

Exploring the Adaptability of Ohio State University Extension County 4-H Professionals to an All-Digital Setting During the COVID-19 Remote Work Period Based on Selected Variables and Their Relationship to Change Style Preferences

Mark Light, PhD Student / Dr. Jeff King, Advisor / Dr. Caryn Filson and Dr. Jerold Thomas, committee members

INTRODUCTION

When work shifted from the office to home during the pandemic, Extension professionals not only made the switch to remote work, but they had to adjust to an all-digital 4-H program delivery rather than in-person.

The Change Style Indicator assessment classifies a person as a Conservator, Pragmatist, or Originator (CSI, 2000). Conservators prefer gradual change. Pragmatists desire change that serves a function. Originators are the most adept to change and favor quicker, more expansive change. These preferences to change impacted 4-H professionals' approach to the pandemic and remote work. Since the spring of 2020 involved rapid change, it became more difficult for employees to maintain a sense of balance.

METHODS

Population involved 98 county-based 4-H professionals in Ohio.

Study was conducted in two parts: a Change Style Indicator assessment in part one followed by a Remote Work survey in part two based on objectives.

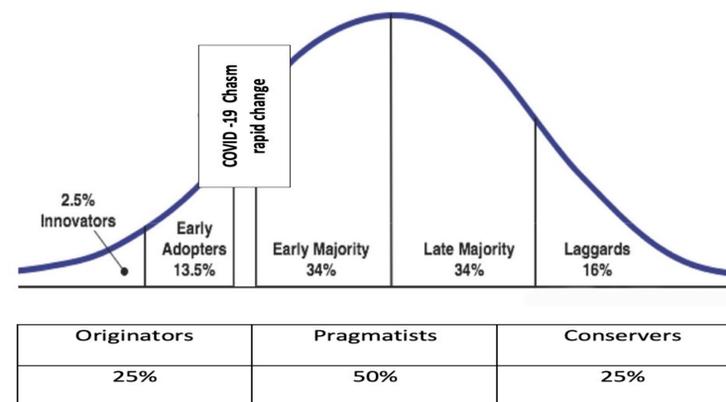
PURPOSE

The purpose of this study is to understand how Ohio State University Extension county-based 4-H Youth Development professionals adapted to the all-digital environment during COVID-19 from March 13 – July 6, 2020 and explore possible relationships to Change Style Preferences.

OBJECTIVES

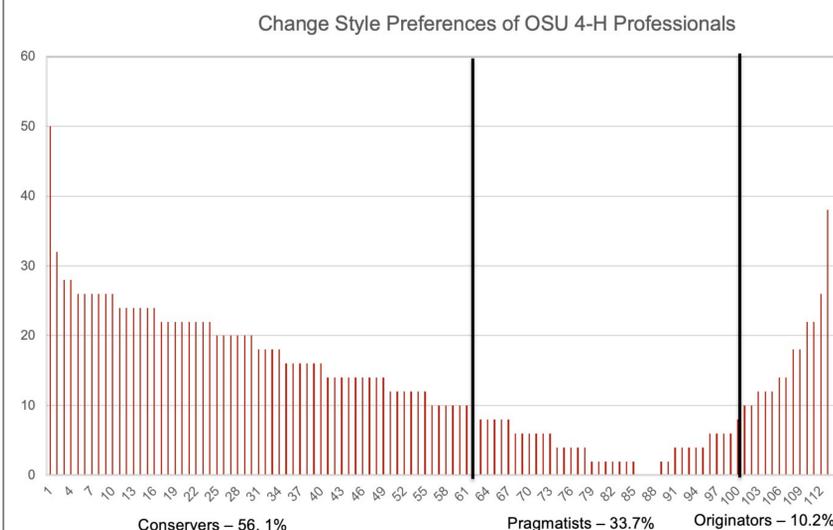
- To describe the population of 4-H Youth Development Professionals by their Change Style Preferences.
- To describe the adaptations during the all-digital work environment for 4-H Youth Development Professionals.
- To describe the types of digital tools used during the all-digital environment by 4-H Youth Development Professionals.
- To describe the types of digital skills learned during the all-digital environment by 4-H Youth Development Professionals.
- To describe the types of digital youth development programming implemented during the all-digital environment by 4-H Youth Development Professionals.
- To describe the types of digital youth development strategies generated during the all-digital environment by 4-H Youth Development Professionals.
- To explore adaptations, digital tools, digital skills, digital programming, and digital strategies and their relationship to the Change Styles Preferences of 4-H Youth Development Professionals during an all-digital programming environment.

THEORETICAL MODEL



Theoretical model of Change Style with technology adoption

COVID-19 disrupted the diffusion of technology adoption as matched up with change style preferences (Rogers, 1962). The theoretical model shows that Originators should line up with innovators and early adopters in their use of technology even before the all-digital period. Because of the rapid shift to an all-digital, remote period, the normal curve was compressed on how quickly employees adopted new technology. COVID-19 filled the normal chasm that might have prevented technology use in 4-H for programming prior to March 2020 by Pragmatists and Conservators (Moore, 2014). In the model, Pragmatists are the early majority and some late majority in their adoption of technology. They might have utilized existing University tools, but not tried innovative technology like Originators. Conservators were assumed to be in the late majority and laggards in this model.



BENEFITS OF AN ALL-DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT

	#1 Rank Count	#2 Rank Count	#3 Rank Count	Median	Overall Rank
More flexible scheduling throughout the week	23	19	17	3.35	1
Blended in-person and online 4-H programming / meetings	25	18	12	3.67	2
More work-life balance by working from different locations	15	16	9	4.55	3
Having more of a digital presence for OSU Extension & 4-H	11	6	10	5.16	4
More online and virtual professional development options	4	10	12	5.28	5
Less in person meetings	9	8	9	5.53	6
Using more digital tools with youth and volunteers	5	7	8	5.79	7
Using more virtual programming to reach new audiences	3	8	11	5.96	8
More work-life balance by dropping 4-H programming	1	3	7	7.65	9
Working virtually outside of county boundaries	1	2	2	8.06	10

Benefits of digital work environment that you hope to continue beyond 2020.

STUDY KEY FINDINGS AND RESULTS

- Change Styles had no or weak correlations with digital tools used, skills learned, 4-H programming, adaptations and strategies.
- 46% of the population has worked for Ohio 4-H five years or less
- 89.8% of 4-H professionals used time during the spring to learn new skills or improve existing skills.
- 77.5% used freed up time by canceled programs and activities to create new digital programming
- 30.4% of staff indicated that they did not have good Internet
- Seventy-one respondents depended on each other for support.
- 88.6% waited to alter programming due to the constant changes
- 57.1% reached new audiences as a result of 4-H programming that lowered traditional state and county boundaries.
- 98% of respondents used material that were created by others.
- 60.2% said being able to do things digitally was exciting for me.
- 91.8% would continue to use digital youth development strategies in future programming beyond the all-digital period.
- 63.0% agreed Virtual programs also allowed youth to meet other 4-H members from across the state.

