

Motivating Member Participation

Montana State University
Extension Service
EB 17
August 1987



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Issued in furtherance of cooperative extension work in agriculture and home economics, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, LeRoy Luft, Acting Director, Montana State University Extension Service, Bozeman, Montana.

MOTIVATING MEMBER PARTICIPATION

Most leaders are concerned about participation in their groups. Leaders want to know why some members exert more effort than others, why their own levels of motivation vary from time to time and what they can do to influence the level of participation. It is proper that leaders be concerned because their actions do have a direct impact on the level of participation in their groups. Their concerns have interested theorists and researchers as well. The major theories that have been developed and related research findings are presented in this publication along with suggestions that leaders may wish to apply in their groups.

LEVELS OF INVOLVEMENT

Robert Keen (1977) of Purdue University states that in most voluntary organizations only a minority of members are really active and that the larger the group, the smaller the percentage of active members.

Keen divides members into three levels of involvement. The “loyal” members take part in almost every activity. The “intermittent” members participate only occasionally. The “big event” participants come to only major events. The problem for leaders is to get the intermittent and big event participants into the loyal category.

Keen cautions that before leaders become overly concerned with involvement, they need to determine whether or not they actually have a problem. To be successful, does the organization need 10 percent, 20 percent or 50 percent of its participants to be loyal members? The answer to that question will vary from time to time. Typically, groups get involved in a big push on a particular project that requires a high level of participation from a high percentage of group members. Once the project has been completed, the need for member activity declines.

If the leader and other group members decide that they have a problem with participation in the group and they want to correct it, they will need a basic understanding of human motivation. They will want to know why members take action, and what can be done to increase member participation.

DRIVES AND EXPECTATIONS

We are motivated by both needs and desires. We tend to be pushed into action to satisfy our needs or drawn into action by expectation of satisfaction of our desires. Drive theory contends our behavior is directed by needs to avoid or relieve adverse conditions. It says the behavior undertaken will be influenced by previous experiences. Expectancy theory holds that our behavior is influenced by our expectation of goal satisfaction. It, too, says that the behavior taken will be based on previous experience. For a behavior to be undertaken, there must be an expectation that we can achieve the goal and the goal must be

one that we value. Studies have shown that failure to achieve the goal will result in a reduction of expectations and a corresponding reduction in the amount of effort put toward the goal.

Different people have different values and different goals. For example, if a member has high expectations for affiliation in the group and finds that the group is dominated by a clique, the new member will probably reduce his participation. Expectation theory suggests that leaders need to tailor the rewards for behavior to the expectations of specific individuals in their group.

NEEDS

Psychologist Abraham Maslow (1970) stated that man is a wanting animal, that he pursues a need until it is satisfied and once it is satisfied, it no longer motivates his actions. Maslow and a number of other theorists have devised a variety of categorizations of human needs. It is possible to group all these needs into three major categories: survival needs, social needs and personal growth needs.

Survival Needs

Survival needs include biological requirements for physical survival, such as food, air and physical comfort. Survival needs also include those related to physical security, safety and job security. Examples are the need to be able to pay our bills, the need for reliable transportation, the need for a roof over our heads. Groups such as unions, farm organizations and self-help groups help individuals satisfy survival needs.

Social Needs

Social needs include our desires for affiliation with other people, our desire to be respected by others, to be accepted by them, to feel like we are part of a team, that we are loved and that we belong to the group. People tend to want to be with people who are like themselves, who have similar status and similar interests. Belonging to groups provides us with an opportunity to compete against others who are similar to ourselves, to see how well we are doing compared to them. Belonging also provides an opportunity to compare our values and our attitudes to others.

Studies rating people's needs for affiliation (Green, 1984) have found that those with the highest needs for affiliation are often social isolates. While they have a high desire for approval and acceptance, their fear of rejection and disapproval is so strong they are unwilling to subject themselves to situations in which they might experience rejection. As leaders of groups, particularly youth groups, it then becomes important for us to structure social activities so that everyone in the group is involved and that people don't have to take on the responsibility for breaking the ice themselves.

