifying outcomes of change, or even bringing in a change management specialist, a strategist, or a consultant to leverage experience with change management to complement your institutional and cultural expertise. Lastly, aim to implement a 3-step plan to drive performance and healthy change (Vivayic, 2024). First, clarify your needs. Then, build a solution with collaborators and stakeholders. Finally, launch with confidence and support.

Ultimately, change is successful when each *individual* understands **why** the change matters, makes a **personal decision** to support the change, knows **how** to change, takes **action**(s) needed to demonstrate the change, and **reinforces** the change to make it a sustainable habit.

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YPAR Part 1:
Engaging Students in Research Leading to Change

by Dr. Amy Leman, Dr. Michael Martin, Dr. Katrina Swinehart Held, Aisha Griffith, & Lauren Elrod

As agricultural educators, we must prepare our future workforce to understand the various content and contexts of agriculture as well as how to work in diverse environments. The field of agriculture is continually changing. We know the impact of global competition and technological advances means that the agricultural industry current students enter may look very different from what we see today. Therefore, students need the skills to think critically, problem-solve, and work in diverse teams.

At the same time, FFA is expanding, adding chapters in new areas of the nation and engaging with students with different backgrounds and identities. These new students offer local FFA chapters and state FFA Associations the opportunity for growth to engage in agriculture differently. Illinois is one such state. FFA members from two chapters in different parts of the state are working together to learn more about agricultural issues using social science research methods through Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR).

What is YPAR?

YPAR is an approach in which youth are trained in research strategies and skills to investigate issues important to themselves and their communities. Then, youth take the results of their research and propose changes to their communities based on their research findings. Participants learn how to use the scientific process for human conditions or social science issues. In the process, they learn to think objectively about a problem and evaluate multiple perspectives, increasing their critical thinking and problem-solving skills. YPAR is a tool to teach youth to think through options and propose changes to community organizations and policies. YPAR is a tool that can serve the school-based agricultural and FFA by examining the real-world challenges around engaging youth in agriculture.

In Illinois, students from the Chicago High School for Agricultural Sciences and Normal Community High School (a mid-sized community in central Illinois where most students have no background in agriculture) have been collaborating on YPAR projects since 2021. The two schools are two hours apart, so most of their interactions are virtual. Members from the two chapters met with university researchers to discuss issues that were important to them, discuss their research background, develop research questions, collect and analyze data, and offer suggestions for change to Illinois FFA.

Over the past three years, students have worked on two YPAR projects, including (1) student perceptions of their sense of belonging in spaces and programs associated with local, state and/or national FFA and (2) the perceptions of urban agriculture within the state FFA membership. This journey also complemented these members' efforts to create an experience at the state FFA convention called the Cultivating Conversations Room to share diverse perspectives of agriculture and FFA with other FFA members throughout the state. A version of this experience was replicated at the National FFA Convention. As students develop their skills as social scientists, their ability to influence policies and practices continues to grow. They are now working with Illinois FFA's Urban Agriculture Food Production contest to clarify the scope of the contest and increase interest

in the contest to more chapters in the state.

While FFA members are actively involved in impacting their state FFA experience, we believe this project's impact on their personal development is a much more remarkable and noteworthy accomplishment. The second part of this article is written by a former FFA member about the YPAR experience. Throughout our YPAR project, students have changed their future goals to agricultural education and social science research (Leman et al., 2023). They have expressed the process's impact on their critical thinking, explaining that they are more likely to look at multiple perspectives and evaluate information. They have grown in their ability to share their thoughts through written and verbal communication. These skills are important as they learn to navigate change in the future.

How Can YPAR be Used by Other FFA Chapters?

The key to YPAR is that the youth participants make the decisions and set the direction. As FFA is designed to promote youth leadership, YPAR seems to be a natural fit. In addition, agricultural education is a science education. YPAR is a way to engage youth in social science research and teach the scientific method. YPAR projects could meet the requirements for social science Agriscience Fair entries and the Research Immersion SAE (Supervised Agricultural Experience) under the new SAE for All format. YPAR could also be utilized in an FFA Program of Activities and National Chapter Award application under the agricultural advocacy quality standard.

There are many curricula and activities available online to lead YPAR activities. Check out specifically YPAR Hub from the University of California, Berkeley (Home | YPAR Hub (berkeley.edu)), and the Institute for Community Research's Youth Participatory Action Research Curriculum, adapted for Oregon (CurriculumYPAR2014.pdf (oregon.gov)). We are in the process of creating a curriculum for teachers to follow in leading a class through YPAR with the goal of all students having Agriscience Fair entries and the related SAE. The curriculum would provide resources for teachers to explore various human aspects of agriculture, such as perceptions and use of new agricultural technologies like electric tractors, the experiences of members of agricultural cooperatives, and agricultural safety in urban food production. The curriculum will help the teacher walk the students through researching the issue, creating a research question, learning research skills to collect information on the question, analyzing and reporting the results, and suggesting changes to policies and procedures in their community.

