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FAMILY RANCHING AND FARMING

A CONSENSUS MANAGEMENT MODEL TO IMPROVE FAMILY FUNCTIONING AND DECREASE WORK STRESS

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Internal and external threats could soon squeeze some ranch and farm families out of business. To assist ranch families with these threats and with amicably transferring the operation to the next generation, this article offers a six-step Consensus Management Model that combines strategic planning with psycho-education/family therapy. A pilot test with an intergenerational ranch family indicated improvements in family functioning, including reduced stress and depression and improved self-esteem and family coping levels.

Few businesses have as much family involvement in the day-to-day operation as intergenerational ranching and farming. Working side by side, family members have opportunities for shared dreams, satisfying communication, and intimacy. At the same time, working side by side presents challenges of high intrafamilial stress, strain, and conflict, especially when the family lacks skills in communication, problem solving, goal setting, conflict resolution, and strategic planning. The internal stress ranch families experience as a result of working together has contributed to a decline in the number of families staying together on the ranch (Rosenblatt, deMik, Anderson, & Johnson, 1985; Ward, 1987; Wilson, Marotz-Baden, & Holloway, 1991).

Family ranching is a business under siege. Since 1989, ranchers have come under increasing scrutiny by the U.S. House of Representatives, which has included raising grazing fees on public lands four times in appropriation bills (Grazing fees, 1993). Recent U.S. Senate debate and public hearings in the western states regarding whether to double or triple the per-unit grazing fees have focused attention on ranchers and their use of public lands (Grazing reform, 1993). Recent national television coverage by both the Audubon Society and CBS has publicized the question of whether ranchers' use of public lands is in the best public interest, given growing environmental concerns. CBS characterized the problem as "the new range wars" (Rather, 1993). These external threats could soon squeeze a number of ranch families out of business (Lewis, Volk, & Duncan, 1989).

The purpose of this pilot study was to test the hypothesis that ranch family members who communicate openly with one another to establish a shared vision and strategic plan can increase

positive family functioning and decrease work stress. As a united system, perhaps family members can more effectively fend off internal and external threats to the family ranching business.

Rural ranch families who both want to face the external threats that contribute to their reported feelings of being under siege and to take appropriate proactive steps to transfer the labor, management, and land amicably to the next generation face a double problem. First, it is difficult for families to work together day after day without either encountering high levels of stress and strain or denying personal needs and wants (Freudenberger, Freedheim, & Kurtz, 1989; Jurich & Russell, 1987; Marotz-Baden, 1988; Rosenblatt & Albert, 1990; Wilson et al., 1991). Second, family life educators and Cooperative Extension specialists may lack experience working collaboratively with marriage and family therapists one-on-one with rural families to help families rebuild trust and cohesion. This article brings together therapy and education and creates a rural family Consensus Management Model that increases positive family functioning and capitalizes on ranch families' natural inclination toward self-sufficiency. It also enables them to create a structure and a process for successful and amiable labor, management, and land transfer across the generations.

Not all families are likely to be good candidates for the intervention. Families that are likely to benefit most from the Consensus Management Model are similar to those that would benefit most from traditional therapy (Fisch, Weakland, & Segal, 1982), that is, those that are hurting, have insight that their coping strategies are inadequate, or are in crisis from the high stress of interpersonal communication problems and the fear of losing their ranch or farm as a result. These

families tend to be more willing to invest time and resources into some form of therapy or consulting. They tend to realize the urgency of seeking new alternatives to family and business problem solving. They recognize that continuing to use their old coping strategies to solve problems is inadequate to prevent depressive feelings, worry, tension, stress, angry outbursts, fighting, and possible loss of the family farm or ranch. These families usually function well, and their members typically have no previous psychiatric history. However, they sometimes have trouble adjusting to changes in their business and family, such as changes in division of labor, gender role expectations, equity of compensation, federal regulations, environmentalists' expectations, and consumer attitudes (e.g., toward lean beef consumption).

Helping ranch and farm families develop strategic plans and communication skills is critical to their survival as a family operation. If families learn coping skills before their challenges become crises, they may preempt severe psychological distress or the selling of the family ranch or farm. Too often consultants are brought in too late, after many poor decisions have already been made (Danco, 1991). Building family strengths may help families weather the stressors.

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together. The Consensus Management Model seeks to assist ranch and farm families with practical business and family communication skills.

