

the extension job: who stays, who goes

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What causes one Extension home economist to be satisfied and committed to a job while another decides to resign? Are there certain personal attitudes that help an Extension home economist adjust to her county and position? What factors are related to job effectiveness? The following article provides some information about these and other questions relating to effectiveness, commitment, tenure, and job satisfaction.

Most educational organizations, including the state Extension Services, have problems in recruiting, securing, and keeping professionals. Inducting and training new Extension professionals involves a lot of time, effort, and money. It would certainly help administrators if they had some objective methods of keeping professional turnover at a minimum.

In the 1960s, several studies were made that suggested certain psychological and vocational inventories could help administrators select personnel.¹ True, these test results are only indicators, but they do have some validity in predicting which agents are more likely to work longer in Extension and which will quit after a short time.

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1965 Study

In 1965, I conducted a study of the professional commitment and job satisfaction of Kansas Extension home economists.² Commitment was defined as "the dedication or devotion of an agent to her profession." I assumed that the more (high) committed agents were the ones who were serious about remaining with Extension and wanted to make

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their efforts count toward the goals of Extension. I assumed *the least (low) committed agents were those whose concerns and attitudes weren't as highly related to the goals or objectives of the Kansas Extension Service.*

Form E of the Measure of Professional Commitment (MOPC) was used.³ It consisted of 100 attitude questions that were divided into 7 categories. These categories were self-understanding, social relations, autonomy, creativity, ambition, rationality, and non-fanaticism. The self-understanding category included statements such as "This person seeks to understand herself better."

The social relations scale explored how an agent related to other people in groups and on an individual basis. Closely related to this area was the autonomy scale, which asked agents to respond to statements such as "This person values independent action" and "This person can take a point of view different from her own in discussion."

When an agent responded to items such as "This person produces work that has unique qualities," she was indicating her perception of her creativity. Responses to statements such as "This person works hard to make a thing successful" indicated her response on the ambition scale.

Included in the rationality scale statements were "This person feels free to examine and question ideas" and "This person is willing to accept the consequences of her own actions."

The seventh scale, non-fanaticism, included statements such as "This person is often intensely discontented" and "All this person seems to talk about is her work."

1969 & 1973 Studies

The data from the 1965 study were retained and additional key punches were made on the data deck for those agents still working 4 years later in 1969 and again for those still working in 1973—8 years after the data were collected. The various MOPC scales and reasons for resigning were analyzed for the three commitment groups—high, some, and low.

Professional Commitment

Table 1 shows the scores for the various MOPC scales for the 99 Kansas Extension home economists in the original 1965 study. The data were analyzed by commitment groups. The "high" commitment group consisted of the top 25 agents whose total scores on MOPC ranged from 169-190. The "some" commitment group included the middle 50 agents whose scores ranged from 149-168. The "low" commitment group included the bottom 24 agents whose scores were from 104-148.

The agents in the "high" commitment group had group scores above the mean and the "low" commitment group of agents had group scores below the mean on all seven of the MOPC scales. This suggests that the MOPC instrument was

indeed able to distinguish various levels of commitment for Kansas Extension home economists. The 50 agents in the “some” commitment group were above the mean on the ambition, self-understanding, creativity, and rationality scales, but were below the mean as a group on the autonomy, social relations, and non-fanaticism scales.

I compared the seven MOPC scales by tenure. The 37 agents who were still working in 1969, but had resigned by 1973, had scores above the mean on the social relations scale, while the 25 agents still working 8 years after the data were originally collected had the highest mean score on this scale. This suggests that agents who were more comfortable and secure in social relationships in their counties stayed longer.

The 37 agents who had resigned between 1965 and 1969 were above the mean on the creativity scale. Perhaps the Kansas Extension Service didn’t allow some of these agents to be as creative as they’d described themselves, so they resigned.

I found that 13 of the 25 high commitment agents (52%) were still working in 1973 compared to only 7 of the 24 low committed agents (29%). As suggested in 1965, a higher percentage of the high commitment agents have remained with the Kansas Extension Service 4 years and 8 years after the data were collected.

Table 1. Scales of Measure of Professional Commitment for Kansas Extension home economists, 1965.

