

# motivation=benefits minus costs

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Terry L. Gibson

"I just can't seem to get people motivated!" Ever heard that comment in discussions on developing programs for Extension clientele? Motivation has been defined as "the creation of a state of disequilibrium which produces locomotion," or the "state of tension resulting from an unsatisfied need."

A careful examination of the lives of our clientele would probably indicate that most people are motivated to have fun, watch television, work, and provide for their families. Very few lack motivation. However, they may not be motivated in a direction and with a level of commitment we feel is most desirable. Our task, therefore, is to provide sufficient information so people can make decisions with a thorough knowledge of the consequences of the alternatives.

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**An individual uses many resources (power) in maintaining daily activities and personal commitments (load). The power that remains is the *margin* the individual has to invest in new activities. An individual who is about to engage in a new activity will examine his/her current margin and the potential *costs* and *benefits* of the new activity.**

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## Rational Model of Man

If we can assume a rational model of man, then we can also assume that people will make decisions as to the directions and level of commitment of their efforts. The individual who stays home to watch television rather than going to a meeting is motivated in the direction of the television set. The television set satisfies a need that's stronger than the need for the meeting.

The rational model assumes that decisions are based on the individual's perception of the situation and the consequences attached to various alternatives. The rational model implies rationality only from the perspective of the individual making the decision and the information used to make it. In many

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situations, the decision may be rational, but it may be based on an incomplete understanding of the consequences of the alternatives. An observer who has a broader view of the situation may feel that the individual made a poor decision and in some cases might believe the individual lacked motivation.

~ Motivation or movement in a particular direction requires a decision. Individuals should make decisions with a full understanding of the consequences of those decisions.

### **Many Influences**

Our clientele are constantly being influenced by different forces trying to motivate them in a particular direction. Ford and General Motors are trying to motivate them to buy a new car. The post office is trying to get them to put zipcodes on their mail, and the Red Cross wants them to give blood. Extension is trying to get them to try a new idea or practice.

The direction and level of commitment of each of the preceding examples is significantly different. Attending a meeting, sending for information, listening to a radio program, trying a new idea, or taking leadership each require different levels of commitment.

### **Decision Factors**

*Power and Load*

What factors does a person consider consciously or sub-consciously in decision making? A complete list of factors is, of course, unique to each individual. Several key factors can be identified by McClusky's concept of  $\text{margin} = \text{load}/\text{power}$ .<sup>1</sup> *Power* is the total of the individual's resources and includes his/her physical, mental, emotional, social, and financial abilities. *Load* includes a person's emotional relationships, financial obligations, professional and social responsibilities, and personal convictions.

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*Costs*

The *cost* to an individual is his/her perception of the increased load he/she will have to carry because he/she engaged in the learning activity. Costs include many of the following items:

1. Time: Is it really worth all the time it will take to learn something new when I don't even know if it can help me?
2. Learning style: Do I have to go to a meeting to get the information?

3. Self esteem: Will it seem that I don't know very much?
4. Money: Will I have to spend a lot of money on new equipment or techniques?
5. Energy: Do I have the physical and creative energy for a new project?
6. Physical comfort: Will I be able to see and hear the speaker?

When "costs" are examined individually, they may appear to be of only "trivial" significance in the decision-making process. Unfortunately, the costs are cumulative and a number of seemingly minor "costs" may add up to a major commitment that the individual is unwilling to make.

*Benefits* consist primarily of accomplishing the learning objectives and secondarily include certain social or psychological gratifications. In other words, the *benefits* increase the *power* of the learner.

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The categories used for "costs" can also be helpful in examining the potential "benefits" to participants:

1. Time: I'll be able to save time at work and have more time for my family and relaxation.
2. Learning style: I like sharing my ideas with other people.
3. Self-esteem: The group support will give me the courage to try the new approach.
4. Money: I'll learn how to increase my profits.
5. Energy: I'll be able to make more effective use of my creative and physical energy and put my ideas to work.
6. Physical comfort: Refreshments will be served.