The Consensus Management Model presented in this article combines strategic planning with psycho-education/family consulting approaches. It offers a practical model that therapists and family life educators can use to encourage youth to stay involved with the family ranch, to decrease ranch families' work stress, to promote their positive family functioning, and to assist them in creating an amiable transfer process.

RELEVANT LITERATURE

In North America, farming and ranching are two of the few remaining occupations that involve entire families. Nikolitch (1972) points out that "approximately 95% of all commercial farms in the United States are owned and operated by families" (cited in Capener & Berkowitz, 1976, p. 9). Therefore, most ranch and farm operations need to maintain both positive family and business skills to succeed. According to the most recent U.S. Department of Commerce data available (1987b), the percentage of individual or family-owned farms has fallen to 87%. Farm or ranch, home, and family constitute a dynamic system filled with daily opportunities and challenges for husbands, wives, children, grandparents, and in-laws. If families do not meet these challenges effectively, their numbers will continue to decrease.

Substantial cash investments are required in land, cattle, equipment, seed, feed, and fertilizer to start a farm or ranch business. Many young people are able to go into ranching or farming only with help from parents or relatives. Working and living together, intergenerational ranch and farm families are faced with many unique challenges. Based on conversations with a variety of experts, the authors estimate that a majority of the 2,087,759 farming/ranching operations in the United States (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1987a) have significant two-generational conflicts. Therefore, assisting ranch and farm families in business and family skill building is important.

The number of farm/ranch families that are staying on the nation's farms and ranches is at an all-time low, and the average age of ranchers and farmers is at an all-time high (Hoffman, 1993; U.S. Department of Commerce, 1987b). Senior farmers/ranchers need to transfer the labor, management, and land to their off-

spring. Yet their offspring are not staying on the family farm or ranch. When young adults leave the ranch or farm out of frustration with the family business, it sometimes threatens the existence of the business. Most farmers and ranchers are not able to afford hired help.

Across the U.S., the percentage of persons in farm occupations has declined steadily from 71.8% in 1820 to 37.5% in 1900 to 2.5% in 1991 (Hoffman, 1993, p. 122). Since 1954, the total number of farm acres in the U.S. has declined by almost 17%, the number of farm and ranch operators has plummeted by 56%, and the average age of the American operator has risen from 49.6 to 52.0 (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1987b). If these trends continue, by the year 2020, less than 1% of the population will be employed as farm and ranch operators, only half of the current operators will still be in business, and the average operator age will rise to 54. If the new range wars intensify, and if ranch and farm families continue to experience high work stress, these trends will be exacerbated.

Farms and Ranches— Businesses or Complex Family Systems?

In this century, information on farming in the United States burgeoned. Yet most articles were on farm production, technology, machinery, chemicals, animals, economics, marketing, credit, etc. Although a growing body of literature is emerging on farm family relationships (Ballard-Reisch & Weigel, 1991; Lewis et al., 1989; Liebowitz, 1986; Marotz-Baden, 1988; Marotz-Baden & Cowan, 1987; Rosenblatt & Albert, 1990; Weigel & Weigel, 1987; Wilson et al., 1991), few addressed ranch families (Marotz-Baden & Cowan, 1987; Wilson et al., 1991), and only one addressed therapy for farm families (Junch & Russell, 1987).

Colman and Capener (1986) wrote that many researchers assume that operating a farm is like operating any other business. "Rural sociologists argued that farming is both a business and a way of life. Agricultural economists argued that farms are or should be operated exclusively as businesses in which performance is evaluated by profit returned" (p. 6). However, one ranch woman recently told the authors, "If our operation was like a business, we could fire one or two of our family members—but we can't!" Based on a 15-year Cornell study of how 33 farm families make decisions, Colman and Capener (1986) concluded that while "farms are indeed

operated as businesses, . . . because production is closely related to the life cycle of the family, the farm, in organization and management, is remarkable, if not unique, among businesses in developed economies" (p. 6).

Work, Stress, and Two-Generation Ranch and Farm Families

Family conflicts are particularly likely when transferring responsibilities from one generation to another, a process that takes years. At first, parents are in charge of all aspects of the farm or ranch, and their children are "cowboys" or hired hands. This "sweat-factor" apprenticeship varies in length, depending on the readiness of the two generations. In successful transfers, eventually labor responsibilities, management decisions, and assets are discussed and shared by the generations.

