

Human Resources

DONALD R. FESSLER

In resource development, it is more important to develop human resources than natural resources, according to the author. He contends that to fully develop these human resources, low-income people must develop a desire to better themselves. But how can we motivate the unmotivated? The author suggests involving the poor in group participation at the neighborhood level. Recognizing the fact that often the poor drop out of a group before they can be helped, he explores the reasons people join groups and the effect of the environment on desires and intentions. Implications are given for working with the poor in neighborhood activities and organizations.

MOST PEOPLE who are concerned about the development of a community, a region, or a nation feel impelled to put the emphasis on development of the area's natural resources. They believe that the development of physical resources such as forests, mineral assets, or farm lands will automatically result in improvement of people's lives. The resources that count most in resource development, however, are the human ones—natural resources are of secondary concern. We need to give more attention to developing human resources in terms of both occupational skills and skills needed by individuals to fulfill goals at the neighborhood, community, or regional level.

Many public and private agencies, including the Extension Service, recognize they have a responsibility to help see that these human resources are developed to the full. The relevant question now is "How?" In this paper, an attempt will be made to identify some basic principles which need to be considered in arriving at an answer to this question. First, it will be contended that people in the poverty class must develop a desire to better themselves. Second, the contribution which group participation can make to this situation will be explored.

A concern for human resource development is especially needed

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in present efforts to assist economically, and otherwise, disadvantaged people. Their plight in relation to marketable skills has been well documented.¹ The relationship between their preparation for earning a living and their educational background has also been well established.²

DESIRE AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Of course, not all school dropouts come from low-income families. However, those who come from poorer homes are numerically the largest group, and the causes are more often than not beyond their control. The average middle-class person finds it hard to understand why poor children do not accept opportunities for education. He fails to recognize that children in the poverty class have environmental limitations which make it difficult for them to cope with standards maintained in school systems set up primarily to educate middle-class children.

Children from middle-class homes, for example, are generally exposed to printed materials long before they go to school. They have already learned to read a few words and are highly motivated to do well in school. When they need help, they can usually get it from somebody at home. By contrast, poor children often have never seen printed materials at home. They have no idea how to read. Consequently, they are typed from the start as stupid or lazy, regardless of their real capabilities. They get no encouragement at home, do their homework under appalling or impossible conditions, and find no one in their families able or willing to give help when they need it. Many suffer from malnutrition, lack comfortable clothing, or have unsuspected physical disabilities such as poor eyesight. Eventually the burden of constant failure to measure up to the rest of the class becomes too great and they drop out. In reality the failure is society's.

Participation

Middle-class families generally guide their children into various activity groups. These groups are goal-oriented; that is, they are set up to achieve certain ends, usually through different types of activities. Parents send their children to Sunday School and encourage

¹ U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Occupational Outlook Handbook* (Washington, D.C., 1965).

² U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, *Rural People in the American Economy*, Agricultural Economic Report #101 (Washington, D.C.: Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, October, 1966)

them to join scout troops, 4-H, FFA, athletic teams, and extracurricular organizations of all kinds. By the time the children are grown, they are accustomed to looking to groups to satisfy interest needs.

This is not true in poor families. Usually the parents do not belong to formal groups. Children grow up accustomed to having interpersonal relations only with their families and their peer groups, that is, with children of their own age and sex with whom they play. Often these peer groups maintain their membership throughout life if the individuals remain in the neighborhood.

These peer groups are action-oriented rather than goal-oriented; whatever activities they indulge in are spontaneous or accidental, and satisfy a momentary need for action. The group serves primarily to meet the psychological needs of the members. In fact, peer group members may have such a strong psychological attachment to the group that they lack a self-image when away from it. They may be boisterous and aggressive when with their peers, but mild and tractable when away from them. As a consequence of this environmental training, members of the subordinate culture are seldom attracted to groups by the kinds of interests mentioned earlier. Such interests simply do not exist for them.

To avoid confusion, it is necessary to point out that we are thinking of extremes when contrasting characteristics of the poor with those of the middle class. Many families fall somewhere between in regard to specific characteristics. Some members of poverty families, for example, can be interested in goal-oriented activities while in other ways they have characteristics peculiar to their class.³

If this analysis is accepted, two things become evident in planning for neighborhood community activities and organizations. First, for many people who need to be involved in activities, the interest factor will be weak or nonexistent. Generally they will have no interest in improving anything—their homes, their farms, their communities, or their individual attitudes, values, or behavior patterns.

Second, these people who need so much to be involved are often the people who will respond most readily to attempts by the group to satisfy their psychological needs—needs which have not previously been satisfied outside their families and peer groups. They may be shy and suspicious at first, but once they see that the group is really interested in them as human beings, often they will react with enthusiasm. Involvement of these people in a community or

³For these and other characteristics of the subordinate culture as contrasted to the dominant culture, see Donald R. Fessler, *The Challenge: Motivating the Poor*, Occasional Circular (Blacksburg, Virginia: VPI, Virginia Cooperative Extension Service, March, 1966).

neighborhood program will depend a great deal on the approach used. If emphasis is put on tasks or goals to be accomplished, or on what some expert or outsider thinks the needs of these people are, their response will be one of indifference. If, however, emphasis is put on the group's wanting their help to meet mutual needs, they are more apt to react favorably.

This applies even when the goals are closely related to the individual's own future, as for example in job training. Many such programs have failed or lacked applicants because the training was carried out with little concern for the trainees' psychological needs.

