

## Research in Brief

ROBERT L. BRUCE, *editor*

### OPEN VS. CLOSED GROUPS

While groups and individuals in groups have been subjects of a great deal of research, the effect of membership stability has seldom been taken into account as a possible cause of group behavior. Extension workers faced with the problems of creating and/or working through groups of many types may find some guidance in this excellent review of current evidence.

Open (where membership is constantly changing) and closed (where membership is relatively stable) groups differ with respect to four characteristics: time perspective, equilibrium, frame of reference, and changing group membership.

*Time Perspective* The open group is transient by definition. Its members must act on the assumption of brief interpersonal relationships. This has at least two main effects: (1) a tendency to "get *something done*," and (2) a tendency to relate to the group as a whole rather than to individuals within it.

The present dominates in the open group—action is taken more quickly on decisions than in closed groups. Postponement may be the same as inaction to those members who may be removed or replaced.

Short individual tenure in the group means that rewards and sanctions among group members may be hard to maintain. The member may be interested only in those things he can take with him when he leaves the group. Interdependency can be person-to-person in stable groups, but in the open group it becomes person-to-group. Some open groups counteract the short-term views of their members by invoking the idea of a more general group to which all belong and to which they must be loyal. By thus transforming intergroup movement into intragroup movement, they achieve some of the benefits of stable membership.

*Equilibrium* Even open groups must maintain some stability if they are to continue. Group size contributes to stability in the open group in that the effect of individual changes in membership is reduced as the number of members remaining goes up. Groups whose memberships vary in age, interest, etc., are likely to be able to accommodate new members with less disruption than groups with uniform membership.

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Membership turnover necessarily disrupts group activity and entails some loss of group memory, but this outcome may be the one desired in some instances. Dormitory residents, for instance, became less satisfied as group stability increased.

*Frame of Reference* To the degree that having open membership means a greater variety of members, open groups are likely to provide a broader frame of reference and greater creativity than closed groups. Open groups, by virtue of their short group memory, can throw off the effects of failure more easily than can closed groups. On the other hand, a history of success is difficult to preserve in the open group, and changes in membership may thus threaten group security.

*Changing Group Membership* The most obvious characteristic on which open and closed groups differ is, of course, the fact that membership in one changes while that in the other does not. Some of the effects of this difference are discussed above, but there are also effects on the ways in which membership changes are handled. In the open group, for example, change is expected and every member is a potential graduate. This may make the manner of his leaving as much a concern as the way in which he enters the organization, and procedures may be established to control this. The ways newcomers are handled may also vary.

The author makes no claim that one type of group is better than the other. He demonstrates a relationship between type of membership and a variety of outcomes. The desirability of those outcomes depends on the situation. The informed Extension worker, knowing that these relationships exist, can work more effectively by taking them into account.

Robert C. Ziller, "Toward a Theory of Open and Closed Groups." *Psychological Bulletin*, LXIV (September, 1965), 164-82.

#### FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT IN LOW-INCOME FAMILIES

To aid in developing educational programs for low-income families, the financial situation and practices of such families in a small Oklahoma city were studied to learn more about their financial management and use of consumer credit. The sample included all families in the city with incomes of \$3000 or less and with husband and wife and two or more children under 18 living at home.

The entire city was canvassed and interviews were conducted with the wives in 111 families. Comparisons were made by amount and regularity of income, age and education of husband and wife, number of children under 18 living at home, and the employment of the wife.

The majority of families had a regular income and used credit extensively. The major portion of the income was from earnings of husbands and wives. (About one-third of the wives were employed.) A considerable number received income from welfare agencies. More than a third had credit problems and the amount outstanding was relatively high in comparison to income. Younger families tended to use credit for major durables and medical expenses while older couples used loans for housing improvements.

In the majority of families both husband and wife took part in financial planning, although planning and record-keeping were largely men's work. Educational attainment and limited job skills were consistent with low income; but, within the range found, educational attainment did not appear to affect management practices. A considerable number of the wives expressed interest in educational programs.

