

Personnel Plateauing and Motivation

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Plateauing, or leveling off of work performance, is related to the type of administrative climate created and maintained in an organization. Extension administrators must provide an atmosphere that will encourage maximum staff productivity. Providing this atmosphere or climate may be related to a number of factors, including motivation. This paper is focused on ideas related to motivation, in the hope that Extension personnel will more clearly see how their administrative and supervisory practices can affect long-range staff productivity.

PREVENTING personnel plateauing has been labeled the most serious problem facing industry today in the field of personnel training, according to the personnel director for a large U.S. industrial concern.¹ Contemplating this "leveling off" in performance as it may relate to Extension, the writers have concluded that plateauing may also be one of the more serious and far-reaching problems facing Extension and other educational institutions. Plateauing can be a serious problem in terms of its considerable effect upon work accomplishment and the achievement of organizational goals. A substantial occurrence of plateauing among an organization's personnel suggests some symptomatic implications for administration. Plateauing may indicate an inadequate climate of organizational expectation and challenge.

Essentially, it is suggested in this paper that plateauing is related to the type of administrative climate created and maintained at all levels in an organization. Halpin and Croft² refer to the organizational climate of the school as its "personality" saying that "figura-

¹ Elbert Burr, "Industry Looks at Staff Development," speech presented at the National Extension Training Conference, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland, April 14, 1966.

² Andrew W. Halpin and Don B. Croft, *The Organizational Climate of Schools* (Danville, Illinois: Interstate Printers & Publishers, Inc., 1963), p. 1.

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tively, 'personality' is to the individual what 'climate' is to the organization." This definition bears a close relationship to what is referred to here as "administrative climate." It refers to the "on the job" work environment which is created and maintained essentially through the administration of an organization. Getzels and Guba assign to administration the task of integrating "the demands of the institution and the demands of the staff members in a way that is at once organizationally productive and individually fulfilling."³

Providing an organizational climate (atmosphere) that stimulates the most productive efforts of personnel may be related to a number of factors. This paper focuses on ideas related to motivation. The subject is accorded special attention because research is producing some enlightening and interesting ideas and because motivation is most vital in conducting educational programs. Relevant ideas are therefore being explored in this paper as a means of focusing attention on ways and means of motivation. It is hoped that, by so doing, Extension personnel will more clearly see the impact their administrative and supervisory ideas and practices may have on long-range staff productivity.

EMPLOYEE NEEDS AND MOTIVATION

The first requirement in an organization is a clear definition and statement of educational objectives. Objectives should, therefore, be continually kept in mind, emphasized, and evaluated. Motivation for achieving these objectives does not occur in an organizational vacuum or in the absence of purpose. It is generally conceded that human beings have at least four basic psychological needs—security, belongingness, opportunity, and recognition—which have to be met before people experience any appreciable degree of satisfaction and self-actualization in their work.

Providing for such needs is of vital concern to Extension and should invoke careful thought and study on the part of administrators, supervisors, training officers, and others responsible for work accomplishment. Doing so poses some interesting questions: (1) What conditions prompt Extension employees to work in the first place, or to perform their work at all? (2) Why do some Extension workers continue to be productive while others tend to "plateau"? (3) What, if any, peculiarities or characteristics of Extension influence motivation? (4) Under what administrative practices or circumstances are workers motivated for continued productivity?

³J. W. Getzels and E. G. Guba, "Social Behavior and the Administrative Process," *The School Review*, LXV (Winter, 1957), 429-30.

According to available evidence,⁴ Extension workers have an altruistic orientation toward their work. But it must be assumed that they are influenced in their decision to work for Extension by financial as well as psychological considerations. Extension is characterized as a "grass roots" organization. As such, most of its personnel are employed at county or local levels. Percentagewise, therefore, there is less opportunity for employees to move up the "organizational ladder" than is the case for professionals in many systems. Within the county, Extension workers can usually move up only one or two positions. Even when promotions are made from a county position to a state position, or from one position on the state staff to another, it is not always clear whether or not an employee has actually advanced. The picture is especially confusing when position and salary scales either do not exist or are not adhered to.

It may be possible to minimize the influence advancement problems have on plateauing by paying more attention to meeting the psychological and other motivational needs of employees. This is an important factor in work performance even where there is good opportunity for promotion. It is even more important where these opportunities are limited. First, these psychological needs must be recognized and understood. Second, meeting these needs and providing motivational incentives must be recognized as part of the administrative role. Third, there must be good communication. Finally, administrators must earnestly desire to meet these needs. This desire must stem from a genuine interest in people (not from a paternalistic, coddling attitude), from a recognition that each employee is a living dynamo of energy, and from a conviction that each staff member represents a resource to be developed (not only for his own welfare, but as a means to further organizational goals).

The most important point for the administrator is evidence pointing to the likelihood that giving proper attention to these matters can lead to greater sustained productivity by the staff. This can be illustrated by two theories of administration, the "X" and "Y" theories, as described by McGregor.⁵

THEORIES OF ADMINISTRATION

Persons subscribing to the "X" theory, according to McGregor,

⁴ See Emily King, "Relationships of Personal Value Systems to a Measure of Job Satisfaction among Personnel of the Florida Agricultural Extension Service" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin, 1961).