> "As students develop their skills as social scientists, their ability to influence policies and practices continues to grow."

We found that the FFA members enjoy contact with the researchers as they work on their projects. We originally planned to turn the project over to the FFA advisors, but both the advisors and students expressed their support for maintaining the relationships with the university researchers. If you choose to engage in YPAR, consider contacting your state agricultural education teacher licensure programs to see if professors or graduate students are interested in working with your students.

Even in FFA chapters with strong, positive relationships between FFA members and their advisors, relationship development and creating a safe space to share thoughts and ideas must be a priority before and during YPAR. As youth pick projects that are important to themselves and their communities, there will be connections to their personal lives. Part of the growth from YPAR is helping youth develop their own identities around the YPAR topics. For instance, when our Illinois YPAR youth worked on the topic of "belonging" in FFA, it made them re-evaluate their own thoughts on belonging as they considered what other FFA members felt it meant to "belong." When they discussed urban agriculture, students discussed their views, as well as perceptions from others of the term "urban agriculture." In order to have these conversations, FFA members must feel safe and confident in sharing their thoughts and feelings, and in turn, learn to evaluate the various views of others.

YPAR process can address any challenge facing an FFA Chapter. Once trained in investigating issues in their community, students can be guided by trusted mentors to address a wide array of issues. FFA advisors, or other mentors, can empower their FFA student leaders to address challenges facing their membership using the YPAR process. YPAR could also be used by student leadership at the state and national level to address issues facing FFA at various levels. YPAR could help students feel included in addressing the issues facing FFA in a relevant and student-driven manner.

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YPAR Part 2: Former FFA Members' Perspective of Their YPAR Experience

by Drexel Douglass

When YPAR was first introduced to me, I was only a junior in high school. I had never spoken to a university professor in a formal setting, and I had certainly never thought about research. Luckily, my naivety did not prevent my interest in YPAR, and soon, a few more students from Normal FFA (my FFA chapter) and some students from the FFA Chapter at Chicago School for Agricultural Sciences (CHSAS) began our journey with YPAR.

It always surprises my college friends when I tell them that FFA is one of the largest student-led organizations in our nation. It surprises them even more when I tell them that I was part of it. Many of my friends do not know what FFA is, but if they do, it is often seen in a negative and narrow light. To describe FFA, they use words like, *racist*, *homophobic*, and more. Their exposure is not from being in FFA but from watching it. They see images of politically polarizing apparel at the National FFA Convention and hear bigoted remarks from the FFA kids who go to class at the other end of the school. Frequently, college friends will say to me, "the FFA kids at my school were racist." Their paths will only ever cross in the hallway. I quickly counter these beliefs and explain to them the enriching opportunities FFA provides students. But I also cannot lie. My time in FFA was not perfect, and it was not perfect for many other students. Many of the words and experiences that my college friends use to describe FFA ring true for me and my friends from FFA. However, we can choose not to let those experiences define what FFA *is* and, more importantly, what FFA *can be*. This is where YPAR comes into play. YPAR recognizes the unique situation many FFA students are in: the students who value and appreciate the opportunities that FFA provides but also see and experience the problems with FFA. A category I would place myself in.

> "Every student deserves a positive experience in FFA, no matter their background."

Organizations can (and do) operate in a positive manner while also having their faults. However, what makes an organization stand out is its effort to address its faults. YPAR is doing exactly that. It is multi-faceted research that addresses the sense of belonging that students, primarily those from non-traditional ag backgrounds, have in FFA. It gave me the perfect opportunity to advocate for diversity, equity, and inclusion in an organization I love. It allowed me to expand my perception of how each individual student interacts with and becomes involved with FFA. No student experiences the organization in the same way as another. However, *every* student deserves a positive experience in FFA, no matter their background. YPAR helped me realize that agriculture is everywhere and a part of everyone's life. If you are from a city, you have a place in agriculture. If you are from a farm, you have a place in agriculture. If you are from a town, you have a place in agriculture. If you exist, you have a place in agriculture. That is what makes FFA an amazing and *crucial* organization, but sometimes, it forgets the wide audience that it appeals to. It is not easy to create a space that truly accepts everyone, but the most important tasks are usually not easy.

