

Mr. Chairman, Your Behavior Affects Morale

Paul O. Johnson, Auburn University, and
J. C. Bledsoe, University of Georgia

All Extension professionals know that their leader and his or her behavior affects the way we feel about our job. In this article, the authors studied the morale of Extension agents and how the behavior of the office administrator affects agent morale. In conducting the study, the concepts of morale and leader behavior were tested for their relationship. The results and the authors' subsequent conclusions should make for interesting discussions among members of your Extension office.

Mr. Chairman, does your leader behavior really make a difference? Do Extension agents working on your staff display high morale? Do agents in your county understand the role of the county agent chairman as it affects office interrelationships, county programs, and individual members of the staff? Questions like these face Extension professionals at the county level, and yes, even at the state level.

Extension program emphases have progressed from demonstrations on crop and livestock production to highly complex programs in public affairs, marketing, community resource development, foods and nutrition, ecology, etc. Employment patterns have also expanded to accommodate programs. Staff members have been as-

signed new responsibilities. With these changes, most Extension staffs have one person designated chairman of the county staff. As chairman, this person's responsible for implementing successful Extension programs and maintaining desirable staff interpersonal relationships.

The morale of Extension agents, involved in day-to-day activities, influences the effectiveness of Extension programs. When there's agreement among the staff on policies and procedures of the organization and when personal goals are fulfilled, the total Extension program is likely to be affected favorably.

Surely as Extension programs become more diverse and expectations of the public more demanding, Exten-

on must have staff members qualified to create a favorable climate for education to take place.

In an effort to better understand the relationship of the morale of Extension agents and their perceptions of the leader behavior of their immediate supervisor, the county agent chairman, 101 Georgia county Extension agents from 68 counties (including 68 chairmen) were studied.

The study tested these hypotheses:

1. Extension agent's morale is positively and significantly related to his perception of the chairman on: (a) consideration (personal) and (b) initiating structure (organization).
2. The consideration score is a better indicator of agent's morale than the initiating structure score.
3. Agents rate their chairman higher on the consideration variable than on the initiating structure variable.
4. Georgia Extension agents, when classified by sex, education, length of service, race, and first-order interactions differ significantly in the following perceptions:
 - a. Chairman's initiating structure.
 - b. Chairman's consideration.
 - c. Agent's morale.
5. The morale of agents perceiving their chairman as being above the mean on the total leader behavior score is significantly higher than the morale of agents perceiving their chairman as being

below the mean on the total leader behavior score.

These five substantive hypotheses were tested by appropriate operational (null) hypotheses using correlation, multiple regression, correlated t-tests, and analysis of variance.

Concept of Morale

Morale is an imprecise, but highly important, concept. It's the emotional and mental reaction of a person to his job. The level of morale is determined by the extent to which an individual's needs are satisfied, and the extent to which the individual perceives that satisfaction as stemming from the total job situation.

High morale is evidenced by interest in and enthusiasm for the job. Important in morale is what the person believes and feels, rather than the conditions that others may think exist.

When discussing morale in the framework of organizational theory, two components are involved: (1) perceived productivity and progress toward achieving the organization's tasks (task achievement) and (2) perceived job satisfaction of individual needs through the interaction of the employee in his role within the work group and the total organization (needs satisfaction).

In general, two approaches have been used to measure morale and job satisfaction. In one approach, the individual estimates his own morale, a technique used by Hoppock¹ in his study of job satisfaction of teachers.

The other approach asks the individual to make qualitative judgments and express his feelings about the people and things in his environment that may be related to his morale. This approach was used in the study with Georgia Extension agents.

Measuring Leader Behavior

Leadership—a factor directly affecting morale—is difficult to measure, but the behavior of a leader can be measured. Halpin states that in shifting the emphasis from leadership to the behavior of leaders, research can differentiate between describing how leaders behaved and evaluating the effectiveness of their behavior.²

To shift the emphasis to the behavior of the leaders, Stogdill and Coons developed the Leader Behavior Description Questionnaire (LBDQ).³ Two dimensions of behavior were identified as accounting for most of the variance: consideration (personal) and initiating structure (organizational).

Likert refers to employee-centered (consideration) and production-centered (initiating structure) supervisors. He found that high consideration foremen could increase structure behavior with little increase in grievance and no increase in turnover.⁴

Procedure

Morale and leader behavior dimensions—consideration and initiating structure—were quantified by existing instruments, the revised Purdue Teacher Opinionnaire (PTO) and the LBDQ. The PTO was revised to use with Extension personnel. The short form of

the LBDQ, validated by Halpin,⁵ was used in this study.

Findings

The data determined that the consideration score of the chairman, rated by the agents, gave almost good a prediction of the agent's morale as the combination of both the consideration and initiating structure scores.

Table 1 presents correlation means, and standard deviations for the predictor and criterion variables, as well as the regression equation for predicting morale of county agents from the agent's perception of the leader behavior of his chairman.

