A *Psychologist Encounters Extension*

No one has to tell the Extension worker about irrational reactions by clients who reject his sound advice

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YOU were not what I expected you to be. Extension workers were supposed to be a group of technical-minded individuals who wanted only to find out how better to communicate fresh information to a willing audience. You were not supposed to feel so keenly and reflect so clearly the human problems of social change, nor were you to be so interested in such problems and so *action*-oriented toward their amelioration.

Prior to February, 1965, I had very little knowledge about the Agricultural Extension Service, or about the kinds of problems faced by its workers. I had been contracted to teach a course called "Basic Psychology for Extension Workers" at the University of Arizona's Agricultural Extension Winter School and was in doubt about how to structure the course. What would the members of the class, representative as they were of the core of Extension workers, know about scientific psychology? What would they want to know, and how best could the material be presented in this short, three-week term? What information, in particular, would be of most use to them in the field? What kinds of problems would they want to discuss? In other words, what could scientific psychology do to help them better fulfill their tasks?

Nature of Extension's Problems

The textbooks and annual reports of the Extension Service gave me some insight into the formal structure and functions of the Service, but such references could not and did not provide an adequate indication of the human dynamics underlying that structure and those functions. After only a few days in the classroom, however, the answers to my questions came loudly and clearly, and somewhat

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overwhelmingly. Extension workers seem to be fiercely proud of their profession and are not at all hesitant to voice their work problems—with a sincere hope for discovering ways to solve them.

Many of the day-to-day problems of the Extension worker might be interpreted as stemming from one social-psychological phenomenon: his job has been and still is in the process of changing. Earlier in the history of the Extension Service, the organizational focus was on production. It was taken for granted that technical expertise was all the Extension worker needed—that his audience would quickly and eagerly grasp the information and advice he had to offer and would implement his suggestions without resistance.

This view of human nature was much in fashion in work organizations around the 1920's and was based upon the assumption that our behavior is always rationally and logically motivated.[1] After some rather hard-learned lessons about what motivates people, however, this view came to be modified. It was accepted that we humans are not always so rational, and that we may often decisively reject, for what seem to be poor or even non-existent reasons, the most logical of suggestions to change our behavior. The emotional components of motivation were seen to play an important part in the shaping of our actions. Furthermore, long-term investigations of employee motivation, such as the now classic Western Electric Studies,[2] revealed the stubborn tenacity of our group-formulated attitudes toward people, things, and situations.

From Production to People

The change in emphasis was away from the totally "rational man"; and there emerged the awareness of the interpersonal dynamics underlying the development of (and resistance to) change of attitude. This new approach is part of the pattern of events that led to the contemporary "human relations" approach to the analysis of human behavior.

It is not surprising, then, to note a similar shift in emphasis taking place within the Extension Service—from production to people. Certainly the degree of technical know-how still is, and should remain, at a level of excellence; but, if the students in the Winter School are any indication, there is a keen awareness of the need for rather extensive know-how of another kind—the understanding of human behavior.

[1] See, for example, Frederick Taylor, *Scientific Management* (New York: Harper and Bros., 1947).

[2] F. J. Roethlisberger and W. J. Dickson, *Management and the Worker* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1947).

Apparently, much insight into the complexity of interpersonal dynamics has been gained by the Extension worker through his own field experience. No one has to tell the worker about "irrational" reactions from some of his clients to the sound advice he has given them. Winter School class members commented about the puzzling lack of interest, and even resentment, they often face in their day-to-day job. They described, for example, the client who listens intently, shakes his head in affirmation, comments with thanks for the help the Extension worker has given him, and then swiftly proceeds to forget the advice and go on as before. This is indeed a waste! Here is a dedicated group of highly trained people who have worthwhile information to convey to others; yet, by their own analysis, these workers are not getting across to their audiences as effectively as they might. The communication issue has become more complex for Extension as the audience has become increasingly heterogeneous.

No one knows better than the Extension worker that his occupational role is broadening with every passing year. His responsibilities are increasing to the point where he is expected to be both Univac and Socrates, with a touch of Dr. Kildare! The question is, what steps are being taken by the Extension Service training facilities to help him to enact adequately his expanding role?

Useful Concepts from Psychology

Let us now talk more specifically about some of the increasing responsibilities of today's Extension worker, and let us discuss a few of the ways in which the findings of scientific psychology might help him meet these responsibilities in an optimal way. Even though the Arizona School class members represented only a portion of the many job specialities within Extension, the list of their work problems (as they expressed them) reads like the index of a good text in General Psychology. Their audiences, at any given time, numbered from one to thousands, ran the gamut from rich to poor, from young to old, from the educated to the underprivileged. Their methods of approach spanned from the abstract-theoretical to the concrete-practical; and their work places ranged from the sterile laboratory to the share cropper's shack.

Since all Extension workers are, in some way, teachers, they are faced with problems involving the psychology of learning, of perception, and of motivation. What are the processes by which people learn? Why are some teaching techniques better than others? Why is it that various people perceive the same information differently, or the same people perceive the same information differently at

different times? What motivates people to accept or to reject the learning situation?