Many times being a part of YPAR was not easy. CHSAS is two hours away from Normal, so most of the time, we met virtually. We were also upperclassmen high school students. If we were not busy with FFA, we had schoolwork or another activity to worry about. Despite the barriers, YPAR still taught me more than I could ever ask for. Without a doubt, working with CHSAS was the most educational part of YPAR for me. Empathizing with and understanding your peers' different perspectives and experiences is one of the most important parts of cultivating diversity, equity, and inclusion within a student-led organization. However, understanding someone is easier said than done. It takes time, patience, and openness.

I believe that if we have grace with each other and work to understand each other, *everyone* can find a place in FFA. Because, at the end of the day, FFA should be about two things: agriculture and student leadership. *Everyone* deserves these opportunities. And everyone deserves the opportunity to be a part of FFA.

Drexel Douglass is an undergraduate student at the University of Missouri majoring in Environmental Sciences with an emphasis in education and outreach and an FFA alum from Normal Community High School in Illinois.

Preparing Students for the Agricultural Profession:The FCS Leadership Scholars Project

by Dr. Meeshay Williams-Wheeler, Dr. Paula E. Faulkner, & Dr. Geleana D. Alston

As university professors at the largest historically/black college university (HBCU) in the nation, we encounter first-year students who are excited to begin their college journey in AGGIE LAND. These students are ready to leave home, find new friends, and become Aggies! In addition to declaring a major and enrolling in courses, new Aggies desire to be active — be involved and engaged in the larger campus community. NCAT has a rich history and legacy of prominent leaders who have led the university to great heights and notoriety. As such, students enter the university with pride and servitude to continue the legacy of leaders through active involvement in campus and community organizations. It was our desire to expand the leadership ideology at NCAT with other institutions as a recruitment effort to our university. Particularly within the College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences (CAES), Family and Consumer Sciences is one of the four departments in the college that has experienced a decline in student enrollment. Therefore...

Project Overview: Experiential learning is one way to expand and involve students in leadership opportunities. This paper highlights two funded projects: *Developing Students' Leadership Capacity and Creating Pathways for Careers in FCS* and *Digital Badges in FCS Leadership to Enhance Workforce Development*. Both projects focus on students' leadership and experiential learning at four institutions: Davidson-Davie Community College (DDCC), Lexington Senior High School (LSHS), T.A. Marryshow Community College (TAMCC) and NCAT (host institution). Project investigators from their respective institutions represent one of the four content areas in family and consumer sciences (child development and family studies-CDFS, consumer sciences-CS, fashion merchandising and design-FMD, and food and nutritional sciences-FNS) and serves as mentor/liaison on the leadership. The primary objective of the project is to recruit and retain students via varied pathways while developing their leadership skills (see figure 1).