⁵ Douglas McGregor, *The Human Side of Enterprise* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., 1960), pp. 33-57.

assume that the average person inherently dislikes work and will avoid it if he can. They assume further that most people must be coerced, controlled, directed, and threatened with punishment before they will exert adequate effort to achieve organizational goals and objectives; and that the average person prefers to be directed and, having little ambition, wishes to avoid responsibility.

Advocates of the "Y" theory assume that expending physical and mental effort in work is as natural as playing or resting. They believe that bringing about effort toward achieving organizational objectives is accomplished not only through external control and threat of punishment; that efforts directed toward organizational objectives can contribute to satisfying the ego and self-actualizing needs; that under proper conditions the average person learns not only to accept but to seek responsibility; and that the capacity to exercise a relatively high degree of imagination, ingenuity, and creativity in solving organizational problems is not limited to a chosen few. Finally, they believe that in our modern industrial life, the intellectual potentialities of the average person are only partially utilized.

A Conceptual Model

Based on these two theories, Myers⁶ developed a conceptual model to illustrate what he terms the motivation cycle and to show the effects which different administrative styles have on managers. In his model, supporters of theory "X" are known as "reductive" administrators; those subscribing to theory "Y" are referred to as "developmental" administrators; those falling somewhere between are known as "traditionalists."

According to Myers' concept, employees under a reductive administrator tend to be engulfed in interpersonal conflict. Their goals are arbitrary, unchallenging, and uncertain. The general work atmosphere is one of restriction, disapproval, and punishment. Frustration and guilt tend to prevail. Maintenance seeking is a primary concern and hostility and cynicism are evident everywhere. Under a traditional administrative climate, interpersonal relations are somewhat more relaxed but fail to radiate competence. Goals tend to be confusing or inconsistent. The general demeanor of employees ranges from dignity to apathy and despair, but individuals tend to have much more positive attitudes than do those working under "reductive" bosses.

⁶M. Scott Myers, "Conditions of Manager Motivation," *Harvard Business Review*, XLIV (January-February, 1966), 58-71.

In contrast, a developmental administrative climate fosters goals that are clear and challenging; interpersonal relationships radiate competence; systems are clear and helpful, and the work atmosphere is one of motivated achievement; individuals experience self-actualization. In space-age vernacular, "all systems are go."

Myers concludes that: (1) motivation is strongly related to the supervisory style of the boss; (2) developmental supervisors stimulate motivation, and reductive supervisors inhibit it; (3) motivation is highest in top-level management; (4) different styles of supervision are found at all levels of management; (5) all managers prefer developmental over reductive bosses, regardless of what they personally practice; (6) reductive supervisors are not aware of their tendencies to stifle motivation—they view themselves on a par with developmental supervisors; and (7) motivation is strongest when the manager is realizing he is becoming what he has the capacity and desire to become.

Myers found that the level of competence attained by any administrator depends, to a measure, on various combinations of personal characteristics (judgment, ambition, integrity, and dependability). He concludes that possession of these characteristics does not necessarily guarantee that a person will be a successful administrator, however. According to McGregor, additional qualifications are required, including "skills and attitudes which can be acquired or modified extensively through learning."⁷ Competence in planning and initiating action, problem solving, keeping communication channels open, accepting responsibility, and ability at social interaction are particularly important.

Other qualifications and characteristics are clearly implied. If an employee is to be productive, he must be given the opportunity and encouragement to try new methods, original ideas, and different approaches to problems. He should be counseled and guided without domination and, if possible, without indication of lack of confidence. To develop his creative potential and fully utilize his capabilities, he must feel free to make some mistakes without endangering his professional standing. But permissiveness, demonstrated by *laissez-faire* attitudes of administrators, tends to destroy individual creativity rather than to promote it. Some administrative structure and direction is desirable.

Halpin⁸ determined that (1) consideration and (2) initiating

⁷ McGregor, *op. cit.*, pp. 181-82.

⁸ Andrew W. Halpin, "The Leader Behavior and Leadership Ideology of Educational Administrators and Aircraft Commanders," *Harvard Educational Review*, XXV (Winter, 1955), 31.

structure (two ideals of leadership) were not necessarily incompatible. Research in both industry and the military shows that "effective" leaders scored high on *both* these leader behavior dimensions. Assuming the findings apply, Halpin concludes that educational administrators show good leader behavior in their consideration for staff members, but that they do not adequately initiate structure.⁹

A favorable administrative climate calls for an interpersonal relationship that best promotes mutual understanding and respect between administrators and staff. Whether this relationship is formal or informal, it is important that it be maintained on a consistent basis of mutual confidence and respect. Obviously, staff members need to feel that the administrator is accessible and willing to discuss problems, objectives, and (if necessary and helpful) matters of almost any other nature. If these conditions prevail and employees are dealt with in a sincere, consistent, fair, and friendly manner, job satisfaction and positive attitudes are almost sure to result.