Theories of learning, and the relationship of learning to perception and motivation, are currently among the most researched areas of psychology. These researches have yielded learning concepts which could be of value to the Extension worker: the importance of reinforcement or reward in the learning situation; the processes of generalization and extinction of learning; the nature of forgetting and of systematic distortion of learned material; the phenomenon of motivated forgetting; the relative merits of massed vs. distributed practice, and of learning by wholes vs. learning by parts; the effect of meaningfulness of material and of knowledge of results upon learning; the degree of transfer of training from one situation to another; and the usefulness of programmed learning and teaching machines.[3]

Receptivity of a client to the information offered him by the Extension worker depends, to a large extent, upon how the client perceives the worker and his information. Psychological studies offer the Extension worker biological and psychological information concerning the organization of perception: the phenomenon of selective attention; the influence of preparatory set and frame of reference; and the impact of needs and values upon perception. There is a large amount of material available concerning the relationships between personality characteristics and perceptual distortion.[4]

Motivation

Studies of motivation should be of central interest to the Extension worker since he must be concerned with motivating people to learn and to change. Psychologists have explored and are exploring the bases of human motivation; they can now offer to the Extension worker a wealth of information concerning biological sources of motivation, as well as the complex and equally important social (acquired) sources of motivation. Particularly relevant to the Extension worker would be, for example, the cross-cultural and cross-socioeconomic level researches done on the so-called "achievement motive." Some other social motivations discussed by psychologists[5]

[3] See, for example, Ernest R. Hilgard, *Introduction to Psychology* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, Inc., 1962), pp. 252-336; and Gregory A. Kimble and Norman Garmezy, *Principles of General Psychology* (New York: Ronald Press, 1963), pp. 133-257.

[4] Hilgard, *op. cit.*, pp. 185-223; and Kimble and Garmezy, *op. cit.*, pp. 287-374.

[5] Hilgard, *op. cit.*, pp. 124-58, particularly pp. 145-46; Kimble and Garmezy, *op. cit.*, pp. 374-406; and David Krech, Richard S. Crutchfield, and E. L. Ballachey, *Individual in Society* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1962), pp. 68-103.

(and relevant to the professional tasks of the Extension worker) are the human wants of affiliation, acquisition, prestige, power, altruism, and curiosity.

The Extension worker continually works with groups of varying sizes; thus he often confronts problems that are specific to social psychologists' studies of group dynamics. What is the effect of the group upon the individual member? How does communication within and between groups work, and what techniques make it work best? Why is it that one person will be accepted in or by a group while another (perhaps the Extension worker himself) may be rejected? Why do some groups welcome and respond readily to suggestions for change while others seem forcefully to reject them? Psychological research has yielded an enormous amount of data on group processes. In becoming familiar with that research, the Extension worker would find useful discussions of: group patterning and interaction, particularly with regard to communication networks; the social structure of the group in terms of hierarchies, roles, and statuses; the development of leadership within groups, and the impact of different styles of leadership upon group performance and member satisfaction; the setting of group norms or standards, and the formulation of group values and goals. He would discover the force the group has in demanding member conformity and moulding member attitudes toward persons (including the Extension worker), events and things; and the characteristics of the group which foster group cohesion, productivity, and which would determine whether it is "open" or "closed" to change.[6]

The Young and Old

Those Extension workers who deal with people at the two extremes of the scale of years have very specific problems. How do you motivate a young person to take advantage of the benefits of 4-H membership when the call of the Frug and Watusi is so attractive to him? How do you convince an octogenarian that he should still be an active part of society when it appears that society has quite effectively shelved him?

Psychologists have studied specifically the developmental patterns of adolescents. Their reports provide the Extension worker with information concerning: the psychological correlates of maturation; the childhood and family dynamic bases for some adolescent behaviors; the development of the "self-concept" and body image; the genesis of attitudes toward authority; the impact of dependence

[6] Hilgard, *op. cit.*, pp. 551-81; Kimble and Garmezy, *op. cit.*, pp. 581-607; Krech, Crutchfield, and Ballechy, *op. cit.*, pp. 383-531.

vs. independence; the dynamics of friendship, clique, and peer interaction; and the phenomena associated with the so-called "adolescent subculture."[7]

Problems of the aging have more recently attracted increasing interest as an area for study. But already data have been accumulated on the following topics of interest to the worker whose job takes him to the aged: the psychological correlates of physical aging; the difficulties of assuming a dependent role in old age; shifts in family life as the result of aging; changes in perceived status and feelings of social isolation; the psychological problems of loss of "usefulness" and work; and the challenges of leisure time.[8]

The massive potential of the Economic Opportunity Program accentuates a problem and increases another responsibility already well known to the Extension worker. Why is it that some underprivileged individuals seem to refuse help? What has evolved in the defense system of the chronically underprivileged that encourages some of them to turn down what appears to be a perfectly good opportunity to improve their lot? Why is it sometimes so difficult to get people to accept new (and what seem to be better) ideas on such very basic items as food and clothing?