Negative correlations shown in the table are really conceptually positive, since *higher* scores on morale are more favorable, while *lower* scores on consideration and initiating structure are desirable. Thus, an Extension agent's morale is positively and significantly related to his perception of the county agent chairman on consideration and initiating structure, with consideration being a better predictor of agent's morale than the initiating structure score.

A correlated t-test of the difference between the means for consideration and initiating structure yielded a value of 12.0 ($P < .001$). Hypothesis was confirmed, thus inferring that Extension agents are less critical of their superiors in the consideration variable.

Agents perceive their leader more favorably in the interpersonal relationship than the more objective job-oriented element. Whether the disparity reflects a real difference in the leader behavior of the chairman or in

Table 1. Correlations, means, and standard deviations for LBDQ and morale variations.

(N = 197)					
Variable	X ₂	X ₃	Y	Mean	s
Consideration X ₁	.59	.91	-.65	28.34	11.13
Initiating structure X ₂		.87	-.45	36.38	9.37
Total LBDQ X ₃			-.62	64.72	18.31
Morale Y				289.20	21.71
Regression equation for predicting morale: $\hat{Y} = 332.9 - 1.13X_1 - .34X_2$					

result of the agent's reluctance to find fault with his chairman wasn't determined from the data. It's also interesting that the variance of the two scores indicated that the agents varied more in their rating of consideration behavior than in initiating structure behavior.

Tables 2 and 3 present data on the LBDQ and morale variables for various subsets of Extension agents classified on biographical information. Based on results in Tables 2 and 3, the consideration and morale variables produced some significant differences among the various groups of Extension agents. The initiating structure subset means and the LBDQ total subset means didn't vary significantly from the respective means of the total group of agents.

Data in Tables 2 and 3 show that although neither sex classification alone nor education alone yielded significant differences in consideration behavior ratings, male agents with a bachelor's degree only and female agents with a master's degree rated their chairman more favorably than males with a master's degree and fe-

males with a bachelor's degree only.

The combination of race and length of service produced significant differences in the consideration variable. Differences between means for white agents were very small. Black agents varied greatly with experience. Black agents with 15+ years rated their chairman most favorably and those with 5 years' service or less gave a much less favorable rating.

On the morale variable, white agents had significantly higher morale than black agents. Agents with 15+ years of service had higher morale than agents with 6 to 15 years, who in turn had higher (better) morale than agents with 5 years' service or less. All group differences were significant.

Male agents with a bachelor's degree only and female agents with a master's degree had higher morale than men who held a master's degree and women with a bachelor's degree only.

Length-of-service groups revealed that those who held a master's degree in the middle-service group had the best morale with differences somewhat greater for a master's degree group com-

Table 2. Summary of F-ratios for analysis of variance of LBDQ and morale.*

Source of variation	df	LBDQ variables			Morale (Y)
		Consideration (X ₁)	Initiating structure (X ₂)	Total LBDQ (X ₃)	
Main effects*					
Sex	1	1.45	0.43	1.00	0.57
Race	1	0.78	0.17	0.47	6.41**
Length of service	2	1.32	1.43	1.74	6.05**
Education	1	0.57	0.20	0.31	0.40
Interaction					
Sex X race	1	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.17
Sex X service	2	1.10	0.72	1.15	2.97
Sex X education	1	4.12**	0.16	1.03	5.62**
Race X service	2	3.61**	0.19	1.83	3.47**
Race X education	1	0.21	0.77	0.03	0.34
Service X education	2	0.89	1.02	1.18	4.75**
Error df and mean square	1-2	120.8	87.1	331.1	426.8

*The sums of squares for each main and/or interaction effect may be obtained by multiplying the F-ratio times the degree(s) of freedom times the error mean square.
 ** Significant at .05 level.

pared to those reporting a bachelor's degree as the highest degree held.

A master's degree apparently contributes more to the morale of the middle-experience group than to the most experienced and least experienced. So while education alone didn't produce significant differences, when combined with length of service, it had an effect on morale.

Summary and Discussion

Extension agents' morale and leader behavior of the county agent

chairman are significantly and highly related. Although a correlation of this magnitude suggests a cause-effect relationship, it's likely that more than two variables—morale and leader behavior—are interacting in the relationship, and these variables are effects of other factors.

The chairman is responsible for initiating action programs to achieve Extension goals. Certainly goal achievement is related to his ability to work with the staff and lay leadership. The chairman favorably perceived by Ex-

Table 3. Adjusted means for LBDQ and morale variables with significant F-ratios.

