

Navigating New Normal Extension Management Strategies in Occidental Mindoro State College

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Abstract: The Extension Unit of OMSC envisions in providing an effective and relevant pool of information and activities that will propel the community towards sustainable development. However, among its major function, extension had been greatly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. This case study aims to determine the management strategies employed during the COVID-19 pandemic from 2020-2021. Result shows there had been changes in the extension dynamics needed by the partner agencies and other stakeholders. The top topics identified are technology, research capability, health and governance. The stakeholder still likes the 8 hour training with the inclusion of demonstration or assessment. The ICT is the most preferred methodologies, which is in line with social media as a source of information. Further, the difficulties faced in providing services in the New Normal were categorized based on the extension process and was ranked as follows: evaluation, implementation, monitoring, planning and agenda creation. Even in the New Normal, the status of extension activities had showed an increasing turnout. Majority of these extensions were conducted online using digital platform.

Keywords: Extension, Extension Productivity, New Normal

1. Introduction

Extension services are similarly a common feature of the administrative structure of rural areas and these services have the responsibility, in partnership with the farmers, of directing programmes and projects for change [1]. Extension involves the conscious use of communication of information to help people form sound opinions and make good decisions [2]. Extension is an approach to development that has come to be recognized as a noble and essential function of an institution of higher learning. Further, it is an instrument of premeditated, deliberate intervention to achieve the intervener's goals and can only be effective by inducing voluntary change on the part of the client and hence satisfying client's goals [3].

FAO Reference Manual (1984) define it as "as a service or system which assists farm people, through educational procedures, in improving farming methods and techniques, increasing production efficiency and income, bettering their levels of living, and lifting the social and educational standards of rural life.

The term "university extension" was first used by the

Universities of Cambridge and Oxford in 1867 to describe teaching activities that extended the work of the institution beyond the campus. Most of these early activities were not, however, related to agriculture. It was not until the beginning of the 20th century, when colleges started conducting demonstrations at agricultural shows and giving lectures to farmer's clubs, that the term "extension service" was applied to the type of work that we now recognize by that name. The definition of extension has gradually evolved through time from the basic concept that it is a non-formal system of education which is organized to provide the people with useful and practical knowledge and technology, and teach them to apply these to improve their lives [4].

Under the AFMA of 1997, the SUC play a significant role in addressing the shortage of well-trained agricultural extension staff in the field level through trainings and non-degree programs. The Extension Services performs one of the major function of the Higher Education Institution like the Occidental Mindoro State College. Furthermore, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) in the Philippines, defined extension services as an "act of communicating, persuading, and helping specific sectors or

target clienteles to enable them to effectively improve production, community and/or institutions, and quality of life” (CMO No. 8 series of 2008), and later defined as the “systematic transfer of technology, innovation or information generated by HEIs and its partners to seek solutions to specific developmental concerns” [5].

Extension is a force that has the potential of enabling the Universities and Colleges to actualize their impact on individuals and society (PAEPI, 2010). The COVID-19 pandemic had caught State Universities and Colleges unprepared, and there is a need to make abrupt adjustments. In January 2020, COVID-19 was declared a public health emergency of international concern by the World Health Organization [6].

To date, there is already full evidence that the COVID-19 pandemic had changed the very fabric of the population, bearing implications for extension services. Apart from the repetitive difficulties faced in daily work of extension faculty and staff in delivering extension in the service areas, the challenges that most extension services face are mostly of a technical and logistic in nature.

As an outcome to the different directives of national offices and legal mandate of SUCs, extension is part of the General Appropriation Act provision, Performance-based Bonus Benefits, evaluation for faculty promotion, International Organization for Standardization (ISO), Philippine Quality Standards, Institutional Sustainability Assessment of CHED, and Institutional and Program Accreditation of the Accrediting Agency of Chartered Universities and Colleges (AACUP). Thus, these projects must continue to evolve through various strategies even in difficult times [7]. Nonetheless, local actions and various coping mechanisms have been adopted in response to the agency’s annual target.

2. Objectives

The study determined the management strategies employed during the COVID-19 pandemic from 2020-2021. Specifically, it aims to:

1. Present the current needs of the partner-agencies in the time of pandemic.
2. Identify the difficulties faced in providing services in the New Normal.
3. Determine the response made to address the agency’s annual target in the New Normal.