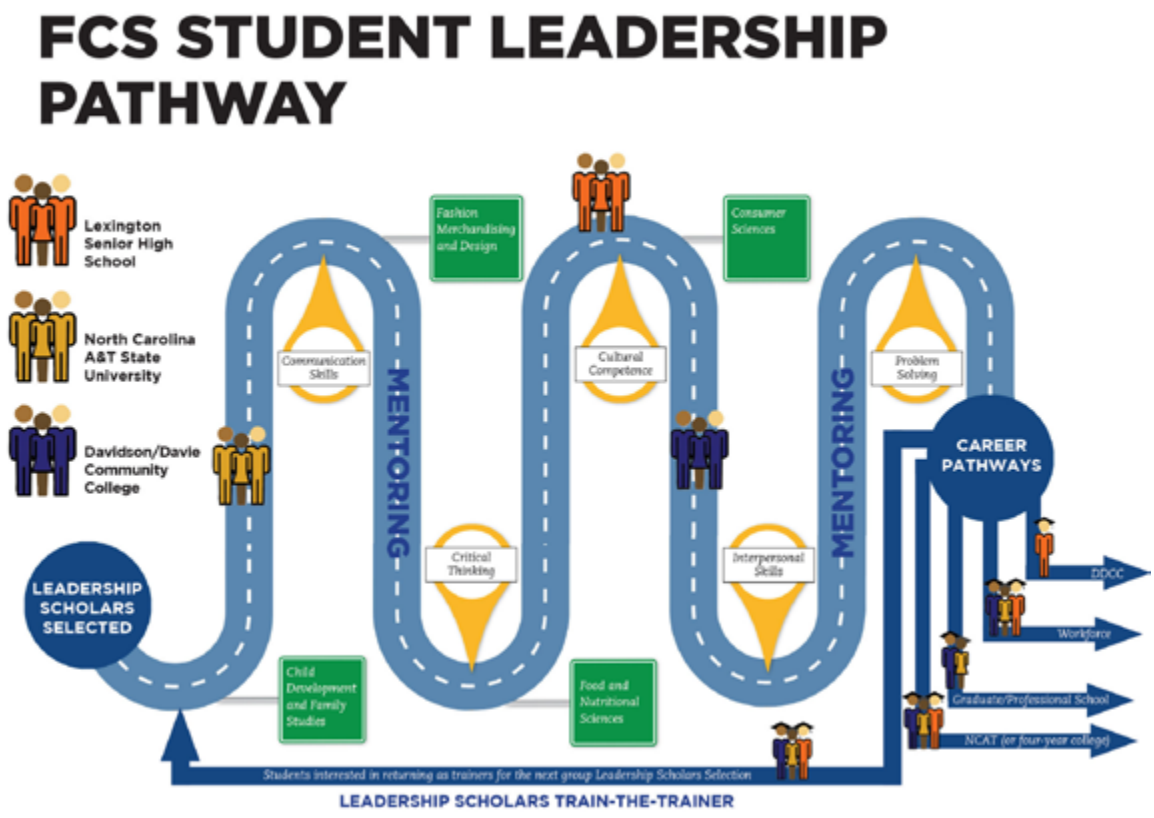

Figure 1. The primary objective is to recruit and retain students via varied pathways while developing their leadership skills

Experiential Learning Activities	
Leadership Modules	1. Communication Skills – how to demonstrate effective ways to communicate as a leader 2. Critical Thinking – how to interpret and analyze facts and information as a leader 3. Cultural Competence – how to contextualize one's cultural beliefs and behaviors and needs 4. Interpersonal Skills – how to effectively interact with one another 5. Problem Solving – how to effectively overcome obstacles as a leader 6. Professionalism and Dress – how to incorporate disposition and behavior in ones action as professional
Digital Badging	Upon completion of the modules, LS will receive micro-credentials to demonstrate competency in
AAFCS Fall Leadership Workshop	Three LSs attended the 2-day AAFCS fall leadership 2-day workshop
CliftonStrengths	This assessment allows the LS to identify their opportunities for development and success in their career pathway
FCS Leadership Discussion Panel	Weekly virtual panel discussions led by early, mid and late year FCS professionals who are leaders in the field and serve as mentors and advisors to prepare LS on professional pathway
Scholars' Blogs	LS share insights and reflective comments via Discussion Board related to the 6 leadership modules
Journaling/Reflections	LS complete weekly journal entries aligned with module topics and panel discussants
Professional Advisors and Leaders to Scholars (P.A.L.S.)	Represent various sectors of the family and consumer sciences field and serve as mentors and serve as mentors and professional advisors to the leadership scholars.

Table 1. The FCS Student Leadership Training Model consists of synchronous and asynchronous activities including workshops and mentoring activities.

Leadership Scholars (LS): Twenty-five (25) students were recruited from CDFS, CS, FMD, and FNS programs: DDCC – 5, LSHS – 5, TAMCC – 5 and 10 – NCAT. LS from NCAT serve as mentors for the other LS. The mentor/mentee model allows the scholars to build, create, and observe leadership skills amongst their peers as well as within themselves. The LS represent a diverse group of students from varied areas and communities including scholars TAMCC-LS from St. George's, Grenada. The international and cross-cultural interactions amongst the scholars is certainly a critical component in becoming a leader.

The Curriculum: LS participate in a 10-week experiential learning curriculum: *FCS Student Leadership Training Model*, which consists of synchronous and asynchronous activities including workshops and mentoring activities centered (see table above):

The Pathways: As shown in the table, the LS are actively involved in the FCS leadership curriculum for 10 weeks. While the curriculum is asynchronous, scholars connect and network with one another at their respective institutions. Several of the LS have classes together and are involved in the same camps organizations. However, the LS have formed closer unique bonds through involvement with the leadership pathway project. For example, NCAT-LS play an integral role in coordinating and implementing FCS Day @NCAT. This inaugural recruitment activity is designed to recruit nearly 100 high school students. LS from DDCC and LSHS also assist with the FCS Day @ NCAT and work together with the NCAT-LS

Students participating in the program engage with each other to promote and encourage their academic journey.

in organizing the event. While TAMCC LS will not be able to attend the recruitment event at NCAT, they are mentored and guided in carrying out a community building activity within their community in St. George's, Grenada. Specifically, the TAMCC-LS will assess the varied ways in which professionals and leaders in varied community organizations implement the six leadership concepts from the FCS Leadership Pathway Curriculum.

The positive interactions among and between the LS is a key component in the recruitment and retention into the NCAT FCS Programs. While the project investigators work closely in building the connections between the institutions, the willingness and the energy of the scholars to want to be engaged and learn more about the FCS majors from one another is exciting to see. The NCAT-LS are proud Aggies and share that same energy with the other LS to promote and encourage their academic journey to Aggie Land. Being a part of the FCS Leadership Scholars Program allows the LS from DDCC, LSHS and TAMCC feel a connection to other Aggies, FCS faculty and the entire university community. This connection is key to their wanting to attend the NCAT.