Scale	Number of items	Highest score possible	Range of agent’s scores	Kansas agent mean score
Ambition	24	48	22-47	40.9
Self-understanding	17	34	19-34	29.2
Autonomy	13	26	9-24	16.8
Creativity	10	20	7-19	14.4
Social relations	19	38	16-38	31.9
Rationality	8	16	8-16	13.3
Non-fanaticism	9	18	7-17	11.9

Reason for Resigning

Table 2 shows the major reasons for agent resignations. It’s surprising that the most frequent reason was to become a full-time homemaker. In fact, motherhood accounted for 22 out of 62 resignations between 1965 and 1973. “To become a full-time homemaker” and “retirement” were the resigna-

tion reasons for 83% of the high commitment group, while these reasons were given by only 59% of the low commitment group.

Table 2. Reasons for resigning by level of commitment.

Reasons for resigning	Levels of commitment			Total
	High	Some	Low	
To become full-time homemaker	7	10	5	22
Retired	3	9	5	17
Moved to another state or county	1	5	2	8
To attend graduate school	—	2	—	2
New job opportunity or change in occupation	—	3	3	6
To be married	—	2	1	3
Other reasons, or information unknown	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>4</u>
Totals	12	33	17	62

Job Effectiveness

A simple effectiveness rating (high, average, or low) was given in 1965 to each agent by her home economics supervisor. No clear cut relationship existed between effectiveness scores and MOPC. The mean score on the creativity scale of MOPC was the same for the agents in all three effectiveness categories. This suggests varying degrees of creativity in each of the three effectiveness groups.

The mean score for the high effectiveness group (39 agents) was above the mean on the ambition scale. This suggests that those who see themselves as being more ambitious were designated as having high effectiveness by their supervisors. Table 3 shows these levels of effectiveness. It's interesting to note that 18 (46%) of the 39 agents given the high effectiveness rating in 1965 are still working in 1973. Only 4 (27%) of the 15 agents with a low effectiveness rating by their supervisors were still working 8 years later.

Agents who were rated as being less effective by their supervisors scored above the mean on the autonomy and social relations scales. This confirms the earlier finding that effectiveness isn't highly related to level of commitment. It also suggests that agents, who feel they make decisions on their own and have developed good human and interpersonal relationships, aren't necessarily the more effective agents on the job.

Job Satisfaction and Commitment

Job satisfaction scores were also obtained from the Kansas Extension home economists by using Hoppock's Job Satisfaction Blank No. 5.⁴ These scores were highly correlated

with the overall professional commitment scores, significant at the .01 level. Additional support for this finding comes by comparing the seven MOPC scales with the levels of job satisfaction. All of the scores for the high job satisfaction group (27 agents) were above the means for the seven MOPC scales for Kansas home economists. Scores on three scales (creativity, rationality, and non-fanaticism) were above the means for the agents who had scores in the "some" job satisfaction category (53 agents).

Table 3. Supervisor effectiveness ratings.

Levels of effectiveness	Number of agents	Not working in '69 or '73	Working in '69, but not in '73	Still working in '73
High	39	12	9	18
Average	45	19	11	15
Low	<u>15</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>4</u>
Totals	99	37	25	37

The data show that agents who had average or low job satisfaction scores were below the mean scores on the MOPC scales for ambition, self-understanding, autonomy, and social relations. This suggests they didn't feel as comfortable with their self-images and aspirations and weren't as comfortable in working on their own or in improving social relations. These factors, among others, have been suggested by researchers as factors in job satisfaction. Herzberg writes:

The satisfied worker is, in general, a more flexible, better adjusted person who has come from a superior family environment, or who has the capacity to overcome the effects of an inferior environment. He is realistic about his own situation and about his goals. The worker dissatisfied with his job, in contrast, is often rigid, inflexible, unrealistic in his choice of goals, unable to overcome environmental obstacles, generally unhappy and dissatisfied with his job. Data do show that workers dissatisfied with their jobs often show these characteristics.⁵

Table 4 shows the levels of job satisfaction measured by the adaptation of Hoppock's Job Satisfaction Blank No. 5. Nearly half of the highly satisfied agents (13) were still working in 1973 compared to only a third (6) of the low satisfaction group.

In the why-included 1965 study, one question was asked about the amount of salary needed to lure agents away from their present positions. Surprisingly, 40 of the 99 agents reported that they were satisfied enough with their jobs that

Table 4. Job satisfaction levels.