3. Conceptual Framework

The extension management strategies of OMSC is based on PDSA cycle, which is a continuous quality improvement model consisting of a logical sequence of four repetitive steps for continuous improvement and learning: Plan, Do, Study (Check) and Act. PDSA, or Plan-Do-Study-Act, is an iterative, four-stage problem-solving model used for improving a process or carrying out change.

The PDSA cycle takes into account the internal and external stakeholders to provide feedback about what works and what

does not. The customer defines quality, so it would make sense to also involve them in the process when appropriate or feasible, to increase acceptance of the end result.

The first step is participative planning and decision making that finds resource scanning important. It assesses the current condition, where it needs to be, why it is important, and plan how to close the gap and identify some potential solutions. Annually the OMSC conducted strategic planning to determine the issues and concerns that need to be resolved.

Afterwards, the Unit checked to find out if the control measures implemented had the effect in enhancing extension productivity, and to make sure that there are no risk associated with it. An evaluation is done to check if the desired objectives are accomplished. Finally, the lessons learned are acted upon. If the objective is accomplished, control measure was put into place so that the issue never comes back again. If objectives were not reached, the cycle is repeated, starting with the planned step. The framework used had ensured that an organization could fulfil all the MFOs that is need to be achieved.



Figure 1. Extension management framework.

4. Methodology

The study used the case study method. Data was analyzed using the descriptive statistical tools. The study used some qualitative techniques to answer the objectives, which are better done, in narrative rather than in statistical form. The sources of information were from the narratives of the extension faculty and staff, extension records, Minutes of the Quarterly Meeting (2020-2021), Extension Continuity Plan, Annual Review of the Strategic Plan, Performance-based Bonus reports, Funding Source Documents, 2021 Training Needs Assessment (38 responses from partner-agency) and Stakeholders’ Meeting on April 7, 2021, ISO Audit report and RDE Manual.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1. Present the Current Needs of the Partner-agencies in the Time of Pandemic

The current needs of the partner-agencies were gathered through the online stakeholders' presentation and training needs assessment. The TNA identifies performance goals and the knowledge, skills and abilities needed by a SUC workforce to achieve those goals, identifies gaps in training provision in sectors and or regions, helps direct resources to areas of greatest priority, and addresses resources needed to fulfil the organisational mission, improve productivity, and provide quality products and services.

Table 1 presents the training topic needed in the new normal, Research Capability (65.8%) and Governance (56.8%) has the highest score since most of the partner agency are from the Department of Education (DepEd) and Local Government Unit (LGU) while 13.2% for the Engineering.

Table 1. Training topics needed in the New Normal.

Training Topics	Frequency*	Percentage
Governance	25	65.80
Risk Management	22	57.90
Engineering	5	13.20
Environment	22	57.90
Nutrition	13	34.20
Entrepreneurship	16	42.10
Research Capability	25	65.80
Women and Indigenous People	21	55.30
Education	20	52.60
Agriculture	15	39.50
Law Enforcement	8	21.10
Technology	23	60.50
Health	19	50.00

*Multiple Response.

Table 2 presents the sources of information of the partners and stakeholder. Majority them utilized Social Media (68.4%) as a source of information, the number of internet users in the Philippines increased by 4.2 million between 2020 and 2021 [8]. Social media serves a source of information during the pandemic this is supported by Strekalova (20146) that social media can serve as indicators of information amplification [9]. However, only 2.6% of the partners and stakeholders used Internet as a source of their information.

Table 2. Source of information.

Source of Information	Frequency	Percentage
Radio	13	34.20
Print media (leaflets/posters/brochures/comic)	16	42.10
Television	17	44.70
Meetings/seminars	23	60.50
Social Media	26	68.40
University Extension	17	44.70
LGU Training Providers	12	31.50
Internet	1	2.60

*Multiple Response.

