

THE ROLE OF MIDDLE LEADERS IN FOSTERING ORGANIZATIONAL  
LEARNING IN A STATE COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explored the nature of organizational learning and the role of regional directors (RDs) and program directors (PDs) as mid-level leaders in fostering organizational learning in one cooperative extension organization. In-depth interviews were conducted with top leaders, middle leaders, campus and regional faculty, and state extension council members.

Key findings included organizational learning occurring simultaneously in four dimensions and identification of characteristics of transformative learning. RDs and PDs acted as knowledge activists in their functions as designers, enablers, evaluators, and bridges to foster organizational learning. Critical to organizational learning were relationship building, trust, communication, the process for engaging people in collaborative learning and dialogue as a means for creating a culture of care and the space for learning, and collaboration among RDs and PDs. Barriers to organizational learning involved organizational culture and structure, leader behavior, and the lack of a robust system for accessing the knowledge base.