Retirement is the result of an ongoing process (Lea, 1991; Rosenblatt & Albert, 1990; Shulman, 1991; Ward, 1987). Waiting to transfer responsibilities and assets until the parent generation is advanced in age can be disastrous (Swogger, Johnson, & Post, 1988), because by then the younger generation has acquired other interests (Liebowitz, 1986). Too often, parents keep total control until they retire or die. Consequently, the young adults, seeing little opportunity to become a part of the family operation's goal setting and decision making until middle age, often leave the ranch for other opportunities. Eventually, the parents are alone and unable to manage the operation. Because the authors believe that this transfer process must be a systemic rather than a linear process (i.e., first labor, then management, then land), it is important, when possible, for family consultants to interact with the whole family system. Consequently, the transfer of labor, management, and land is an ongoing process.

Studies funded by experiment stations at some land grant universities have identified the long transfer process of the family farm/ranch as one of the most stressful issues that two-generation agricultural families face (Anderson & Rosenblatt, 1985; Ballard-Reisch & Weigel, 1991; Bratton & Berkowitz, 1976; Jurich & Russell, 1987; Russell, Griffin, Flinchbaugh, Martin, & Atilano, 1985; Salamon, Gengenbacher, & Penas, 1986; Weigel & Weigel, 1990). Weigel and Weigel (1990) examined the family satisfaction levels of 242 senior generation farmers and 239 junior generation farmers. Farmers reported problems

with handling arguments, fair criticism, and family problem solving.

According to Anderson and Rosenblatt (1985), critical coping strategies for successful management of the transfer of the family farm are open communication among family members, including both generations, about the transfer plans; allowing feelings to be openly expressed and acknowledged, and planning early. Ideally, the three-phase transfer process identified by Keating and Munro (1989) (labor, management, and land) occurs gradually and simultaneously—as both generations are ready—rather than consecutively (Bennett & Kohl, 1982). Frequently, however, one generation is ready to transfer before the other is (Salamon et al., 1986, Weigel & Weigel, 1987), thereby raising issues of power, control, decision making, resource allotment, and family unity, which can all influence the satisfaction of family members during the transfer process (Weigel & Weigel, 1990).

Recommendations

Weigel and Weigel (1987) recommended that two-generation farm families be offered education on “communication skills, conflict resolution, problem solving, decision making, . . . [and] goal setting” (p. 384) over extended periods of time. Farm families anticipating a transfer of the farm to the next generation are strongly encouraged to plan early for the transfer, to maintain open communication throughout the process (Anderson & Rosenblatt, 1985), and to preserve the sense of unity in two-generation families via establishing common goals and limiting conflict of loyalties (Weigel & Weigel, 1990). Ballard-Reisch and Weigel (1991) advised family life educators and Cooperative Extension agents to assist family members in identifying problem areas and in developing communication, problem-solving, decision-making, and negotiation skills.

The Consensus Management Model presented in this article takes both the intergenerational work stressors and recommended coping strategies for farm families, incorporates them into a strategic planning and process skills model, and adapts them to ranch and farm families’ unique needs. Because the process is a combination of business management and family therapy, it is referred to in this article as “family consultation” rather than family therapy.

The model is novel and unique in two ways. Many rural families live a distance from a major city, and even further from consultants. Therefore, traditional weekly sessions may not be feasible. The

model adapts the Milan consultation scheduling (Boscolo, Cecchin, Hoffman, & Penn, 1987) to meet the consulting needs of ranch families. A cotherapist-educator team flies monthly to meet with the intergenerational family in a motel conference room for a full day of consultation. This process may continue for up to 18 months. The Milan assumption is that change happens between sessions, so considerable homework is given to be completed between sessions, which are longer and happen less frequently than traditional therapy sessions. Second, the process combines a strategic planning model with a family systems consultation model. The model, which builds on family management skills, is presented via a case example involving an intergenerational ranch family.

METHOD: A CONSENSUS MANAGEMENT MODEL

Eight members of a multigenerational ranch family approached the authors for family consultation. The parents were in their late-50s-early-60s. All three siblings and their spouses were in their late-20s to mid-30s.