Conclusion: In sum, we are excited to introduce great students to the great programming at NCAT. Moreover, we realize building leadership potential in students will translate to career development within the workforce. Studies show college students benefit from experiential

> "With a diverse workforce, students who possess strong leadership qualities are better equipped with needed skills, knowledge, and qualities to advance the field."

learning and field-based experiences by retention and academic success (Langlais, 2018). With a diverse workforce, students who possess strong leadership qualities are better equipped with needed skills, knowledge, and qualities to advance the field. The infusion of leadership concepts into courses of study and experiential learning activities promotes diverse college students who enter an agricultural profession. While this is the first cohort of the leadership scholars program, the FCS Leadership Pathway (see diagram) is designed to develop the skills in the LS and encourage them to serve as "train the trainer" for the next cohort of LS — and ultimately welcome them all to AGGIE Land!

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The $100 Solution: Developing Students Leaders Through an Innovative Service-Learning Project

by Dr. Lucas D. Maxwell & Dr. Jay K. Solomonson

The development of leadership skills has long been a staple of agricultural education instruction in the United States. From serving as a chapter officer or committee chair, to planning and executing a successful plant sale, agricultural education students are provided with many opportunities during their time in FFA to develop their potential for premier leadership, personal growth, and career success. One common method of providing these meaningful, hands-on experiences to our students is by using the experiential learning method of instruction within each component of our three-circle model (Talbert et al., 2022). Blackburn and Stair (2022) suggested that experiential learning can be a useful tool to connect real world problems to the knowledge and skills we want our students to acquire. One form of experiential learning, known as service learning, is often used to help bridge the gap between the principles of civic engagement and the educational process (Binard & Leavitt, 2000) and can be an effective approach to develop student leaders in our programs.

Service learning can be defined as a "form of reciprocity in which students extend classroom learning into society to resolve communal problems while also accruing distinct benefits for all members" (Roberts et al., 2019, p. 37). Several scholars knowledgeable on the topic have reported numerous benefits to students using service learning in an agricultural education program, including the development of leadership, teamwork, and communication skills (Lemons & Strong, 2016; Meyers et al., 2014; Robinson & Torres, 2007). Despite the many benefits of incorporating service learning in an agricultural education program, it can sometimes be difficult to implement without a clear, concise framework to structure the service project. This was something we struggled with until we learned about the $100 Solution framework of service learning. Throughout this article, we will describe this innovative service-learning model and how we have successfully implemented it in our agriculture department's Team & Organizational Leadership, Communication, and Change course to develop our student leaders at Illinois State University.

> "Considerable effort should be focused on helping students understand the true meaning and importance of partnership."

$100 Solution: The Basics

The $100 Solution model of service-learning incorporates the following five principles: partnership, reciprocity, capacity building, sustainability, and reflection (English, 2014). These fundamental principles embedded within the framework were originally based on a service-learning curriculum from Belize (The $100 Solution, n.d.). As an initiative of a Kentucky Rotary Club in 2006, the $100 Solution project was first conceptualized and developed in the United States as a way to allow individuals or organizations to make a positive difference in communities across the globe with small amounts of money (The $100 Solution, n.d.). The $100 Solution has been further adapted as a service-learning model in schools allowing students to focus on course learning objectives, combined with the principles of service-learning to answer a central question: with a $100 bill, what can you do to enhance the quality of life for others? The model demonstrates that students can make a positive difference in their communities and can solve many societal problems with minimal or zero amounts of money.

As previously mentioned, the $100 Solution incorporates five principles of service-learning: partnership, reciprocity, capacity building, sustainability, and reflection. Fundamental to its philosophy, the $100 Solution designates that both the student and community organization work together as contributing partners to ascertain the needs

of the organization, plan and implement solutions, and evaluate the project (English, 2014). These actions would allow both to benefit from the activity, emphasizing reciprocity. Jacoby (2003) indicated that both parties should develop personally and professionally through the experience, stating that this will look different for each project implemented. Another goal is that the community partner should learn how to become self-sufficient, and the project become sustainable, so the project can continue beyond the semester or year the student is involved (English, 2014). Finally, like other experiential activities, students should be required to participate in several reflective exercises throughout the experience so more meaningful learning can occur (English, 2014). These fundamental concepts serve as the foundation of each service-learning project within this instructional framework.

How to Successfully Implement the Model

We believe the $100 Solution is a framework for service learning that can be embedded in courses across disciplines and utilized to achieve diverse goals dependent upon course objectives and student interest. In our case, the framework is part of our upper division Team & Organizational Leadership, Communication, and Change course. This course seeks to develop students' ability in:

1. recognizing various leadership, communication and change theories.
2. better understanding themselves and others with respect to leadership and communication theories.
3. becoming effective as team leaders and members of groups.
4. improving leadership, communication, and personal development skills.
5. assessing leadership situations, determining, and administering appropriate leadership, communication and change theories and evaluate results.