Source of variation	Consideration variable (X ₁)	Morale (Y)			
Main effects					
Race		White	293.2		
		Black	270.6		
Length of Service		0-5 years	261.6		
		6-15 years	287.9		
		15+ years	296.1		
Interaction effects					
Sex by education	bachelor's	<i>Male</i> 25.5	<i>Female</i> 30.1	<i>Male</i> 293.2	<i>Female</i> 288.2
	master's	28.4	24.8	283.6	297.5
Race by service	0-5 years	<i>White</i> 28.0	<i>Black</i> 45.5	<i>White</i> 286.3	<i>Black</i> 237.0
	6-15 years	30.5	28.1	293.2	282.5
	15+ years	29.7	24.5	300.0	286.1
Service by education	0 - 5 years			<i>Bachelor's</i> 287.1	<i>Master's</i> 281.1
	0 - 15 years			285.9	305.7
	15+ years			297.7	288.9

tension agents in personal interactions was also perceived as being effective in planning and directing Extension programs and procedures.

Although evaluations were favorable on both scales, Extension agents were more critical of their chairman with respect to the initiating structure (organization) functions than for the consideration (personal) matter. Perhaps agents felt more freedom to criticize the impersonal elements of the work, but were reluctant to criticize the chairman, a colleague and friend.

Perhaps chairmen pay more attention to consideration behavior or interpersonal relations than to task-oriented or initiating structure behavior. The chairman, however, must be careful to avoid becoming so concerned with personal needs of staff members that his influence as Extension chairman is adversely affected.

This finding strongly suggests a need for training the chairman in executive or management development. In many instances, the chairman may have considerable training in the bio-

logical and physical sciences, but lacks management training. As chairman, he must assume administrative responsibility and be willing to make management decisions to maintain a dynamic Extension program.

Furthermore, Extension agents should understand the desirable organizational relationships and procedures that should exist between the chairman and the agents that work with him. A better understanding of these relationships will likely affect program planning, implementation, and office interrelationships, thereby improving the quality of Extension educational programs.

In the LBDQ findings, the consideration score alone provided almost as good a prediction of the morale score as both the consideration and the initiating structure scores. This finding means the agent chairman must be concerned with fellow workers' personal needs because their job satisfaction (morale) influences productivity and ultimately the total Extension program.

A parallel may also be drawn with Extension clientele. The effective Extension agent must be able to create a favorable climate for education to occur. He must establish rapport with clientele. As techniques for improving interoffice communications are practiced, communication skills will likely improve between agent and clientele.

Extension administrators and supervisors may wish to consider training in improved personal communications. In fact, because of the influence that the chairman's behavior has on agent morale, in-service training for

both the chairman and agents should be considered.

Length of service is one of the most critical factors in Extension agents' morale scores. Extension agents with the least amount of service (0 to 5 years) had the lowest morale scores, followed by the group with 6 to 15 years' service. Highest morale was indicated for those with more than 15 years' service.

Since agents with fewer years service had lower morale, and generally a less favorable perception of their chairman's leader behavior, measures to encourage recently hired employees to become career agents should be projected.

It may be that agents with less experience may feel less secure in their role and more critical of existing practices because of recent exposure to formal classroom experiences or job experiences unlike their present role as Extension agent. With increasing experience, there may be a convergence between the role-as-expected and the actual tasks performed in the job.

As agents acquire favorable experiences and as professional expectations are fulfilled, the probability of their staying with Extension is increased. This supports the need for thorough orientation training for newly employed Extension employees. Surely a major concern of the orientation training should include the role of the chairman and the proper relationships between Extension agents and the chairman.

The effect of length of service and race on Extension agents' morale is highly significant. Among all length-

of-service categories, morale scores of white agents were significantly higher than those of black agents. Likewise, a similar pattern was found for the agent's perception of his chairman's consideration variable. White Extension agents with the shortest length of service reported the highest consideration score for their chairman.

Findings from this breakdown suggest a need for training in a better understanding of communications between black and white agents. From the study, I couldn't determine why black agents scored their chairman lower on consideration behavior, nor why white agents scored their chairman higher. Perhaps a follow-up study in this area might answer these important questions.

A chairman should work to develop a system of communication within the county staff to achieve optimal interpersonal relations. He should constantly be aware of procedures that elicit satisfaction and dissatisfaction among the staff and adopt appropriate modifications. He should, through a continuing training program, develop a concept of his position . . . including the agents' expectations of him . . . and constantly improve skills in human relations and leader behavior.

Furthermore, Extension agents should have an understanding of the role of the chairman as it affects office interrelationships, county programs, and individual members of the staff.

As staff relations are better understood, processes to review employee expectations and performance may be improved, and conflicts may be analyzed by appropriate personnel.

Footnotes

1. R. Hoppock, "A Twenty-Seven Year Follow-Up on Job Satisfaction of Employed Adults," *Personnel and Guidance Journal*, XXXVIII (1960), 489-92.
2. A. W. Halpin, *The Leadership Behavior of School Superintendents* (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University, College of Education, 1956).
3. R. M. Stogdill and A. E. Coons, eds., *Leader Behavior: Its Description and Measurement* (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University, Bureau of Business Research, 1957).
4. R. Likert, *New Patterns of Management* (New York, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961).
5. A. W. Halpin, *Theory and Research in Administration* (New York, New York: Macmillan, 1966).