Job Satisfiers and Dissatisfiers

Herzberg¹⁰ studied job attitudes of over 200 engineers and accountants in nine companies to determine what factors account for job satisfaction or dissatisfaction, and whether the same factors account for both. He found that:

1. Factors accounting for positive attitudes and job satisfaction were not necessarily the same as those accounting for negative attitudes and job dissatisfaction. Things accounting for dissatisfaction were not always opposites of those accounting for satisfaction.
2. Job satisfaction and motivation resulted primarily from such things as achievement, recognition for worthy work performed, growth, responsibility, advancement, and self-actualization.
3. Job dissatisfaction seemed related largely to feelings about fairness and unfairness, including such aspects as promotion, lack of opportunity for personal and professional growth, lack of recognition for a job well done, lack of achievement, pay, working conditions, and other considerations largely of an extraneous nature.

Of particular interest was the fact that pay was more important

⁹ For a more detailed discussion of these leadership styles, see Clarence J. Cunningham, "Dimensions of Leader Behavior," *Journal of Cooperative Extension*, IV (Winter, 1966), 223-28.

¹⁰ Frederick Herzberg, Bernard Mausner, and Barbara B. Snyderman, *The Motivation to Work* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1959), pp. 59-83.

as a factor causing job dissatisfaction than as a factor accounting for job satisfaction. Findings regarding effects of job attitudes on work performance showed that production was greater when employees held favorable job attitudes than when negative attitudes prevailed.

In a later study, Myers¹¹ found that responsibility, pay, company policy, work itself, and opportunity for growth were the primary factors influencing job satisfaction. Administrative policy, failure to achieve, incompetence of supervisors, and failure to advance were most frequently mentioned as factors accounting for job dissatisfaction. The combined effect of both types of factors showed that achievement, administrative policy, recognition, competency of supervisors, advancement, responsibility, and pay, in about that order, were the primary factors affecting motivation and work accomplishment.

Findings of both Herzberg and Myers are confirmed in the work of Clegg¹² (who reported on sources of motivation of county Extension chairmen) and by Swanson¹³ who researched the factors associated with motivation in professional improvement programs in Extension. Herzberg's findings are essentially confirmed also in a recent study by Johnson¹⁴ involving 415 public school teachers.

The findings of Johnson and Herzberg differ only in certain details. For instance, principal factors accounting for job satisfaction in Herzberg's study were, in order of importance, (1) achievement, (2) recognition, (3) work itself, (4) responsibility, and (5) advancement. In Johnson's study, these factors were (1) achievement, (2) interpersonal relations, (3) recognition, (4) policy and administration, and (5) working conditions.

The principal dissatisfiers as determined by Herzberg were (1) policy and administration, (2) interpersonal relations, (3) supervision, (4) recognition, and (5) salary. In Johnson's study, these were (1) policy and administration, (2) working conditions, (3) interpersonal relations, (4) status, and (5) supervision. Johnson also found that teachers rated interpersonal relations, working conditions, and status much higher as satisfiers than did the engineers and account-

¹¹ M. Scott Myers, "Who Are Your Motivated Workers?" *Harvard Business Review*, XLII (January-February, 1964), 73-78.

¹² Denzil O. Clegg, "Work as a Motivator," *Journal of Cooperative Extension*, I (Fall, 1963), 141-48.

¹³ Harold B. Swanson, "Factors Associated with Motivation toward Professional Development of County Agricultural Extension Agents in Minnesota" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin, 1965).

¹⁴ Eldon D. Johnson, "An Analysis of Factors Related to Teacher Satisfaction-Dissatisfaction" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, School of Education, Auburn University, Auburn, Alabama, 1966), pp. 68-130.

tants in Herzberg's study. In Johnson's study, working conditions and status were much higher as dissatisfiers. These differences may possibly be explained on the basis of regional variation and sex differences. (Herzberg studied only men in the Pittsburgh area; Johnson studied both men and women teachers in Georgia.)

The implications of the various studies already cited have particular utility and meaning in regard to administrative climate and increasing motivation.

1. Since factors affecting teacher satisfaction or dissatisfaction are similar to those affecting accountants and engineers, educational systems should utilize many of the advances of industrial research in areas relating to job satisfaction or dissatisfaction.
2. Professional educators should be concerned with the motivating factors of achievement, recognition, work itself, responsibility, and interpersonal relations.
3. Administrators must provide an organizational climate that will eliminate forces effecting employee dissatisfaction and provide for creativity, happiness, and growth.
4. Administrators must remove barriers to communication concerning the rights and duties assigned to each role or position.
5. Administrators should apply policy fairly and consistently.
6. Administrators should improve working conditions within the educational system, providing for work assignments that are likely to result in successful accomplishment and be most conducive to work achievement.

CONCLUSION

Where Extension administrators fail to meet these challenges, human resources are likely to be ineffectively employed and flagrantly dissipated. Motivation will be low, plateauing is likely to be excessive, and organizational goals seem destined to be only partially realized or ineffectively accomplished. But if the requirements for personnel motivation can be appropriately met, program accomplishment should be greatly accelerated, be more effective in meeting clientele needs, and be uniformly satisfying to administrators and other Extension personnel alike.