Designed as mini-case study in team leadership and communication, all students participate in the assigned $100 Solution team service-learning project. Utilizing the framework, students are engaged in activities that clearly address items two through four above making the project a central component of the students experience in the course.

When implementing this framework, it is critical to provide student teams with adequate guidance and resources to facilitate their completion of the assigned project. You must ensure that the students fully understand each of the pillars of the $100 Solution. In our course, we dedicate class time to presenting the framework to students and facilitating discussion about the importance and interconnectedness of each of the pillars. For many students, this is the first time they have truly participated in a service-learning project. Many come to the course with a spirit of volunteerism, but few have been tasked with moving beyond volunteering to building partnerships and developing innovative solutions to ill-structured problems. Often, this means having critical conversations regarding the framework itself and how participation in the project enables them to achieve course learning objectives.

After multiple semesters utilizing the framework, we have identified some best practices to help set students up for success. First, engage students in individual and team exercises helping them to identify and clarify their own values and those that are shared across team members. We have found this step to be critical in helping students clarify shared areas of interest to aid in the identification of potential partnerships. For us, this process involves students utilizing worksheets we have developed and in-class activities to help identify and operationally define their own individual core values. We facilitate in-class discussions that encourage the students to share their values and help their team members understand them. Students are then led through a brainstorming process to identify potential community partners who might have shared goals and values before working to seek consensus on two to three potential organizations to reach out to regarding potential partnerships.

Secondly, considerable effort should be focused on helping students understand the true meaning and importance of partnership. According to Jacoby (2003), true partnerships are "mutually-beneficial and well-defined relationships that include a commitment to a definition of mutual goals, a jointly developed structure and shared responsibility, mutual authority and accountability for success, and sharing not only of the responsibility but also of the rewards." Too often, students attempt to identify the needs of a community partner based on their own knowledge of the organization absent of true understanding and engagement with the group. We recommend pushing students to first identify a partner that aligns with their values and interests. Then, student teams should work collaboratively with the partner to learn about their goals and needs while also educating the partner about the students desired learning goals and outcomes. Only then can a problem be identified, and a solution implemented, that allows all parties to achieve each of the pillars of the $100 Solution framework.

Finally, providing students with many and varied opportunities to reflect during and after the project is key. Built into our course

are several required assignments that require the students to reflect on their own learning. These include multiple opportunities to reflect on their own commitment to the team project as well as the commitment of their team members, team developed visual displays presented at a come and go event at the end of the semester, team developed papers that expand on the ideas and concepts presented in the team poster, and individual leadership analysis papers that requires students to discuss their own growth and development as well as lessons learned as related to the $100 Solution pillars. Additionally, each student team submits plans regarding their own strategies for individual and team reflection.

The Impact on Students & the Community

Since developing our Team & Organizational Leadership, Communication, and Change course, more than 100 students have partnered with nearly 20 different community organizations. Community partners have included local municipalities, assisted living centers, museums, and a food insecure family, just to name a few. One semester, a student team partnered with the Town of Normal, the Little Library company, and several local libraries to provide the community easier access to books, especially for younger children.

Throughout the project the team had to overcome numerous issues including obtaining permission to place the little library along a popular local recreation trail, building the actual little library, and finding libraries and individuals to donate books to stock the library. Throughout this process, students were guided by the five principles of service-learning discussed above and applied leadership, communication, and change theories discussed in the course. In reflecting on the experience, one student stated, "I learned not only about working with others, but also about myself. I learned how to be a better teammate, as well as how to keep a level head. I see this project as something to be proud of, as when we first started it seemed an impossible, gargantuan task, but slowly piece by piece we were able to overcome." Another student reflected, "I will say this was the most stressful group project I have ever participated in, but when I started to fully commit to the project, the whole team became so much more productive and efficient. The $100 Solution has been a great way for me to learn how to really interact with a team." In a full circle moment, after meeting with town of Normal officials, a current student team has developed a partnership to refurbish and relocate the Little Library after some recent vandalism rendered it no longer usable.

Our Future Plans

The $100 Solution has been a valuable framework that has allowed us to immerse students in meaningful service-learning while deepening their understanding of leadership, communication, and change themes discussed in class. We have been lucky that our department alumni association has been willing to support this course

(LEFT) Using their $100 budget, students built and installed a Little Library on the Constitution Trail in Normal, IL. (BELOW) Members of a $100 Solution Service-Learning team pose with their completed project as it was being installed.

project each year. Additionally, our campus offices supporting service learning, civic engagement, and sustainability have all been resources for our students. We believe in the five pillars of the $100 Solution and look forward to growing enrollment in our course and creating more community partnerships that help develop our student's leadership and communication skills while creating real and sustainable change on our campus and in our surrounding communities through service-learning. If you would like to learn more about the $100 Solution, visit their website at https://the100dollarsolution.org.