This family’s presenting problems included lack of trust, inflexible organizational structure, poor communication skills, autocratic decision making, perceived inequities, and difficulty in transferring the responsibilities of the ranch operation effectively to the next generation. The father’s summary was concise—“Our business skills are fine; it’s our people skills that need help!” These problems led to the development and testing of the model. The model has six major steps that the consultants found useful in working with an intergenerational ranch family. The early steps are critical for establishing a strong foundation of trust, open communication, and a shared family vision. The latter steps outline tasks that facilitate more positive family interaction on a daily basis and nurture the transfer of responsibility, control, and assets.

Model Steps

A basic assumption of this model was that progress can be sabotaged by unresolved family issues. Although not all ranch/farm families need couple or family consultation, it is the authors’ experience that the availability of consultation to families who want it is imperative. If members of a couple or family have years of resentment built up toward another member based on conflicting visions and management styles, the

resolution of the resentment is a key to success in the family’s working together with the new management model. Therefore, the authors worked as cotherapy teams with an Extension Specialist and a marriage and family therapist and incorporated therapy/consultation whenever appropriate.

Step 1: Establish family rules and a shared vision. It is highly unusual for ranch families to bring in family consultants. The assumption that families need to feel that consultation provides a safe place to talk openly led to the development of the first step. Initially four family rules were established and agreed upon for consultation sessions. (a) members should keep everything said in consultation sessions confidential and not use it against each other later, (b) members should not use shame, blame, insults, or violence; (c) members should listen well and not tell others what to do unless asked, and (d) members should ask for what they want.

The family rules created a safe context for taking risks and for sharing individual ideas about their future. Eventually, the family was ready to create a shared family vision for the next 3 to 5 years. A basic problem among many farm/ranch families is conflicting visions or goals for the farm/ranch operation. If one generation’s vision is at odds with the next generation’s vision, the transfer of the operation will be difficult. Therefore, establishing a shared vision was important. Having a shared vision, plan, and goals is imperative in any cohesive family business (Rosenblatt et al., 1985; Ward, 1987). The authors guided the family through futuring exercises (Deshler, 1988) to develop their collective vision for the ranch family business. From the strategic planning literature (Fetsch, 1990, Fetsch & Bolen, 1989), the authors knew the importance of taking the time to dream and reach consensus on a brief, easy-to-remember, shared vision or “target that beckons.”

This ranch family wrote the following vision statement: “We want our family ranching to be harmonious, consensual, enjoyable, and profitable.” This vision was important to the family for several reasons. They reported that working together was much more conflictual than before (vision harmonious). They reported that individual decisions were being made without consideration of the family as a whole (vision consensual). They reported that ranching was no longer enjoyable because of the high tension and frustration with each other (vision enjoyable). They also reported that the profits of the ranch were at stake because they were not working as



a team (vision profitable) and because of external political and environmental threats. As the family progressed in later stages of the model, they referred to their shared vision, "If we do things that way, John will not be happy—that is not consensual."

The lengthy discussions leading to the shared vision made it clear that part of the presenting problem was lifespan related. For the young adults to feel involved in the operation, the family needed to shift from an autocratic decision-making style to a consensual decision-making process. Consensus was defined as communicating, problem solving, and negotiating on major issues until no family member had any major objections to the decision—all could live with the decision. Autocratic decision making allowed one person to decide, democratic decision making allowed the majority to decide. Neither option worked well in a system where people lived and worked together daily—those who did not feel heard often sabotaged the individual and majority decisions. Consensual decision making incorporated the major needs and wants of all young and elder adult family members, making the decisions related to the transfer process more amiable.

Step 2: Improve family communication and conduct meetings. As part of extensive work to increase communication skills, the family began to conduct monthly family meetings on the ranch to discuss family and business issues. It is important for families to work toward feeling safe to be able to have productive meetings without the consultants. Experiencing success in meeting among themselves is critical for family members to have ongoing positive interactions long after the consultation process has ended. Some family members reported: "In the past our family meetings ended up with everyone mad or leaving. Pretty soon hardly anyone would show up."

A new structure for family meetings greatly improved meeting success and increased overall communication and business functioning. Guidelines (Lingren, 1982) were provided for rotating chairperson and secretary/timekeeper roles among family members, so all gained experience conducting meetings.

The four family rules described earlier were incorporated into the family meetings. To assist the family in developing effective family meeting skills, the authors used a reflecting team model (Anderson, 1992) in consultation sessions. The family was observed having a short family meeting during the consultation session. The authors then coached the family about strengths and

growth areas (e.g., listening, asking for what one wants). The practical, concrete feedback enabled the family to make significant behavioral changes during their family meetings.