The findings suggest that low-income families such as those described would be a potentially fruitful audience for programs in family financial planning. While receptive to help in this area, they present problems which may call for departures from conventional Extension approaches.

Nada Mae Hall, "Financial Management Practices of Selected Low-Income Families in an Urban Community in Oklahoma." Unpublished M.S. thesis, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma, 1965.

#### PROFESSIONAL COMMITMENT OF HOME ECONOMICS AGENTS

Extension workers, like other professionals, differ in the amount of commitment they display toward their profession. In this study of 99 Kansas Extension home economics agents, scores on the Measure of Professional Commitment were found to range from 104 to 190 (out of a possible 200). In this, the agents compared with college personnel, graduate students, and secondary school teachers and differed significantly from clerical workers.

While the data showed that the more committed agents belonged to more professional organizations, attended more professional meetings, read more professional magazines, and were more satisfied with their jobs than the less committed, the reasons for commitment were not determined. Agents, as a group, were found to be quite homogeneous as to personal characteristics. The more committed agents were not older nor did they have longer tenure than the less committed. Supervisors' ratings of commitment and effectiveness were correlated at a fairly high ( $r = .50$ ) level. There was considerably less relation ( $r = .24$ ) between agent and supervisor estimates of agent commitment.

The positive results of the study are scarcely surprising. One would expect that persons engaged in a profession to which they are committed would be more satisfied and exhibit more professional behavior than less committed persons. Several interesting questions can be asked, however, for future investigation: Why is the commitment of the agent, as she perceives it, so different from the perception of her supervisor? What is the direction of the relationship between effectiveness and commitment as the supervisor sees it?

Another problem suggests itself for Extension researchers: Personnel studies in other fields have shown relationships between background data and a variety of dependent variables. In this study, as in others, Extension workers have proved too uniform with respect to conventional background data to permit the discovery of cause-effect relationships. The existence of such naturally matched groups of workers might permit more refined analyses than are usually possible.

Phyllis E. Kemp, "Professional Commitment of Home Economics Agents in Kansas." Unpublished M.S. thesis, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland, 1965.

#### HOW DO YOU IDENTIFY COMMUNITY LEADERS?

Increased involvement in community development and public affairs demands that Extension workers be capable of determining the leadership structure of the whole community as well as its rural components. Sociologists lean to the "reputational method," in which leaders are identified by panels of informants, or the "pluralist method," in which events are analyzed to determine who is involved in the decision making.

A third technique is suggested by anthropologist Walter Boek. The anthropological method involves five steps: (1) learning the community's prominent social and physical characteristics; (2) establishing rapport with persons who can provide entree into the system; (3) gaining workable levels of confidence with reliable informants; (4) checking and re-checking findings; and (5) withdrawing from the community. (The latter step would suggest that, since agents will remain in the community, they should be especially discreet in the uses made of data.)

Based on his own research, Boek offers these principles:

1. Old, established leaders make few public appearances and receive little publicity.
2. Top leaders always have control of a major source of financing and an important legal firm.
3. If there is more than one top leader, each will have his own domain. Where conflicts exist considerable stress may be generated for those who must take action.
4. Most sociometric stars (persons on whom overt leadership centers) are not top power leaders, but they may be the persons through whom decisions are channeled.
5. Leaders often have "talking chiefs" who can easily be mistaken for power wielders. They make the leader's ideas known to determine public reaction.
6. There are usually apprentice leaders who are assigned increasing responsibility as they demonstrate their ability to behave correctly.
7. Women are seldom in top power positions, and when they do influence decisions it is through men.
8. Elected officials may have little actual power.
9. Kinship is sometimes, but not always, a factor in gaining a place in the power structure.

Walter Boek, "Field Techniques in Delineating the Structure of Community Leadership." *Human Organization*, XXIV (Winter, 1965), 358-64.

PEOPLE MAY make massive compilations of facts, statistics and opinions, and assemble them in impressive arrays of arguments, but in the end they produce only a few humble truths.

—*The Royal Bank of Canada Monthly Letter* (May, 1964).