Still another reason proposed for affiliation is that groups allow us to do unusual or far-out things we wouldn't try on our own. Ziller (1964) found that groups that permit reductions in personal restraint tend to be rated as most satisfying by members. Examples of such group activities include costume parties, games and casino nights.

Personal Growth

An important personal growth need is forming a favorable self-image. Our self-image is based on our feelings of confidence, our perception of our achievements and the respect we receive from others. Other personal growth needs and desires include the need to perform well, aesthetic drives, our desire to have an influence on our world, our desire to learn more about things that interest us and also our desires to reduce feelings of guilt. Personal growth needs and desires motivate us to try to fulfill our own potential, to expand our internal satisfaction “to be all that we can be.”

The desire to satisfy personal growth needs is one of the major reasons why people participate in groups. Groups allow us to achieve things we could not achieve on our own. Atkinson (in Heckhausen, 1985) found that people respond to achievement situations in two different ways. Some people are motivated to approach success expecting to succeed, others are primarily motivated to avoid failure. The more highly motivated a person is to approach success, the more likely he or she will be to choose tasks of moderate difficulty that require stretching capacity a bit, involve some challenge, but yet are within the range of the possible. People who have a tendency to avoid failure more commonly choose tasks that are very easy so that success is assured, or very difficult, so that failure is excused.

These attitudes toward achievement are formed early in life, based on experiences in achievement situations and the reactions of others to our successes or failures. Leaders of youth groups need to be particularly aware of the impact of their reactions to member successes or failures.

People in groups tend to take greater risks than they would individually and to set goals for their group that are beyond their capacity to achieve. In fact, most groups fail to achieve the goals they set for themselves. So leaders need to force members to face reality when setting group goals.

Atkinson (in Heckhausen, 1985) found that people who approached success tended to credit themselves for their successes and that people who avoided failure tended to credit themselves for their failures, while attributing their successes to chance. Leaders need to help the group take responsibility for its own actions, pointing out when it has in fact accomplished something because of its own actions and when it has failed.

Individual Differences

People differ enormously in the amount of satisfaction they require for a particular need before moving on to satisfy another need or desire. They also differ greatly in how much discomfort they are willing to experience before they give attention to a need. We are all familiar with the example of the starving artist whose need for aesthetic gratification overrides his basic survival needs. Theorists differ on whether one or multiple needs may be influencing our actions simultaneously and on whether there is a standard order in which needs have to be met. Research (Birdwell, 1976; Goodman, 1968) indicates that the order in which needs have to be met varies dramatically from person to person. Leaders need to be aware of these individual differences in their members.

OVERCOMING INERTIA

At what point does a need or desire become powerful enough to move us to take action?

At least seven factors determine whether or not we will take action on any particular need:

Urgency—Is this need a higher priority for us than any other need demanding our attention at that particular time?

Survival—Is action required to meet our needs for air, food, water, bodily functions, sleep?

Appeal—Where does the need rank on our pleasure/pain continuum? The more perceived pleasure we expect to derive from taking an action, the greater the appeal.

Risk—What are the costs involved in the action? What is the chance of being injured, or suffering personal loss as a result of the activity? Often there is a trade-off between the perceived probability of pleasure and the perceived cost or risk involved in an activity. There is also an element of immediacy involved with risk. For example, the risk of eventually developing lung cancer versus the pleasure of smoking now.

Timing—At different times, certain activities have greater appeal to us than at other times. At different periods in our lives, certain activities are more important to us than at other times. As our interests change over time, our participation in particular interest groups is also likely to change.

Availability—The means for satisfying a need must exist if we are to act. The desire to swim on a hot August day may be very strong, but if a place to swim is not available, no action will occur.

Energy Level—All of us have only so much energy to devote to activities. Any activity we engage in draws off some of our available energy and reduces the amount left for other activities.

These forces are additive. If an activity has a strong urgency to it, if it affects our survival, if it has high appeal, relatively low risk, if it occurs at a time that is convenient for us, if the means to satisfy the need are available and we have the energy level to carry out the action, we are likely to do it. Leaders can plan strategies to increase these forces, thus encouraging member participation in activities.