A positive family meeting was imperative for this family to conduct business together. It allowed a structured time for problems to be resolved and for policies to be developed or reviewed. It also kept family members moving together toward their shared vision and increased overall positive family functioning. This structured format began and maintained the process of flattening the hierarchy, transferring responsibilities to the younger generation, and promoting open communication and shared decision making.

Step 3: Create departments and appoint managers. After a shared vision was reached and communication skills improved, the family members were ready to create an organizational structure to implement their goals on a daily basis. Members were asked to list all the groups of tasks required to operate the ranch. Each group of tasks became a department (i.e., family meetings, mother cows, genetics, equipment, continuing education, land, recreation, crops, feeder calves, registered cows, shop, cull cows, and books and records). Family members then chose department managers who were responsible for seeing that the work was completed (i.e., delegation, planning, and oversight).

Some family members found it difficult initially to trust that other members would manage a department effectively. It was also difficult initially for members to delegate and to be assigned tasks. However, eventually they reported feeling less burdened by the entire ranch operation. They began to enjoy focusing on specific areas and knowing that other critical areas were covered. The departments began to structure the organiza-

tion in a way that spread responsibility and accountability to all members and was the basis for further structural changes.

Facilitating the ongoing process of transferring responsibilities from one generation to the other and flattening hierarchy and management responsibility were primary goals. Lea (1991) emphasized the importance of managing the transition process early and not waiting until the actual retirement. Therefore, in this step the authors assumed that all members needed to take responsibility for some parts of the operation in order to facilitate the transition.

Step 4: Develop task lists. A common problem for many ranch families is that there is never enough help or time to accomplish all the tasks. However, nowhere in the literature were lists found containing tasks and the number of hours to complete the tasks for a typical ranch operation. In this case, the family had no guidelines to determine whether the operation was more than they could manage or what tasks department managers should delegate. Developing such a list of tasks was an important next step for this family. Each manager was asked to generate an extensive list of all tasks that needed to be done by his/her department from January through December. Every departmental list included tasks by month for a calendar year, an estimated number of hours to complete the task, and a priority rating by the A-B-C method (A = *The task absolutely has to be done*; B = *Whether the task has to be done is debatable*, and C = *The task can be postponed or dropped*). The list in Table 1 is one of 156 monthly departmental lists the family developed.

Each department manager's list of tasks and estimated hours was reviewed and revised by all family members until a consensus was reached. All departments'

Table 1
Tasks, Priority, and Estimated Hours for January—Mother Cows Department

Task	Priority	Estimated Hours
Monitor cow herd	A	160
Evaluate computer summaries	A	240
Monitor Silt cow herd	A	24
Feed bulls	A	60
Feed replacement heifers	A	90
Feed horses	A	30
Check heifer calving supplies	B	16
Check calving facility	B	16
Ride on creek	B	120
Gather and feed mother cows (*only when weather dictates)	A	1,440*
		Total 756 hours
		Total 2,196 hours*

monthly estimates of how long tasks took were tallied, which allowed the family to estimate how many person hours it would take in a given month to operate the ranch. This made decisions easier, such as knowing when to hire extra help and determining which months were available for vacation time (something the family had not had in years), and also helped identify whether the most time-consuming aspects of the operation were the most profitable. This initial information gathering set the stage for ranch operation by consensus management. This transferring of responsibility met the needs of the younger generation for shared ownership. At the same time, it met the needs of the senior generation to assure that all the important ranch tasks were completed.

Step 5: Establish monthly calendars After tasks and departments had been established, a new way of working on a daily basis was developed. Before the lists had been developed, members began each day working on what they personally thought was most important. Tension increased over differences in perceived importance and priority of tasks. There was tension if one member took off for a few days and high-priority tasks were left undone. Perceptions of who was doing more physical labor and who was doing more paper work created a great deal of work stress and conflict. The family business was not operating from a team perspective.

Establishing monthly calendars that corresponded to seasonal changes in ranch family tasks addressed and reduced this tension and increased team cooperation. Members first wrote their personal commitments (e.g., physician's or dentist's appointments) on their calendars and then circulated their calendars at monthly family meetings to all department managers, who assigned responsibilities on specific days. When the completed calendars were returned to each member, they negotiated their responsibilities, if necessary. This model of assignments and management provided a mechanism for all family members to see the total number of ranch tasks that needed to be done each month. It kept all members informed of what tasks other members were doing each day, informed others when a member was off the ranch, and enhanced family trust that all critical tasks were being done.