Benefits need to be very *specific* and tell the participant exactly how his/her life will be improved as a result of the investment of time, energy, money, and other "costs." People are more apt to get involved in land-use planning if they know that a carcass rendering plant is about to be located in their neighborhood. The potential benefits from their involvement are personal and specific. A land-use planning meeting without specific issues will probably involve only a handful of future-

minded citizens. Do people realize the consequences of their failure to act (decide) on land-use planning? As educators we need to make the benefits or the consequences known to people.

## Predicting Involvement

Adding the dimensions of cost and benefit to McClusky's formula,  $\text{margin} = \text{load} + \text{cost}/\text{power} + \text{benefits}$ , produces an equation that is useful in predicting whether an individual will engage in the learning experience. The learner first examines his present margin (load/power) and then makes a projection in terms of his costs and benefits (load + cost/power + benefits) in making a decision.

$$\text{margin} = 1 - \frac{\text{load} + \text{cost}}{\text{power} + \text{benefits}}$$

Thus a person with no margin would equal .00 and the person with the maximum margin would equal 1.00. An individual can't operate with a negative margin because he/she has no power to invest.

### Low-Margin Person

In some cases, the low-margin individual's motivation may be so great that he/she will try to use all of his/her resources because the benefits will increase his/her power. An example of this is a person who works full-time on one job, has an additional part-time job, and spends three nights a week training for a new occupation that will increase his/her power. This individual has no margin. He/she has invested himself/herself totally and any increase in load without parallel increase in power will be harmful to his/her mental and physical state.

### High-Margin Person

On the other hand, a person with high margin, thus lots of power to spare, has little difficulty taking advantage of an educational program. An analysis of many participants in adult education programs would seem to indicate that the majority of the participants are high-margin individuals. The Johnstone study found that the typical adult education participant has completed high school or better; enjoys an above-average income; works full-time and most often in a white collar occupation; is typically white and Protestant; is married and a parent; and lives in an urbanized area and more likely in suburbs than inside a large city.<sup>2</sup> A recent macro-evaluation study in Wisconsin indicates that people with more than a high school education, incomes over \$16,000, and a professional occupation tend to

participate more in UW-Extension programs.<sup>3</sup> On the surface, the educational programs appear to be equally accessible to all individuals; but further examination makes it obvious that the costs to individuals with low margins are much greater than the costs to individuals with high margins.

**Risk** A person who is in the process of deciding whether to invest his/her resources (power) will consider the following questions:

1. What will I have to put into it? (Costs)
2. What will I get out of it? (Benefits)
3. How great is the risk?

A person with very little margin may not be willing to take the risk if the chances for success are minimal. The perceived risk also depends on the individual's perception of the educational organization's potential for delivering the advertised benefits. What reputation does your organization have? Do you have a history of returning a very high profit on investments people make in your activities?

**Summary** As you plan your educational programs, you should carefully consider the following questions:

1. How great a *risk* is an investment in my educational organization?
2. What *power* (resources) does my clientele have available?
3. What *load* is my clientele carrying?
4. What *margin* does my clientele have available?
5. What are the *costs* to my clientele?
6. What are the specific *benefits* to my clientele?

Time spent considering the preceding questions will be a good investment of your resources. The costs and benefits of involvement need to be identified and communicated to your clientele. Your task as an educator is to provide sufficient information so people can make decisions with a thorough knowledge of the facts and the consequences of the alternatives.

### Footnotes

1. Howard Y. McClusky, "A Dynamic Approach to Participation in Community Development," *Journal of Community Development Society*, 1 (Spring, 1970), 25-32.
2. John W. C. Johnstone, "Adult Uses of Education: Fact and Forecast," in *Sociological Backgrounds of Adult Education*, Hobert W. Burns, ed. (Chicago, Ill.: Center for the Study of Liberal Education for Adults, 1964), p. 110.
3. Sara Steele, Laverne B. Forest, and Mary Marshall, *Extension's Impact in Shawano County—Report No. 1-Contact with Extension* (Madison: University of Wisconsin-Extension, September, 1976).