POWER/LOAD MARGIN

We all have limited amounts of time and energy. We also all have demands on our time and energy that draw off some of our power. The margin of energy left is our available power to engage in other activities. At different times in our lives, we will have different margins of power available for activities. Just because someone is not now active in our group doesn't mean that at a later date he or she may not have more energy available to be active.

Our "power" comes from both external sources, such as our social contacts, and internal sources, such as our skills, knowledge and health.

The load we carry is influenced by the demands we place on ourselves and the demands others place on us. Again, there are both external and internal elements. The external elements include the tasks we have as a result of roles

we play as parent, spouse, club officer, employee. The internal elements include: our expectations for ourselves, our goals, our ideals, things like our desire to take a particular class or to run a mile every day or to provide ourselves with a weekly treat.

The margin is the surplus power available to handle additional loads. It is this margin leaders need to tap for greater participation.

SATISFIERS AND MOTIVATORS

Herzberg (1966) said that in any situation two types of factors determine the amount of effort we put forth: “satisfiers” and “motivators.” Satisfiers include the interpersonal relationships we have with people in a group, the level of security we feel in the group, the conditions in which work is done and the rewards offered by the group. Herzberg said that an adequate level of each of these factors has to be satisfied in order for us to be satisfied with our participation in a group. But he contended that these factors alone will not stimulate us to go beyond a minimum level of performance. He said, additional motivational factors are needed to lead people to higher levels of achievement. These include the intrinsic satisfaction we derive from doing a job, the recognition we receive for our performance and the opportunities the job offers for growth, advancement and responsibility.

Herzberg’s theory suggests that, as leaders, we need to ensure fulfillment of the satisfiers. If we don’t, we can expect dissatisfaction, poor performance and low participation. But, if we want higher levels of participation, we need to provide opportunities for members to satisfy the motivational factors as well.

EQUITY

People compare the rewards they receive for their effort to those others receive. Equity theory suggests people are driven to escape situations in which they believe they aren’t getting a fair deal. It holds that people who perceive that they are over-rewarded for their activities compared to others tend to feel guilty and, therefore, put forth greater effort, while those who feel under-rewarded tend to reduce their input.

Leaders need to be aware that rewards provided to one person are noted by the rest of the group. Therefore, leaders need to make a real effort to appear fair to all members in reward distribution. It is not the actual fairness that is relevant but the perception of fairness by members.

WHAT CAN THE LEADER DO

Leaders have an enormous influence on the level of motivation and participation in their groups. As leaders, we need to understand that our own orientation in groups influences the motivation of other members. We also need to recognize personal differences and be careful not to project our own orientations onto other group members. Further, we need to understand the impact of our particular leadership style on the motivation of the rest of the group. For a discussion of leadership styles and their impact on group motivation, see MontGuide 8404 HRD, “Choosing Leadership Styles.”

Leaders need to recognize that different people are turned on by different activities, so we need to provide opportunities for all members to find satisfaction for their particular needs within the group and plan activities that can meet those needs.

Cost of participation

Leaders also need to consider the cost of participation in the group as well as the benefits. Some costs of participation include:

1. Transportation costs
2. Dues, contributions
3. Time away from the job or family
4. Less time available for other voluntary associations
5. Less leisure time available for other activities
6. Social costs—the risk of embarrassment or failure as a result of participation

Poor membership involvement may also indicate:

1. The benefits of participation are not considered valuable
2. The meetings are poorly organized, drawn out or boring
3. The general membership doesn't have much opportunity to play an active part
4. The members think the same clique runs the group year after year
5. The members feel their participation wouldn't have much influence anyway
6. The goals of the group are unclear or not valued by the members
7. The member's individual needs are unmet in participation

If we want to increase member involvement, we have to provide members with opportunities for meaningful participation. This can be done by ensuring that members are involved in setting group goals, using techniques, such as the nominal group approach (see MontGuide 8401 HRD "Setting Group Goals"). We can also carefully plan meeting agendas to ensure that meetings move along quickly, and that responsibility for different aspects of the meeting is shared. For ideas on meeting planning, see MontGuide 8433 HRD "Planning Meeting Agendas."