Through regular open communication and problem solving, family members learned to respect the diverse ways different members had of doing the same task. They became more accountable for what was assigned to them. Their confidence in their co-workers' competence

grew. Because personal commitments were previously scheduled, the new structure relieved guilt and hostility when a member had to be away from the ranch. Because all the tasks had an estimated time, the structure resolved the feelings of unfairness over work distribution. Most importantly, it increased the level of team responsibility.

Family members learned to build flexibility into their schedules. The expectation was adjusted so that 75% of the time calendars dictated the month's priority tasks, and 25% of the time interruptions dictated priorities, (e.g., a truck breaking down, a calf getting sick). Calendars now had blank spaces for this 25% unplanned time rather than being so fully scheduled that everyone worked 18-hour days with no flexibility.

Step 6: Resolve equality issues This step was based on the assumption that it is important to deal with equality issues. Success of the management model or of any structure can easily be sabotaged when resentment concerning equality arises. Rosenblatt et al. (1985) stated that struggles over who makes decisions and fairness concerning money and workload are primary problems with any family business and need to be addressed. Establishing open communication and developing the ability to create policies concerning equality issues were important and were addressed in the final step of the model. Some of this family's equality issues that were discussed and resolved were division of physical labor versus desk work, equitable pay for the amount of work done, gender and generational pay equity issues, dual-earner couples' issues, on- and off-ranch employment issues, and prenuptial agreements addressing the family land issue to protect the financial integrity of the operation.

What is important here is a recognition that establishing policies for dealing with equality issues is an important final step in the model. Within the broad context of a strategic planning model, family therapy addressed equality issues, couple and sibling conflict, in-law tensions, communication, violence, and work and family stress and coping.

Notebooks for Further Organization

Finally, as a practical way of organizing the family's new model, the family developed notebooks for each member. The family's shared vision was on the front cover, to keep it visible at all times. The notebooks included sections on family departments and organizational structure, departmental tasks, poli-

cies, notes from each family meeting, and monthly calendars for the notebook's owner and others.

RESULTS

Self-report written surveys were administered three times during the 18-month experiment to all eight family members to collect benchmark data and to monitor individual and family changes in levels of family coping, stress, depression, self-esteem, family strains, and behaviors (see Fetsch, 1993). Family coping levels were assessed using a 4-item appraisal skills subscale by McCubbin, Larsen, and Olson (1987). McCubbin (1987) reported a reliability (internal reliability) index of .71 and a validity coefficient (correlation with the original Family Crisis Oriented Personal Evaluation Scales) of .80. Family Coping-Coherence scoring procedures, norms, and comparative data by life cycle stage were reported by McCubbin (1987) ($M = 16.0$, $SD = 2.0$). Current stress, depression, and self-esteem levels were assessed via three Likert scale (1-5) questionnaire items.

Family scores were determined by calculating mean scores of the eight related individuals, so an increase in family coping meant an increase in the overall mean level of the group's coping level from pretest to posttest. An analysis of variance was used to test whether group changes were significant at a $p = .10$ level of significance—the level accepted for this pilot study. Family coping levels increased significantly, from 12.88 to 15.38, $F(1, 6) = 3.77$, $p = .07$. Based on McCubbin's norms, at pretest the family's coping level was over one and one-half standard deviations below the mean. At 18 months, it rose to the mean. The analysis of variance indicated that stress, depression, and self-esteem levels did not change significantly at the $p = .10$ level. Stress levels decreased from 4.00 to 3.38, $F(1, 6) = 1.58$, $p = .23$. Depression levels decreased from 3.12 to 2.50, $F(1, 6) = 1.47$, $p = .24$. Self-esteem levels increased from 3.50 to 4.00, $F(1, 6) = .58$, $p = .46$.

In addition to quantitative changes, there were numerous qualitative changes. After 18 months of consultation, all eight family members reported making at least one behavioral change, and five reported making three (e.g., "We've improved our communication at home/work;" "We've increased our use of effective family coping strategies;" and "I manage conflict better"). Prior to the family consultation, for years family members living within 100 yards of each other did not visit in each others' homes because

of tension. After the consultation, joint family meals became commonplace. The senior couple took their first-ever vacation as a couple for 10 days, which demonstrated a significant increase in their confidence that their adult offspring could manage the ranch operation without them. Family members reported that even the peak spring stress season was enjoyable for the first time in 7 years.