Because of the pandemic, digital advances have been made

in the global higher education sector [10]. Table 3 presents the preferred technology transfer technology modalities majority of the respondents preferred both use of information, communication and technology (ICT) with 76.3% as well as the Social media (FB Page). Since majority of the partners and stakeholders have an access to social media. Social media platforms serve as an alternative to face-to-face meetings and discussion worldwide, which is also applied in the OMSC extension and technical advisory services during this pandemic [11].

Table 3. Preferred technology transfer modalities.

Modalities	Frequency*	Percentage
Social media (FB Page)	29	76.30
Individual farm/ home visits	7	18.40
Farmers' groups meetings	12	31.60
Methods/result demonstration	10	26.30
Farmer field school (FFS)	7	18.40
Establish demonstration plots/farm	8	21.10
Formation of coop/groups/FA	10	26.30
Use of information, communication and technology (ICT)	29	76.30
Print media (leaflets/posters/brochures/comic)	23	60.50
Cellular phones	20	52.60
Educational video programmers	20	52.60
Conventional and Digital Broadcasting (radio)	16	42.10
Integration of modern and indigenous knowledge	17	44.70

*Multiple Response.

Lastly, in terms of preferred length of training, despite the pandemic most of the respondents still preferred 8 hours (31.6%) while 5.3% on both 2 hours and Depends on the kind & scope of the topics. However, training approach mattered more than length of training [12].

Table 4. Preferred length of training.

Length of Training	Frequency	Percentage
2 hours	2	5.30
4 hours	10	26.30
8 hours	12	31.60
16 hours	8	21.10
24 hours	4	10.50
Depends on the kind & scope of the topics	2	5.30
Total	38	100.00

5.2. Difficulties Faced in Providing Services in the New Normal

In December 2019, no one imagined that a trivial virus would shake the morale of almost every country in the world and that economies would take a beating. The speed with which the Corona virus is spreading and the pace at which the key sectors of the economy is tumbling is very disconcerting. Industries have shut down leading to loss of employment in the millions; surface, air and sea transport have come to a standstill severely jolting service sectors such as education, transportation tourism and hospitality.

Certainly, COVID-19 has not spared the different services offered by the academic sector, specifically the extension and

technical advisory services. Based on the Annual Review of the Strategic Plan on March 1, 2021, Continuity Plan on April 2020 and the Extension Quarterly Meetings from 2020-2021, the table below shows the difficulties faced by the faculty and staff in providing services in the extension and technical advisory services in the New Normal.

The responses were categorized based on the extension process and was ranked based on the degree of difficulty encountered by extension faculty and staff. Based on interviews and actual experience, faculty members are overwhelmed with 18-21 actual teaching loads which includes lesson preparation, developing assessment tools and grading student work in the New Normal delivery of instruction. They are also expected to do research and serve as workforce in various activities such as accreditation, ISO, ISA and some with administrative designation. The faculty teaching and other loads has been expressed as a problem of faculty members in the conduct of extension services.

In addition, transportation has been a challenge, especially in hard to reach communities that needs face to face conduct of extension as well as the restriction imposed by the IATF in the conduct of gatherings.

The findings of the study corroborates with the study of Sermona, Talili, Enguito, and Salvador [13], that extension implementers seem to have similar problems

encountered in the monitoring and evaluation of extension programs and projects. In some SUCs, the extension implementers also compose the monitoring and evaluation team. With this being said, the multiple functions of the faculty members is an obstacle to perform monitoring and evaluation of the extension service. Adding to the difficulty is the lack of a monitoring or evaluation system, that is, the process of monitoring and evaluation is sometimes unclear to the team.

As far as SUCs specifically the Occidental Mindoro State College is concerned, the challenges can be fought in three fronts: instruction, research and extension services. As far as extension service is concerned, OMSC's challenge is to continuously develop the faculty and students' competence, performance and accountability for extension, strengthen the interphase of extension with the other SUC functions, establish network where funds from different sources can be channelled, and institute a monitoring and evaluation component in the extension system to focus on delivering market information to farmers and fishers [14].

Further, internet connectivity and electricity also posed a problem in the conduct of webinars, monitoring and evaluation in its attainment of objective. Online learning is not just about the use of technology, although the internet is crucial in the delivery of content.

Table 5. Difficulties faced in providing services in the New Normal.