The approach to members of poor families must be highly personal. Initially, helping them get acquainted with each other and with the total membership of the community must be stressed more than organizational goals. These people must be involved in decision making, not just in voting but in discussing the issues at hand so that they can air their opinions. Even when these opinions are contrary to those of the majority, the fact that they have been asked to give their views will do much to gain their support for group decisions.

All of this takes time. But there are communities that have launched impressive development programs and have soon lost the support of the very people whom the programs were designed to help. Community leaders did not take time to bind these members to the organization by satisfying their psychological needs. These groups were task oriented rather than people oriented.

Present attempts to deal with this problem through community action programs will at least create awareness of why the poor have not made better use of available schooling. But if we are to bring about needed changes, greater recognition must be given to two needs: First, members of the poverty class must acquire a desire to develop their potentials fully—a desire not characteristic of their class. Such a changing of values can best be accomplished through groups. Therefore, as the second point, we must recognize the need to bring the poor into groups organized to create changes in their way of life—changes necessary if they are to live satisfactory lives in a technological society. This can best be accomplished at a neighborhood level.

Extension can well learn from some unhappy experiences of community action groups. In both rural and urban situations, there has been much complaining about the impossibility of getting the poor to stay in organized neighborhood groups long enough to be helped. After an initial organization meeting, the poor often stay away. Careful analysis of these programs has shown that most of the fail-

ures are due to a lack of understanding of certain basic principles of organization and of some genuine differences between poor people and those in the middle class. These differences are not profound but they are important.

REASONS PEOPLE JOIN GROUPS

People generally are attracted to groups on the basis of certain interests. Once they join, their membership in the group is often maintained primarily by the degree to which the group satisfies their psychological needs.

Interests

Four kinds of interests attract people to groups:

1. Groups can help in achieving individual goals (improving spiritual lives, broadening cultural horizons, or simply improving status in the community). This interest applies to churches and to many of our cultural organizations.
2. Activities of the group are attractive to the member. Individuals join groups to play bridge, bowl, study art, or carry on any of a hundred other favorite activities.
3. Group membership is a path to goals outside the group. A young lawyer may join a particular political party because he thinks that only in this way can he gain access to the right courthouse or statehouse crowd. Joining the group is simply a step in achieving success in his profession.
4. Membership in a group may help provide security against a real or imagined danger. The proliferation of extremist groups in our society is largely due to the high degree of insecurity felt by a growing proportion of our population, particularly the less educated. As long as such insecurities are present, these groups will flourish.

Since many groups are competing to satisfy any one of these four kinds of interests, the holding power of any particular group is slight (insofar as it depends on interest alone). Other groups which offer to satisfy similar interests will draw members away from a group, especially if facilities are more attractive. Thus people may transfer membership from one church to another because they prefer the preaching, the new organ, or even the cushioned pews. When a newly organized group offers higher status than do existing groups, the latter will lose members to the new.

Satisfaction of Psychological Needs

Weakening of the interest factor, however, may be offset to a high degree if the member's psychological needs are satisfied within the group. People will endure physical limitations if they feel at home with members of a group. Many groups even far outlive their usefulness because they provide affectional relationships, emotional security, or a sense of significance which members find more satisfying than the interests they originally sought.

While people may be attracted to groups because of interests, the holding power of such groups depends to a high degree on how well they satisfy psychological needs. Three of these psychological needs are worth examining more closely.

First is the need for response. In the family we call it love. It is obvious to most people that family members have to satisfy this need if they are to function properly as a family. In less intimate groups we might use the term "fellowship," but the satisfaction of this need in voluntary adult groups is as important as in the family. When groups such as churches and civic clubs become so large and formal that members no longer feel part of the fellowship, they drift away and form groups where they can better satisfy this need.

Second is the need for security—the feeling that one belongs to a group as an equal with others. One refers to the group as "we" instead of "they."

Finally, there is the need for recognition—to be recognized as an individual personality with all that is implied in terms of individual differences (such as skills, likes and dislikes, and desires). Every person needs to feel that he is different from other group members in certain respects and that his role in the group depends upon recognition of his differences. Many family problems arise from failure to recognize this need. Younger members are expected to be like older brothers or sisters rather than being recognized as having talents and limitations of their own. Many G.I.'s went AWOL during World War II because they could not stand to be just a "soldier."

These psychological needs are best satisfied in groups in which all members are involved in activities (such as recreation) where they rub shoulders and forget status differences, where they all participate in making major decisions, and where care is taken to see that each individual's special skills are used to accomplish group goals.

In many community organizations so much emphasis is put on the business of the group that no time is devoted to meeting psychological needs. Consequently, before the organization really gets going, too many members have dropped out; these are often the people most in need of being involved in change.

CONCLUSION

The solution of our problem of wasted human resources requires training at two distinct levels involving different segments of the population. First, there is the need for basic education and skill training for the disadvantaged themselves. This is the responsibility of our public school system in conjunction with the Economic Opportunity program, the employment services, and related agencies. But to see that the unskilled and poorly educated do take advantage of such training, those civic leaders, or most of them, who have assumed responsibility for getting resource development programs under way are also going to need a specialized kind of training. This is training in how to work more effectively with their fellow citizens (including the disadvantaged), how to motivate the unmotivated, and how to achieve community as well as individual goals through the democratic group process. In this area of training lies one of Extension's greatest challenges and one of its greatest opportunities.

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(Signed) G. L. CARTER, JR., *Editor*
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