

County Staff or Area Staff?

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Is the concept of county-based Extension outdated? Should Extension move to area positions with increasing specialization? McIntyre explored these questions in research he conducted in Indiana. He compared multi-county with individual county systems using several variables including clientele's reactions to the two systems. He learned that clientele who previously worked with Extension are less pleased with the area approach. Clientele who hadn't worked closely with Extension saw no differences in the two approaches.

Rural America is in a state of social and economic ferment. New methods and technology in agriculture and new patterns of community organization are making rural life more demanding and difficult. Many rural areas are affected by growing urbanization. And Cooperative Extension agents are asked to help with urban problems like zoning, schools, taxes, water systems, roads, and water pollution. These problems often call for help from specialists.

These requests from clientele cause Extension to ask questions about itself.

1. How can Extension be more effective in serving today's farmer?
2. How much attention and effort

should be expended in helping low-income farmers?

3. How much attention should Extension give to problems of the big farmers?
4. What should Extension be doing to adapt to the rapid changes in the agricultural community?
5. With increasing attention to city problems, how far should Extension expand its program into urban areas?

Indiana Situation

Three critical issues confronted Cooperative Extension in Indiana: (1) an increase in emphasis on urban and community affairs, (2) the

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integration of the general extension with agricultural and home economics extension staffs at Purdue University, and (3) the assignment of Extension agents (generalists) on a county basis or the reassignment of Extension agents (specialists) on a multicounty basis.

These three critical issues formed the basis for this study. The traditional system in Indiana has been the individual county system. Personnel were assigned to work within the geographical confines of a given county. A multicounty system utilizing area agents was relatively new to Indiana Extension.

Two multicounty systems of six counties each were established in southeastern Indiana in January, 1967. Each six-county area operated as a separate administrative unit. Area agents, depending on the needs of the area, were assigned specialized roles and duties. One agent served as the administrator in each area and coordinated all activities within the area.

Purpose of Study

The primary purpose of this study was to determine the relative effectiveness of Extension work in an individual county system (control) compared to a multicounty system (experimental).

The dependent variable for this investigation was program effectiveness and the independent variable was the system of personnel assignment (multicounty or individual county system).

It was hypothesized that agent job performance would vary between the two different systems of personnel assignment. If program effectiveness and agent job performance differed between the two different systems (experimental and control), differences in agent job performance would be examined in an attempt to interpret or explain variations in program effectiveness. In other words, agent job performance was treated as a "test" or speculative variable to be used if differences existed between multicounty systems and individual county systems in program effectiveness.

Program effectiveness, the dependent variable in the study, was measured by: (1) awareness, (2) participation, (3) adoption, and (4) satisfaction.

The rationale for this method of measurement was that clientele must, in this order: (1) become aware, (2) participate, (3) adopt change, and (4) be satisfied (make permanent changes in attitudes and behavior).

These criteria were applied to two samples of clientele to quantify the dependent variable—program effectiveness. The first clientele group included: (1) a two per cent random sample of the rural farm population stratified by townships in each of two experimental areas (six counties each) and (2) a two per cent random sample of rural farm population stratified by townships in the six control counties (individual county system).

The second group consisted of a 2 per cent randomly selected sample of known cooperators, stratified by townships in each of the previously mentioned 18 counties. They were selected by certain criteria from a list of cooperators provided by the Extension agents. These two groups of clientele—a random sample of the rural population and a selected sample of known cooperators—provided responses yielding two independent sets of data for determining program effectiveness.

Fourteen county agents working in 6 southern Indiana counties and 28 area agents working in 2 southeastern Indiana areas, 6 counties each, participated in the job performance study. This was a 100 per cent sample of the Extension agents in the study areas. Agent job performance was measured by the percentage of job time in: (1) business activities, (2) social behavior, (3) external contacts, (4) selected locations, (5) physical behaviors, (6) administrative activities, (7) mental activities, and (8) providing service for clientele. Also considered were the score on a staff coordination index and the methods of clientele contact used.

Findings

No significant differences in program effectiveness were found between the random sample of clientele in the individual county and the multicounty system.

However, program effectiveness between the selected sample

(known cooperators) in the individual county system and the selected sample (known cooperators) in the multicounty system was found to be significantly different in relation to: participation, adoption, and satisfaction. No significant differences were found between the selected sample in the individual county system and the selected sample in the multicounty system in relation to their "awareness" of Extension.

No significant differences in job performance of agents between the multicounty system (experimental) and the individual county system (control) were observed in the following four dimensions:

1. Percentage of job time in external contacts.
2. Percentage of job time providing service for the clientele.
3. Score on a staff coordination index.
4. Methods of clientele contact used.

Significant differences in job performance of agents between the multicounty system and the individual county system were observed in these four percentages of job time: (1) selected locations, (2) physical behavior, (3) administrative activities, and (4) mental activities.