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Ag Leadership Prevails in Raising Beef for School Lunch

by Rachel A. Sauvola

Being a 25 year veteran teacher, all in the same school, allows a teacher to get creative and inventive in curricular offerings. There is trust and buy-in from the local community and school district leaders. The students who now show up in classes are the children of former students. They have heard stories about the shenanigans and learning opportunities the teacher provided back in the day and are now excited to participate in experiences their parents didn't get because of the growth of the program since they were enrolled. Many of those parents also genuinely want to give back to the program and the teacher who inspired them all those years ago.

Welcome to the reality of New Richmond High School nestled in northwestern Wisconsin. A place where there have only been six teachers since 1914 when agricultural education began at the local high school. As the first female to enter the line up, I was charged with some big shoes to fill. I've embraced that from the beginning by directly involving students in the leadership roles that our authentic agricultural education program embraces. After all, this is OUR program and the success of OUR undertakings are a GROUP effort behind the leadership and direction I provide with my years of experience. I recognize that I cannot do this job alone!

In 2014, sick and tired of hearing about the pink slime students are fed in some school cafeterias, I embarked on a journey to develop a school farm with a herd of beef cattle and the mission to engage community partners to process them for school lunch. As the child of a farmer, I possess a deep understanding of the uphill challenges I would face trying something that had never been done. Knowing locally raised beef was the best for the people in my community, I set my SMART goals and engaged students to help develop the plans that would make this unique idea a reality. There were no other school farms in Wisconsin to collaborate with — I set out on a solo mission with my students as my sidekicks.

> "Students were right there brainstorming and problem solving with me, learning life skills that they could utilize in the workforce."

At that point in my career, I had done all there was to do — including designing a new larger space in our brand new high school and filling it full of amazing learning opportunities. Always up for a challenge and wanting to continue with my own lifelong learning journey, this was the perfect opportunity to continue to grow authentic leadership experiences for the students in my program. Many questioned my sanity as this would be hard and I'm allergic to animals, plants and the environment. For real — I should only be outdoors from December 1st through December 8th, and I was starting a farm with all the allergens that includes! You betcha!!! My students deserved this opportunity to experience farm life and have these hands-on learning and leadership experiences! So onward I forged!

From the original hurdles with space and restrictions at the site, students were right there brainstorming and problem solving with me, learning life skills that they could utilize in the workforce. Networking and communicating with a vast array of people in the community and beyond taught them so much about the art of first impressions, thinking outside the box, standing up for what they believe in, how to speak eloquently in describing their vision/mission, and how to handle themselves in stressful situations.

There were many naysayers who thought we could never make it happen. True leadership emerges when young people are motivated to prove them wrong! People began watching us from all over the state and nation. To date, the SOAR Educational Center has had visitors from 19 states and 11 foreign countries as folks hear about what we are doing and want to pick our brains about how to make it happen in their communities near and far. Most importantly we have produced more than 25,000 pounds of beef for our school and community so far!

SOAR stands for Student Opportunities with Agricultural Resources and has been an integral part of my curriculum for the last

(TOP LEFT) Our tractor was granted to us through three entities partnering together - Westfields Hospital, the Westfields Hospital Foundation and Frontier Ag and Turf - Students use it around the farm, especially to turn the compost pile.
(TOP RIGHT) Cleaning the water tanks weekly year round is a crucial part of chores - Many hands make light work!
(BOTTOM LEFT) Harvesting kale from the garden
(BOTTOM RIGHT) Our February calves start out at school so visitors have a chance to come in out of the winter weather to meet them.

10 years. Students in Vet Science, Large Animal Science and Advanced Animal Science work with our animals, while other course content lends itself to the vegetable garden, landscaping, lawn care, beekeeping, the six and a half acre field we plant in corn or soybeans, and more. It's an amazing place to put into action all that is learned in the classroom! Their leadership skills emerge even when they don't think they are a leader. It's the most beautiful thing to witness as a teacher!

