

Research in Brief

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MAKING GOOD PROGRAM DECISIONS

Insight into the things which make for good Extension programming is one by-product of a recent study of Oklahoma county Extension chairmen. In testing whether county chairmen who were rated by their supervisors as high in efficient use of available resources would also score high in decision-making ability, the researcher found that the good decision makers in his sample:

1. Can clearly and specifically identify program goals and objectives, explain benefits of the program to relevant clientele groups, and select methods of achieving the benefits.
2. Design programs directly to reach stated ends.
3. Seek advice and counsel before making final program decisions, after locating several sources of information and evaluating each carefully before using it.
4. Are knowledgeable about their clientele, with understanding of group size and trends, income level and available resources, and previous training in the program in question.
5. Can recognize time and resource demands of the program.
6. Can predict cost of abandonment of the program.
7. Have determined techniques for program evaluation.

High- and low-rated decision makers were found to be similar in the factors they considered in making program decisions, the criteria by which they evaluated the importance of clientele groups, and the factors considered in assigning program priorities. High-rated individuals placed lack of awareness of alternatives and inadequate evaluation procedures higher on their list of obstacles to programming than did the low-rated individuals.

Eugene N. Williams, "An Analysis of Decision Making Processes Used by County Extension Chairmen in Oklahoma in Selecting Extension Programs." Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin, June, 1966.

A RELATED CONCERN is dealt with by Richard Bellman in a paper in *Science*. Describing recent research in dynamic programming (used where progress is evaluated and corrective action applied during the pro-

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gram) he stresses the need for: (1) flexibility in reaching predetermined goals through doing "the best we can, starting from where we are"; (2) the availability of optimal policies for reaching the goal from any conceivable starting points; (3) adaptive control—acting in the absence of full information, and learning as you go; and (4) criteria for deciding what information to use in making decisions.

These needs are highly similar to the characteristics of good decision makers described above. The author calls for fuller knowledge of human planning: "If we understood the ability of the human mind to make effective decisions when confronted by complexity, uncertainty, and irrationality, then we could use computers a million times more effectively than we do."

Richard Bellman, "Dynamic Programming." *Science*, CLIII (July 1, 1966), 34-37.

LOW-INCOME AUDIENCES

It is often assumed that low-income people are more traditionally oriented than higher-income groups, relying on face-to-face relationships rather than on the less personal mass media. It has also been assumed that the lower educational level of these groups makes them especially hard to reach with printed methods. Conclusions from the evaluation of a program for low-income families in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, indicate that at least some impression can be made through printed means.

The project studied was developed for families taking part in a pilot Food Stamp Program. A series of 12 cards, each containing a message about foods and nutrition, was enclosed in food coupon authorizations mailed to families by the Department of Welfare. Messages were usually in the form of a recipe, nutritional advice, and buying tips. The general educational objective was to increase the knowledge of homemakers and to have them use recommended food and recipes.

A sample of 145 recipients was interviewed in the evaluation. Almost all recognized the cards and recalled getting them. More than half read the cards and almost half filed them. More than half rated them as being of some help, primarily in providing recipes. The various recipes were tried by 9 to 35 per cent of the recipients, but few sought further information from suggested professional sources. Some homemakers talked to family members or relatives about the cards, but few shared them with neighbors.

Age, income, size of family, family status, and reading ability were found to be positively associated with use of the cards. There appeared to be no relationship between use of the cards and such characteristics as neatness of the home and the homemaker or spare-time activities.

Despite the fact that recipes may not be used, recipe hoarding was found to be part of the culture (a trait shared by home economists, professors' wives, and others, in the experience of the Editor).

The authors conclude that the participants accepted the method with high satisfaction, though more intensive methods may be necessary for

significant behavior change. They call attention to the fact that differences within the low-income audience make a great deal of difference in program effectiveness.

Emory J. Brown, Louise W. Hamilton, Marguerite Krackhardt, and Janet E. Miller, *Evaluation of a Foods and Nutrition Educational Program for Low-Income Families in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania*. Extension Study No. 32, The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, Pennsylvania, June, 1965.