No significant differences in job performance of agents between the multicounty system and the individual county system were observed in the following two dimensions:

1. Percentage of job time in business activities.

2. Percentage of job time in social activities.

However, significant differences were observed in the job performance of the agents in Area II (experimental) and the individual county system (control) in the two above dimensions.

Limitations of Study

Before examining the conclusions, implications, and recommendations, keep in mind certain limitations of this study. The samples were obtained from only 4 population segments: (1) a random sample of the rural farm population in southern Indiana, (2) a selected sample of known cooperators of Extension, (3) a population of 28 area agents in 2 multicounty systems in southern Indiana, and (4) 14 Extension agents from 6 individual counties in southern Indiana. Likewise, no provisions were taken to measure the accuracy of the responses by the agents or the clientele. Also, at the time of this study, the "area approach" had been in operation about a year and responses and findings may or may not have been conditioned by the changes in administration and assistance by Extension. Finally, a limited number of variables were considered in this study.

Conclusions

Known cooperators are more satisfied, participate at a higher level, and adopt more practices un-

der the individual county system than they do under the area agent system.

However, it also appears that differences in personnel assignment have little or no impact on a random sample of rural farm clientele. In terms of awareness, as it relates to Extension, little or no difference exists between the two systems—the random sample of rural farm residents and the selected sample of known cooperators.

Based on the responses of the agents in the job performance study, it's concluded that agents in the individual county system (control) spend significantly more time in organizing and planning, and significantly less time in implementing the program compared to the agents in the multicounty system (experimental). It appears that this additional time devoted to organizing and planning results in more effective Extension programs.

Implications

The following theoretical and practical questions are pertinent in discussing the implications of the study:

1. Why did the random sample clientele score nearly as high on measures of effectiveness as the known cooperators?
2. Why did the known cooperators differ significantly in favor of the traditional approach?
3. How did the agents differ significantly in favor of the traditional approach?

4. How do differences in agent job performance account for or explain the differences among the clientele expression of program effectiveness in favor of the traditional approach?
5. Why didn't the multicounty approach result in as much effectiveness as the traditional approach?
6. What are the implications for the future in terms of
 - a. programing?
 - b. agent training?
 - c. Extension methods?
7. How can certain advantages of the old method be preserved?

Let's discuss these seven questions.

As the scores for awareness, participation, adoption, and satisfaction were analyzed, it became apparent that Extension was effectively providing the random sample clientele with information, advice, and service.

An item-by-item analysis between the known cooperators within the multicounty system and the known cooperators within the individual county system indicated that respondents within the individual county system were participating more than were the respondents in the multicounty system in these categories:

1. The respondents in the individual county system reported more farm and home visits by Extension agents.
2. They reported more telephone conversations with Extension

agents.

3. They got and read more Extension bulletins and leaflets.
4. They listened to more radio broadcasts and watched more television programs conducted by Extension agents.
5. They received more *direct* recommendations from an Extension agent.

These differences in participation between the known cooperators within the individual county system and the known cooperators within the multicounty system were statistically significant.

Likewise, an item-by-item analysis of the known cooperators within the multicounty system and the individual county system indicated that the respondents in the individual county system were more satisfied with the following items:

1. The work of Extension.
2. The recommendations made by the Extension agents.
3. The Extension agent's response for help or advice.
4. The educational programs offered by Extension.

In summarizing these four items, it appears that the known cooperators in the individual county system were more satisfied with the job performance of the agents than were those within the multicounty system.

An item-by-item analysis of the known cooperators in the experimental and the control and the random sample respondents in the experimental and control counties

didn't give any clues why the known cooperators differed significantly and the random sample didn't differ significantly between the experimental and the control group. Therefore, an answer to this question must be based on the following theoretical considerations:

1. Many of the random sample respondents, as indicated by the responses, didn't use Extension services.
2. Many of the random sample respondents hadn't worked with either the county agent or area agent previously and the change in staffing the multi-county system wasn't important to them.
3. The known cooperators, on the other hand, had used Extension's services and were accustomed to working with the same individual on all of their problems and had confidence in his recommendations and advice. With the change in staffing the multi-county system, the cooperators believed that they weren't receiving the same personal attention from the several area agents with whom they weren't well acquainted. Therefore, the participation and satisfaction with Extension was slightly decreased.

Similarities and Differences

One important observation: No difference was observed in the percentage of time area agents spent in

driving compared to county agents. This finding didn't agree with the observations in other studies. In other studies, travel time increased as the size of the area was enlarged. In this study, the area agents reported 8.45 per cent of their time in driving compared to 8.3 per cent by county agents.

Another similarity was observed in face-to-face communication where area agents reported 59.4 per cent of their communicating this way. This figure compares to 59.6 per cent reported by county agents. Likewise, no difference was observed in the amount of time spent in farm and home visits. The area agents reported 4.05 per cent of their time of farm and home visits compared to 3.8 per cent reported by the county agents. In other studies, the amount of time spent in farm and home visits increased as the amount of time spent in the implementation of the program increased. The findings in this study didn't agree with the observations of other studies in this regard.