Levels of job satisfaction	Range of scale for agents	Number of agents	Not working '69 or '73	Working '69, but not in '73	Still working in '73
<i>High</i>	24-28	27	5	9	13
Some	21-23	53	23	12	18
Low	16-20	19	9	4	6
Totals		99	37	25	37

an increase in salary wouldn't cause them to leave their Extension jobs. Additional analyses should be made to determine why 29 of the original 40 who said leaving wouldn't be related to salary increase did resign within the 8-year period of the study. Was a salary increase a factor in their resignations, in taking another job or position? How many of these 29 agents resigned to become full-time homemakers, suggesting that salary perhaps wasn't as important a factor as was suggested by the data in 1965?

Eleven of the 37 agents still working in 1973 were satisfied enough in 1965 to say that an increase in salary wouldn't cause them to leave. Do they still feel the same way today? An additional follow-up of these agents is needed to determine their reactions now.

Implications

Administrators who hire home economists must be concerned with professional commitment as well as personal attitudes of personnel. Analyses of the Kansas data suggest that home and family values are still very high as many agents resigned to become full-time homemakers even when they expressed high commitment and/or high job satisfaction.

Additional research is needed in the whole area of commitment, job satisfaction, and job effectiveness. What causes an agent to become highly satisfied or committed? Do some of the more highly committed or highly satisfied agents return to work for the Extension Service after fulfilling their own personal needs of being full-time homemakers? What other needs should be considered? Are the personal- and job-related values of home economists in other states similar to those of Kansas agents? What kinds of training, both formal and staff development courses, are needed for Extension home economists for personal growth and development? Can staff development courses be designed to help agents become more committed to their jobs and profession?

Is it right to expect long-term commitments of professional workers? Eleanore Luckey, in a recent article, wrote, "In a period of rapid change, long-term commitment to individuals, to a specific job, to an organization or to a locale may be maladaptive."⁶ In addition, she speculates that a willingness to make a commitment depends on how firmly a personal self-hood has been developed. Additional supervision and personal counseling are needed to help home economists and others in Extension become more "self-actualized" people. A person comfortable with herself is more likely to be comfortable and effective on the job.

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Additional Research Needed

All these questions indicate the need for more research in several areas:

1. Studies of commitment and job satisfaction of home economists in other states and how these compare to Kansas Extension home economists.
2. Job satisfaction and commitment scores of youth and agricultural agents. How do these compare to Kansas Extension home economists?
3. Study of commitment and job satisfaction of state Extension staff members and how they compare to county Extension home economists.
4. An organized review of the academic preparation of Extension workers and how this relates to commitment, job satisfaction, and job effectiveness.

Footnotes

1. Peter Moon, "The Development of a Battery of Tests for the Selection of Agricultural Extension Personnel" (Master's thesis, Purdue University, Lafayette, Indiana, 1962); C. A. Gosney, "Vocational Interest Patterns of Indiana County Agricultural Agents" (Master's thesis, Purdue University, Lafayette, Indiana, 1963); Peter Moon and Paul B. Crooks, "Improving Agent Selection," *Journal of Cooperative Extension*, IV (Winter, 1966), 229-32; and E. R. Ryden, "Predicting Successful Performance," *Journal of Cooperative Extension*, III (Summer, 1965), 103-109.
2. Phyllis E. Kemp, "Professional Commitment of Home Economics Agents in Kansas" (Master's thesis, University of Maryland, College Park, 1965) and Phyllis E. Kemp, "Commitment and Job Satisfaction," *Journal of Cooperative Extension*, V (Fall, 1967), 171-77.
3. For development of the MOPC instrument, see Helen A. Loftis, "Identifying Professional Commitment and Measuring Its Extent Among Selected Members of the Teaching Profession" (Ed.D. dissertation, Pennsylvania State University, University Park, 1962), pp. 32-47.

4. For a discussion of job satisfaction and the development of the Job Satisfaction Blank, see Robert Hoppock, *Job Satisfaction* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1935).
5. Frederick Herzberg and others, *Job Attitudes: A Review of Research and Opinion* (Pittsburgh: Psychological Service of Pittsburgh, 1957), p. 53.
6. Eleanore Luckey, "The Family: Perspectives on Its Role in Development and Choice," in *Vocational Guidance and Human Development*, Edwin L. Herr, ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1974), p. 221.