Although only coping level increases were significant, the trend was for three other dependent variables (stress, depression, and self-esteem levels) to change in positive directions, and all family members made positive behavioral changes.

Caution should be taken when interpreting the results of this pilot study. One ranch family's results do not represent a cross section of ranchers in the country. Consequently, generalizability of the results is limited.

IMPLICATIONS AND DISCUSSION

The quantifiable and clinical findings of this study support and build on previous findings and support the hypothesis that ranch family members who communicate openly to establish a shared vision and strategic plan can increase positive family functioning and decrease work stress levels (Anderson & Rosenblatt, 1985; Ballard-Reisch & Weigel, 1991; Lea, 1991; Rosenblatt et al., 1985; Ward, 1987; Weigel & Weigel, 1987, 1990). They also suggest that handling two-generation family arguments, communicating openly, setting common goals, solving problems, and improving decision making are critical coping strategies, especially in a successful transfer process (Anderson & Rosenblatt, 1985; Weigel & Weigel, 1990). This model adds a structured, six-step process that combines strategic planning from a business model with a unique family consultation approach.

Based on the experience of the authors, it is recommended that at least one member of the male and female cotherapy team have an agricultural background or experience in ranch business strategic planning skills in order to understand the culture and to communicate in agricultural terms. Further, it is recommended that an interdisciplinary team approach be used, that is, an educator (e.g., family life educator, Extension Specialist, or human developmentalist) teamed with a marriage and family therapist. It is helpful for the team to meet with the family on their ranch or farm at least initially to appreciate the

work and family environment. It is sometimes impractical to expect all of the family/employees to drive long distances or fly to meet with the consultants. This may be neither time nor cost effective. In addition, marketing this process as "Family Consultation" makes it more salable than "Family Therapy" to ranchers and farmers.

It is important for team members to be flexible and to be prepared to work with various family subsystems. For example, couples, siblings, individuals, the family of origin, and the entire family may need time to work through issues apart from the entire family. If all members of a family do not agree to participate in consultation sessions, it is still useful to work with members who are willing to participate. One of the basic assumptions of systems theory is that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts; that is, if one works with one part of a system, other parts will change (Becvar & Becvar, 1982). Not every group needs the same number of sessions. Some, particularly those that need more management consultation than therapy, may only require a few sessions. Flexibility in scheduling is also important. For example, it may not be possible to meet during certain periods of the year (e.g., calving or harvest seasons) because the family cannot leave the ranch or farm. In addition, being flexible enough to provide a Milan scheduling format with 6 to 8 hours of consultation each month requires planning. The authors found that when they planned therapeutic interventions, psychoeducation, and subsystem sessions that corresponded with the family's expectations, the time moved smoothly and quickly for all involved.

Administering reliable and valid instruments before, during, and after intervention gives clinicians quantifiable data about the family's change process to add to their clinical impressions. Reporting individual, couple, and family results gives family members an indication of how they are progressing. Quantifiable results were especially appealing to family members who valued demonstrable outcomes.

The authors believe that, given the farm/ranch lifestyle, this structure of working with the ranch and farm families is practical and worth the investment. When asked, "What is your most important resource?" most ranch/farm family members tell the authors "My husband!" "My wife!" "My family!" When asked how much was invested last year in this most important resource, most say, "Not enough." In the case example, the father said to the au-

thors, "If we hadn't brought you guys in, we'd have lost the ranch!" The model is action- and practice-oriented rather than theoretical. It is practical and useful. It incorporates common sense and current research findings.

CONCLUSION

Working with ranch and farm families with this model can be rewarding for educators and clinicians as well as the families. One ranch family found the model practical, effective, and empowering to face whatever changes lay ahead, to increase their positive family functioning, and to decrease their work stress. It helped them create a process and a structure to deal directly with external and internal threats and to take the transfer process to another level that is more appropriate to their stage of the life span.

The model provides an opportunity for Extension Specialists and clinicians to incorporate a strategic planning process into their practice and to expand into rural areas. Further study is needed with other ranch families and with farm families to assess the model's effectiveness with them. Finally, although this article addresses working with a ranch family, the authors believe that the Consensus Management Model would be equally effective with farm families and with other family businesses.

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