Differences in three major items in this study appeared important as they were further analyzed. This study shows that area agents were spending 5.6 per cent of their time in other county Extension offices compared to county agents who were assigned to work within a specific county, and who reported one per cent of their time used this way.

Likewise, county agents reported 36 per cent of their time in planning and organizing compared

to 16.6 per cent reported by area agents—a 20 per cent difference between the agents in the two systems.

The third major item relates to program implementation. Area agents reported 46.2 per cent of their time implementing programs compared to 33 per cent reported by county agents.

Many other similarities and differences were observed between the agents within the two systems, and these differences and similarities appear important in considering agent job performance and the differences among the clientele's expression of program effectiveness in favor of the traditional approach.

Admitting that the movement toward the multicounty system has resulted in changes and adjustment problems with staff as well as cooperators, the above factors indicate additional adjustments and refinements must be made. The responses made by the clientele also indicate adjustments are needed.

Problem Areas

Clientele suggest several problems exist with the multicounty system.

The majority of the respondents within the multicounty system approved the area approach. However, many suggested that a local representative, assigned to each county, be responsible for the local Extension program and provide answers to general questions that don't require specialist attention. In addition, this agent could provide the

personal contact not only needed by Extension, but also required by the cooperators. This local contact could call in an area specialist and improve the efficiency of the area agent by using specialists for specialized rather than general problems.

Many of the respondents also indicated that the cooperators needed to change some attitudes. For example, one respondent wrote, "A small phone bill is worthwhile." Another said, "It isn't against the law to cross a county line to attend an Extension meeting, but many of our farmers act that way."

These comments indicate how some of the advantages of the old method might be maintained and preserved within the multicounty system.

Recommendations

Based on this study, recommendations are presented in three parts: (1) administration, (2) programming, and (3) research.

Administration

An effort should be made to maintain the local contact and support that Extension has developed from the individual counties. Two areas of administrative decisions should be reconsidered.

First, the decision to present area Extension meetings rather than county meetings should be a gradual transition. Some Extension meetings should be conducted on a single-

county basis, other meetings on a two- or three-county basis, and one or two on an expanded area basis. As these areas become established in the next five years, the local meetings would be replaced in two steps. The two- or three-county basis would be stressed and when accepted by the clientele, the emphasis should then be placed on area meetings.

Secondly, an agricultural agent and possibly a home demonstration agent should be located in each individual county. These Extension agents assigned to the individual counties would continue to provide clientele with general information on a county basis and serve as expeditors for the area agents assigned specialized duties. In addition, the area agents assigned specialist roles should be urged to obtain subject-matter training through workshops and additional courses required of the specialist staff on the state level. Area agents will provide their co-workers with general knowledge of the latest research findings and will also give their clientele this information in layman's language. Thus, they must be highly competent in analyzing the research findings in their respective subject-matter fields and communicating this to agents and clientele.

This study didn't consider Extension's interaction with agri-business. The area agents may have been working with agri-business firms which resulted in less time spent with individual cooperators as reported in this study. A study of

this area, as well as other community duties and responsibilities, could explain differences in job performance by the area agents compared to the county agents.

Programing

Since programs appear more effective from the traditional approach, steps should be taken to strengthen the multicounty approach. Two items should be considered by the agents in the multicounty system.

First, since county agents operating under the "more effective" traditional approach were spending more time in program-planning activities than were area agents (33% compared to 16.6%) area agents should devote up to twice as much time in planning activities as they do now. The literature reveals that program-planning activities in Extension: (a) involve the clientele in the planning process, (b) bring about deep commitment to the program on the part of the participants, and (c) humanize or personalize the program. It's these qualities that were lacking under the more specialized area agent approach.

Secondly, since the respondents within the individual county system reported more satisfaction in the following items than did the respondents within the multicounty system, they should be given increased attention in program planning and implementation.

- a. More satisfied with the *work* of Extension.

- b. More satisfied with the *recommendations* made by the Extension agents.
 - c. More satisfied with the Extension agent's response for *help or advice*.
 - d. More satisfied with the *educational programs* offered by Extension.
- should be done to determine whether the new ideas and practices *first* read about in farm magazines are based on research released by Land-Grant Institutions, industry, or other organizations. Most adoption studies indicate that farm magazines are an important factor in the "awareness stage" of the adoption sequence. A review of the literature doesn't reveal the source of these articles or the validity of the information contained in them. Studying this area would be important.

Research

As a result of the findings of this study, several areas should be examined.

First, this study, as did several other studies, indicates that the majority of both the random sample respondents and selected sample of known cooperators became aware of new practices *first* by reading about them in farm magazines. A study

Secondly, this study didn't consider the impact of Extension on agri-business. Maybe the interaction with agri-business is more effective in the multicounty system than in the individual county system. Future investigations should consider this in looking at agent job performance.