Cultural Deprivation

Studies of the psychological impact of cultural deprivation are revealing new insights concerning the mechanisms used by the poor to sustain a degree of self-esteem and some control over their lives. An old lesson taught by social-psychology concerning the efficacy of member participation in group decisions is finding new significance in poverty intervention programs—such programs toward social change will usually fail unless the beneficiaries can actively participate in the implementation of the program. The Extension worker, whose profession seems more and more to be including work with the urban poor may find analyses of intervention fruitful.[9]

The Extension worker is very often smack in the middle of the phenomenon of rural-to-urban change, where the values and customs of close family or community living are conflicting with the values and customs of the city. What is the effect of such a change upon the individual? What effect does his reaction to such change

[7] Luella Cole, *Psychology of Adolescence* (New York: Rinehart and Co., 1959).

[8] Earl Raab and Gertrude Jaeger Selznick, *Major Social Problems* (New York: Harper and Row, 1959), pp. 432-43.

[9] Frank Reissman, Jerome Cohan, and Arthur Pearl, *Mental Health of the Poor* (New York: Free Press, 1964); and Special Issue on Poverty Dynamics and Interventions, *The Journal of Social Issues,* XXI (January, 1965).

have upon the individual's view of the Extension worker and his advice? Similarly, the Extension worker is very often concerned with members of minority ethnic groups. What do such groups value, and how do these values differ among cultures and subcultures, among various socioeconomic levels? What is the effect on the individual of conflicts among these values? What kinds of defense systems grow out of such conflicts, and what do these defenses mean to the Extension worker's getting the message across?

Research on social change is yielding crucial information for the Extension worker. Of interest to him would be data from experiments in planned social change and controlled intervention, reports on resistances to change, descriptions of the comparative dynamics of communities, models for social change, and studies of the psychological impact of change.[10] Particularly in this instance (also in all other cases covered in this paper) the Extension worker can contribute to the social sciences, and to psychology in particular. The Extension worker who is working in a setting that is manifesting accelerated social change can provide the psychologist with data concerning individual reactions to change—data that can be gathered in only one effective way, by *being there*.[11]

Related to the Professional

To turn to the Extension worker himself for a moment—what are the management problems within his own work organization? How do the changing organizational structure and task responsibility affect relationships with superiors and subordinates? How effective is the communication network in his own bailiwick? Does he get and does he give appropriate tools with which to get the job done? Since he works in a bureaucratic framework, what are the advantages and disadvantages of a bureaucracy, and how can the individual best deal with the disadvantages?

Psychological studies of organizational behavior and the interaction of personality with organization can provide the Extension worker with insight into his own role within the work organization; these studies can give him clearer understanding of the kinds of

[10] Warren Bennis, Kenneth Benne, and Robert Chin (eds.), *Planning of Change* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1961); and Ward Hunt Goodenough, *Cooperation in Change* (New York: Sage Foundation, 1963).

[11] The author is currently participating with Shirley Marsh (State Leader of Home Economics Extension and Head, Department of Home Economics Extension, Kansas State University) in a research venture concerned with the interaction between home agents and the urban poor. Four home agents are being actively involved in community action programs with the Topeka Office of Economic Opportunity and are recording, by participant observation, both their reactions and the reactions of the poor toward social change.

stresses that are concomitant with a profession's evolution.[12] He will find useful such research-born conceptualizations as: the conditions contributing to alienation from work; the psychological importance of occupational status; the strain of occupational role ambiguity; the results of basic conflicts between organizational expectations and employee expectations; and the dynamics of effective supervision and leadership.

There is one final area of psychological research that we shall discuss; it can yield valuable information for the Extension worker —the study of emotion and its relationship to personality structure. Emotions cut across all of the psychological concepts that we have discussed above. The sweep of emotion—the kinds, degrees, and the concomitant reactions—touch every stage of our growth, every interaction we have with people and things in our perceptual world. Clinical psychology has a vast amount of information concerning the organizing and disorganizing aspects of emotion. Such information would be of great interest to the Extension worker, not only for understanding the reactions of others to him, but also for understanding his reactions to others.[13]

Conclusion

Psychology, though a young science, has accumulated considerable data on topics relevant to the Extension worker's job. Some of these topics and their applications have been briefly reviewed. The references cited in this paper are basic texts in the behavioral sciences. These texts have elaborate bibliographies.

But more important than our listing of kinds of references and suggestions as to where the Extension Service reader might find additional sources is this question: Does the Extension Service have a store of knowledge and techniques in psychology that could be useful to Extension workers, and are there components within the Service's training curriculum for psychological information? Furthermore, if the various areas of knowledge and the techniques of psychology could be useful to Extension workers, and if the problems of the Extension workers would be of interest to psychologists (especially to social psychologists), should there not be Extension psychologists?

The conclusion seems obvious. An increasing amount of interaction between psychology and the Extension Service professional would be to their mutual gain and would be a service to society.

[12] Chris Argyris, *Personality and Organization* (New York: Harper and Row, 1957); and Robert Kohn *et al., Organizational Stress* (New York: Wiley, 1964).

[13] Cole, *op. cit.*, pp. 335-79; Hilgard, *op. cit.*, pp. 158-85, 447-551; and Kimble and Garmezy, *op. cit.*, pp. 437-554.