Extension Process	Difficulties Met	Rank
Agenda Creation	Extension agenda are not within the priority of the LGU. Alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals and Ambisyon Natin 2040. Political intervention.	5
Planning	Multi-tasking of faculty and staff (new normal instruction). Difficulty in conducting Training Needs Assessment and consultation meeting with the stakeholders due to COVID-19 pandemic. Alternative Work Arrangement being implemented. Lack of skills in extension planning. Conflicting schedules of both participants and faculty and staff. Procurement issues. COVID-19 pandemic restriction on Face to face implementation.	4
Implementation	Transportation services. Unvaccinated faculty and staff. Quarantine guidelines imposed by IATF. Counter-parting scheme of partners. Internet Connectivity for webinars. Unavailability of monitoring team.	2
Monitoring	Unavailability of beneficiaries/ participants for the monitoring. COVID-19 pandemic restriction on Face to face monitoring.	3
Evaluation	Weak system in evaluating the extension projects attainment of objectives. Lack of skills in writing extension papers.	1

Feder et al (1999) also presented the challenges and issues in agricultural extension faces: Information and organization in the agriculture sector must assume greater importance. People involved in agriculture need improved skills, information, and ideas in order to develop an agriculture that will meet complex demand patterns, reduce poverty, and preserve or enhance ecological resources. Extension has an important role to play. Extension funding and delivery face difficulties inherent in the extension mandate: magnitude of the task; dependence on wider policy and other agency

functions; problems establishing the cause and effect necessary to obtain political and financial support; liability for public service functions beyond agricultural knowledge and information transfer; fiscal sustainability; and interaction with knowledge generation. Many observers are concerned that public extension is not doing enough, not doing it well, and is not always relevant. In developing countries, bureaucratic inefficiency and poor program design and implementation have led to poor performance and incoherent links with client farmers and the research sector. Support for

extension declined in the 1980s and donors were unwilling to fund large-scale public-sector recurrent expenditures, which led to further underfinancing, staffing shortages, and contraction of extension services [15].

Some of the emerging issues are the very nature of the extension work; the impact of the epidemic on the extension organization itself and its staff; and the impact on the clientele of extension services [16]. There were nine major problem areas in the conduct of agricultural extension, namely: technological problems, linkage, technical training, extension training, mobility, equipment lack of teaching aids, organizational and miscellaneous [17].

For government offices, administrative boundaries rarely coincide with agro-ecological zones (nor with socio-economic situations): there may be a large diversity of situations within the purview of a local government, while the capacity to adjust the advice to local conditions (or to specific groups) may be negatively affected by decentralisation. In particular, good linkages with agricultural research may be difficult to establish at local level if there is no research facility in the region. Similarly, responsiveness to farmer problems may not automatically result from decentralisation. Extension managers become closer to the client but not necessarily more attentive to their problems. Staff attitudes need to change, and farmers need to get organised to make them heard. In the Philippines, some farmers were able to get advantage of tailored made extension activities. But for most upland farmers, there has been no change in a system that never met their needs adequately [18].

5.3. Response Made to Address the Agency's Annual Target in the New Normal

The extension and advisory services of OMSC have adapted extension management strategies for COVID-19 among regular and continued extension projects and activities. The table shows the following response made based on the difficulties met.

As per OMSC's experience enhancing extension productivity through capability-building training alone is not enough. Extensive and sustained retooling of the faculty as extension worker or community development facilitator is important. Furthermore, a good incentive and reward system is an effective motivational tool. It is said that an organization is not able to function without the commitment and loyalty of its workers. Employees are assets with valuable skills, pride, dedication, and needs that require satisfaction in the work place personal satisfaction appears when there is congruency between professional beliefs and the values evident within the work environment [19].

In addition, there is still much to become to address the continuous challenges of delivering extension. Monitoring and evaluation of on-going and completed extension projects are important in seeing to it that resources were properly invested whether it is funded from external or local sources. The Unit monitored the extension output of the different academic departments through extension reports submitted, regular meeting, field evaluation, and annual Agency In-house Review (AIHR) or the RDE Highlights Presentation.

Table 6. Response made to address the agency's annual target in the New Normal.