CONFIRMATION OF THE IDEA that factors other than low income affect the behavior of low socioeconomic groups can be found in a recent Wisconsin study of participation in voluntary organizations. This comparison of young people from above-average and below-average income families in a low-income county failed to discover significant differences in participation. Availability of opportunity to join organizations and parental attitude appeared to be more important determinants of participation than did income level.

Norman O. Everson, "Participation in Voluntary Organizations by Wisconsin Rural Youth of Differential Socio-Economic Levels." Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin, June, 1966.

EFFECT OF FORMING GROUPS SOCIOMETRICALLY

It has been known for some time that use of sociometric techniques—forming groups according to preferences of members—results in groups that are congenial. But do members of sociometrically formed groups behave differently than do members of groups formed other ways?

In an effort to test this question under controlled conditions, farm management study groups in Otsego County, New York, were set up in two different ways, taught the same material, and compared as to results. Two townships in the county were organized along sociometric lines, and farmers in two others were assigned to groups on the basis of size of operation, age, and educational level. A third county-wide group was also studied.

The sociometric groups were formed by first asking potential members to indicate their choices for fellow members in their groups. "Core units" of three to five persons, each of whom had chosen all the others, were then identified. Core units receiving the most choices were used as nuclei of groups, with individuals being assigned to groups on the basis of their preference for the core unit.

Operators in the sociometrically formed groups attended meetings better than did operators in the "similar characteristics" groups or in the general county-wide group. Voluntary dropouts over a three-year period were 22 per cent for the sociometric groups as compared to 29 per cent in the "similar characteristics" groups.

The authors reason that the difference can be explained largely by the presence in the sociometric groups of pairs of individuals who have chosen each other. It was found that, regardless of the way the groups were chosen, even one "mutual" choice was enough to assure relatively high

attendance. The advantage of sociometric groups may lie in their greater likelihood of containing such pairs.

James W. Longest and William H. Gengenbach, *Otsego County Experimental Program for Testing Methods of Forming Farm Management Study Groups*. Extension Study No. 8, New York State Colleges of Agriculture and Home Economics, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, February, 1965.

SCHOOL VS. COMMUNITY 4-H CLUBS

One of the trends in 4-H Club work in recent years has been the movement away from "school" clubs in the border states and the South where they were once prevalent. These clubs generally met at the public school during school hours and were often led by a teacher. This form of organization has been discouraged on the grounds that membership is perfunctory and often involuntary (i.e., the whole class joins), that meeting time is limited, that parent support is lacking, and that there is little carry-over outside of school hours. (Almost paradoxically, 4-H workers attempting to reach urban and low-income audiences have been considering the addition of programs which would capitalize on the institutional resources of the school and other agencies.)

A recent study in Kentucky indicates that school clubs do have the faults attributed to them by their critics—but they may have a number of advantages as well. Leaders of 150 clubs, about evenly divided as to type, furnished data in the study. They represented ten counties. Extension agents in charge of the county programs supplied further data. As expected, community clubs were more effective than school clubs in getting assistant and junior leaders, and leaders were more likely to participate in training. School club leaders tended to have shorter tenure than did community club leaders. Community clubs had more and longer meetings, and enrolled more older youth. Members were more active in completing and exhibiting projects and in county-wide activities. School clubs enrolled more members and attracted a higher percentage back for second and third years than did community clubs. The school clubs had greater continuity of existence, and their leaders had more education than those of community clubs.

The authors' conclusion that community clubs are more effective than school clubs in all phases of club work would appear valid if one assumes low population, stable homes, available leadership, and value from participation in county-wide events. In situations with high populations, unstable homes, or lack of competent leadership, and where the value of participation is in doubt, it is possible to reach an opposite conclusion. The issue, it appears, is not yet resolved.

Paul R. Claiborne and Robert L. Johnson, *A Comparative Study of School and Community Types of 4-H Clubs in Kentucky*. Department of Agricultural and Extension Education, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland, August, 1966.