pinpointing morale problems

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Job satisfaction and good morale are continuing objectives of administrators in all organizations, and Extension is no exception. Poor morale, recognized or not, contributes to increased personnel turnover, lowered effectiveness, and most importantly, an intensified struggle to stay fully staffed.

Objectives   Our study discussed here was done to provide a "base-line" to measure changes in morale or job satisfaction in a major Extension field district and as a basis for comparison with similar groups elsewhere. An equally important purpose was the immediate feedback from the participants on the important sources of concern. This feedback was the first step in developing a program on organizational change.

Even though we're talking about groups, it's important to know the employee, how he feels, and what he thinks, so his problems aren't lost in the grouping. . . .

Procedure   A quick measure of the job satisfaction level was taken from all professionals in one district of the Virginia Cooperative Extension Service. The Hoppock Job Satisfaction Record (JSR), a four-item questionnaire, was used. The four questions asked were:

1. The degree of satisfaction.
2. How much of the time the agent felt satisfied with the job.
3. How the respondent felt about co-workers.
4. How the agent felt about changing jobs.[1]

Each agent then filled out the Job Questionnaire (JQ). It alerted management to job factors employees considered the most important. The JQ, based on the Herzberg theory of motivation, elicited the employee's comments about the importance of 14 job factors and the degree to which each was present or absent in the job. Six factors related to Herzberg's "motivators" or satisfiers and the remaining 8 to his "hygienes" or dissatisfiers.[2] These 14 factors apply to a variety of professional and nonprofessional jobs (see Table 1).

Table 1. Job factors in profit and nonprofit work situations.

Motivating Features	Hygienic Features
Achievement	Working conditions
Responsibility	Supervision
Recognition	Management policies
The work itself	Status
Advancement/Promotion	Salary
Personal growth	Interpersonal relationships
	Job security
	Interference with home life

The reason for asking about both importance and degree of concern was to focus attention on job and work environment factors that were causing the most concern. This focusing effect is best shown by Figure 1. The area of the rectangle symbolizes *all* of the job factors in the questionnaire and the two circles represent the *important* and the *lacking* job factors.

We compared the factors between the highly satisfied and the highly dissatisfied groups to identify which factors contributed to the difference in satisfaction.

The job features *that are* important

The job features *that are* lacking
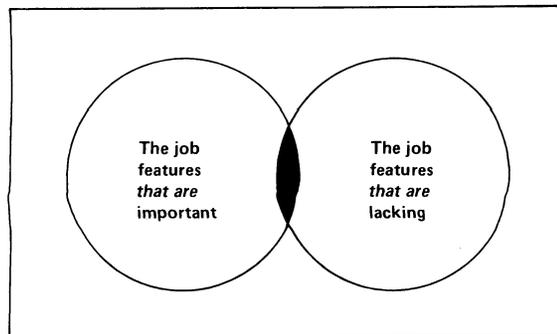
Figure 1. Job features—important and lacking.

Analysis

Overall Job Satisfaction

The JSR results showed a similarity in satisfaction ratings between Extension personnel and a large group of industrial managers and professionals previously surveyed. However, fewer Extension professionals in the group found their work highly dissatisfying than the group of industrial professionals (5.6% vs. 20%). A more useful comparison for Extension administrators could compare the status of this study's Extension professionals with other districts in Virginia and other states that want to cooperate in a broader study.

Most Important— Most Lacking Factors

Each of the 14 factors was ranked in order of importance. Then, they were ranked in order of their greatest deficiency— to what degree the factor was lacking in the job.

Table 2 shows the 6 factors that ranked highest for each list of factors: "factors most important" and "factors most lacking in job."

Table 2. Six top-ranked features.

Importance	Deficiency
Pleasant co-workers	Promotion
Seeing results	Pleasant working conditions and surroundings
Interesting work	
Opportunity for growth	Getting credit for work done
Sound management policies	Sound management policies
Good supervision	Good supervision
	Pleasant co-workers

Three factors appear in both columns: *sound management policies, good supervision,* and *pleasant co-workers.* These factor are the most important but occur the least. However, there's a danger in group ratings: certain factors considered extremely dissatisfying by some people may be overlooked. If these factors are ignored, efforts to improve morale can't be successfu

Even though we're talking about groups, it's important to know the employee, how he feels, and what he thinks, so his problems aren't lost in the grouping. Managers often emphasize *policy* matters, but pay less attention to *supervision* and *co-workers*—the very things that are most important to employees. These two topics simply don't get aired in a group meeting, but should be. This only begins a program in which managers and employees, individually or in small groups, can talk about their problems.

Job Deficiencies

The highly dissatisfied felt their jobs lacked to a higher degree all six motivating factors than reported by the highly satisfied. The dissatisfied group also reported higher deficiencies in several of the hygiene factors, including *pleasant co-workers* and *sound management policies.*

No significant difference existed between these two groups in *salary* deficiency. Supervision also wasn't seen as significantly more deficient by the dissatisfied group. Remember, the total group considered *supervision* a major issue—important *and* deficient. Therefore, this concern should be a matter for further study to prevent possible deterioration of morale among the satisfied workers.

Ultimately, there's no substitute for the individual employee-manager relationship as the prime source of information on employee morale. . . .

Conclusion

The Extension field staff felt their jobs offered a high degree of the factors that motivate professionals . . . a conclusion based on the low number of deficiency ratings of these important factors.

Extension workers emerge as professionals dedicated and interested in the "growth" and public service achievements of their jobs.[3]

Another conclusion: a higher degree of the motivating factors helps cancel out the possible morale weakening effects of *salary* and *supervision* or at least make these deficiencies less irritating.

This study opens the way to improve the methods of detecting good and bad morale. For example, since the Job Questionnaire can identify the highly dissatisfied worker by the presence of highly important job factors reported as strongly lacking, it may be possible to eliminate the Job Satisfaction Record in future studies without sacrificing valuable information.

Ultimately, there's no substitute for the individual employee-manager relationship as the prime source of information on employee morale.

Footnotes

1. Robert Hoppock, *Job Satisfaction* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1935).
2. Frederick Herzberg, Bernard Mausner, and Barbara Snyderman, *The Motivation to Work* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1959).
3. Harold Swanson, "Are Extension Workers Professionals?" *Journal of Extension*, XIII (January-February, 1975), 17-21.