Extension Process	Difficulties Met	Response Made
Agenda Creation	Extension agenda are not within the priority of the LGU. Alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals and Ambisyon Natin 2040. Political intervention.	Presentation of Agenda to the Sanguniang Bayan-LGU. Conduct of Stakeholders Meeting.
Planning	Multi-tasking of faculty and staff (new normal instruction). Difficulty in conducting Training Needs Assessment and consultation meeting with the stakeholders due to COVID-19 pandemic. Alternative Work Arrangement being implemented. Lack of skills in extension planning Conflicting schedules of both participants and faculty and staff. Procurement issues.	Faculty monitoring was installed. Online TNA and consultation was done. Scheduling of cascaded targets per quarter. Retooling through recommendation to attend webinars.
Implementation	COVID-19 pandemic restriction on Face to face implementation. Transportation services. Quarantine guidelines imposed by IATF. Counter-parting scheme of partners. Internet Connectivity for webinars Unavailability of monitoring team.	Notice of change was provided. Request of conduct was done earlier. Permission from the Local IATF. Requested additional internet connection in the office.
Monitoring	Unavailability of beneficiaries/ participants for the monitoring. COVID-19 pandemic restriction on Face to face monitoring.	Review of the monitoring form already crafted for scientific data gathering. Installed online mechanism for monitoring.
Evaluation	Weak system in evaluating the extension projects attainment of objectives. Lack of skills in writing extension papers.	Review of the extension report. Conduct of extension handholding activities.

OMSC adopts the universal logical framework for all State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) which is the Major Final Outputs (MFOs). It is consist of the priority investments of the institution in education, research and extension services. Expectedly, provision of these services will result in enhanced knowledge and skills, attitudes and values of Filipinos who will eventually lead productive lives. This will

be the substantial contribution of OMSC towards a knowledge-based economy as articulated in "The Philippine Main Education Highway," where the key strategic resource necessary to overcome poverty is "knowledge itself—educated people, their ideas and innovations, and their entrepreneurial spirit."

Table 7 provides the details on indicator target and

accomplishments for extension performance during the time of pandemic. These indicator is based on the MFOs and quality objectives of the extension and technical advisory services. For the year 2020 all the targets are met, on the other hand 2021 accomplishments as of 3rd quarter met the target in terms of number of faculty trained in extension,

number of trainings in extension capacity building, number of IEC materials produced, number of extension programs conducted, number of persons trained, percentage of partners who rated the extension as good or better, and the number of active linkages and partnership. The remaining indicators will be determine before the end of the year.

Table 7. Extension productivity in the time of pandemic.

Major Final Output Indicator	2020		2021	
	Target	Accomplishment	Target	Accomplishment (As of 3 rd Quarter)
Number of faculty trained in extension	50	147	100	30
Number of trainings in extension capacity building	2	2	2	4
Number of faculty conducting extension program	10	25	12	-
Number of IEC materials produced	6	17	7	15
Number of presented extension papers	7	4	7	-
Number of published extension papers in refereed journals	1	2	2	-
Number of extension programs conducted	72	98	72	102
Number of persons trained	9,731	9,830	9,731	8,293
Percentage of partners who rated the extension as good or better	94.42%	98.88%	94.42%	90.52%
Number of active linkages and partnership	17	19	17	15

6. Conclusions

The following were the conclusions of the study:

1. There had been changes in the extension dynamics needed by the partner agencies and other stakeholders. The top topics identified are technology, research capability, health and governance. The stakeholder still likes the 8 hour training with the inclusion of demonstration or assessment. The ICT is the most preferred methodologies, which is in line with social media as a source of information.
2. The difficulties faced in providing services in the New Normal were categorized based on the extension process and was ranked as follows: evaluation, implementation, monitoring, planning and agenda creation.
3. Even in the New Normal, the status of extension activities had showed an increasing turnout. Majority of these extensions were conducted online using digital platform or through video presentation as a response to the COVID-19 health restrictions.

7. Recommendations

The paper recommended to conduct a study on the impact of extension and technical advisory services of OMSC in the province. OMSC should also install a proper monitoring and evaluation of the extended program to identify the strengths and weaknesses and likewise the impact of the program to the community.

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