Students on the animal side of the SOAR Center are charged with twice daily chores, assessing special tasks due to weather and unique circumstances, giving tours, creating and delivering presentations to continue to network and gain supporters, seeking donations, writing grants, cataloging financial information like receipts/expenses/income, ear tagging, castrating, hoof trimming, building and fixing fences, weighing and measuring animal growth, incubating chicken and duck eggs, selling eggs, honey and 25 retail cuts of beef to our community members, loading and unloading the cattle for processing, bringing the retail cuts back to town to sell, unloading the beef for school lunch, marketing for sales, developing the posters and social media content to advertise, raising money through educational events at the SOAR Center, ordering, picking up and unloading supplies, networking with the feed company and veterinarian when questions arise, building and maintaining equipment, using the tractor and lawnmower, evaluating animal health with next steps, securing and moving hay from local sources

The students who choose to assist with the plant science portions of the farm plan out the garden, start the seeds in the greenhouse, place chicken compost on the garden, till it, lay down the weed barrier, trans-

plant the seedlings, troubleshoot the irrigation system, mend the fence to keep out the garden predators, spread the diatomaceous earth to prevent unwanted pests, prune plants as needed, harvest, weigh, measure and catalog harvests, create sales events if it's too early for school lunch processing, harvest seeds to use the following year and clean up the garden at the end of the season. Others are learning by doing and working on the landscape, pruning, weeding, and lawn care in and around the farm to make sure it looks nice for visitors.

Simply put, these young people are running a farm! Just look at all of these opportunities for leadership, resume building and onsite Supervised Agricultural Experiences! Their primary customers are the Supervisor of School Nutrition and residents of New Richmond and beyond who come to our sales. They now have customers from a three state area! They know they are making food for their peers and for their community! They take their role very seriously - going to the farm on no school days, over breaks and vacations and helping out in all other capacities whenever they are asked or needed. The pride they take in being part of the SOAR Center Crew is like none other. I am blessed to have such an amazing group of students who know the value of the opportunity they are given. Here's the kicker - none of them come from farms! None of them had previous experience. They are taking what they learn in classes, what I demonstrate to them, and what they problem solve on their own to make an amazing experience for all.

When school is not in session and on the weekends, members of the community also volunteer to help with daily tasks at the SOAR Center. Many of these folks are trained by students. With over 86 community businesses partners, students have been present to lead Community Give Back Days, fence and chicken tractor building events, garden harvests and more. They are right there wanting to learn, lead and educate those in attendance. Providing tours and telling our story is an important part of this leadership. As visitors come to volunteer, they are left inspired by what we have cooperatively established here on top of all that is already going on in the Agriscience Department at school — three 800 gallon fish tanks as part of a commercial fish farming operation, housing and care of 20+ small animals, a commercial greenhouse, and five hydroponic stations — and they want to be a part of it! Our youngest volunteer has been three days old, fresh out of the hospital with her family and our most veteran is 94 years young and works in our garden with her granddaughter and great granddaughter. There is something for everyone to do on the farm so leadership in agricultural education is always at the forefront.

This leads me to the Real Talk with Rachel portion of this article. Remember how I started — I'm a 25 year veteran all in the same town. This project didn't happen in my early years of teaching, and it certainly didn't happen overnight. Many of us have Farm to School components of our programs. Many of us aspire to offer an abundance of opportunities for our students to build their leadership skills. Start small. Make a five-year plan and set goals! Start reaching out to community partners. People want to help you but often don't know what you want or need. Just ask! Don't forget that student leaders can ask too! Be a facilitator of learning. Give up some control to reap many rewards for your students, program, and you! I'm a resource. I've been there and can help! Reach out, and I will assist you in creating leadership opportunities for your students too. I know that great things can and will happen!

Rachel Sauvola, a 25 year veteran teacher, decided to be an Agricultural Educator when she was 12 years old after attending her first FFA conference and hails from New Richmond, WI.

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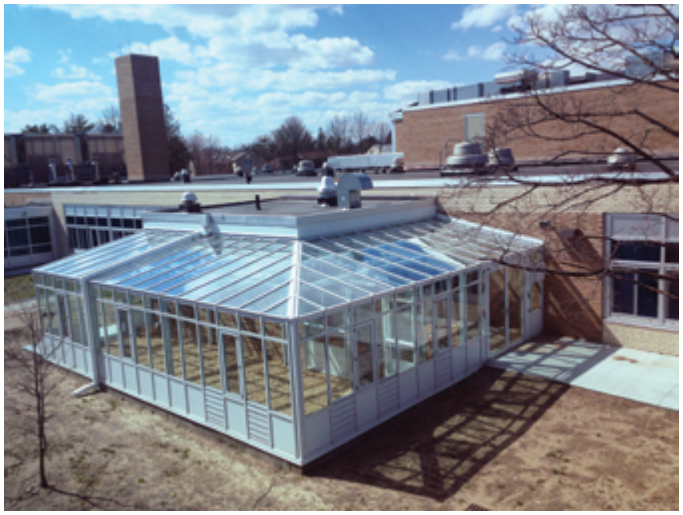

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