Task Delegation

How leaders go about delegating jobs in their group can influence member participation. Herzberg (1966) recognized the importance of the job itself as a motivational factor. People receive "intrinsic" satisfaction from jobs, tasks and activities. Intrinsic satisfaction is the enjoyment that comes from the activity itself. It explains why people participate in activities, such as doing jigsaw puzzles, climbing mountains or sky diving. Most people gain a measure of satisfaction from a great range of behaviors.

Intrinsic motivation is distinguished from extrinsic motivation basically by the source of the rewards. In groups, extrinsic rewards are those that originate from others, such as the status and respect we receive from others, and the recognition for the work we have done. Intrinsic rewards are the inner satisfactions we derive from an activity. Intrinsic motivation comes from control of our own activities, while extrinsically rewarded activities are controlled by others.

Studies have found that when people are rewarded by others for activities that they used to find intrinsically satisfying, the amount of intrinsic satisfaction declines. Further, when an activity that was intrinsically motivating becomes extrinsically motivated and then the extrinsic motivation is removed, people stop the activity. Studies have shown that virtually any external control, whether positive or negative, can undermine intrinsic satisfaction with an activity.

These studies imply that leaders who adopt a “hands off” approach in delegating responsibilities, allowing members control over the activity to the greatest extent possible, may contribute to a higher level of intrinsic satisfaction. This is particularly important in volunteer organizations in which leaders do not have many extrinsic rewards to provide.

To increase intrinsic task motivation, Hackman and his associates (1977) identified five core characteristics of tasks that motivate people along with five strategies to incorporate those characteristics into a task. The core dimensions are:

1. Skill variety
2. Task identity (the completion of a whole, identifiable task)
3. Task significance
4. Autonomy in carrying out the task
5. Feedback on how well we are doing.

The five strategies proposed for enriching the tasks are:

1. Form natural work units—the more responsible a person feels for a whole piece of the task, the better;
2. Combine tasks—wherever possible, try to combine smaller tasks to form a larger job assignment, thus fostering a sense of identity with the entire job;
3. Establish relationships with those served. When possible, put the member in touch with the people who will actually make use of the service. This can be especially important as a motivator for members of service groups;
4. Vertical loading—give members responsibilities and controls that are usually reserved for the group leader, such as letting members decide when they will do things, how much effort will be put into something and letting them come up with solutions to problems, correcting their own errors;
5. Open feedback channels—build regular feedback channels into the task so that members learn immediately and objectively how well they are performing.

Planning for Participation

Group leaders can use an annual plan of activities to determine how well the group is meeting members' achievement, social and personal growth needs. By listing all of the group's activities for the year and determining which needs each activity meets, leaders may identify needs that aren't being sufficiently met. Leaders can then add activities specifically planned to help members satisfy the unmet needs. Figure 1 illustrates how an annual plan can be laid out. Examples of activities that meet various member needs are included in MontGuide 8402 HRD, "The Individual and the Group."

Figure 1. Annual Plan of Activities

Month	Task Activities	Social Activities	Personal Growth Activities
January	Goal Setting using nominal group	Ice Breaker for new members	Parliamentary procedure exercises
February	Force Field Analysis on goals from January meeting	1/2 hour refreshments before meeting	"How to ____" slide presentation

Conducting Meetings

The manner in which leaders conduct meetings has a powerful impact on member participation. So does the fashion in which leaders encourage or inhibit communication by group members. Even the non-verbal signals that leaders send while others are speaking have a bearing on participation. The meeting place itself and the arrangement of the room also impact participation. Leaders can reduce the cost of participation at meetings by structuring participation so that no single individual dominates the group. Leaders can also:

1. determine in advance which decisions need to be made and how the group can structure its activity to make sure everyone is involved in making the decisions,
2. can stay on top of the discussion and keep the discussion on track,
3. draw those not participating into the discussion,
4. recognize that when points start to be repeated, it is time to move on to the next topic,
5. divide the larger group into smaller groups to facilitate discussion. (The optimum size for discussion groups is 5-7.)
6. provide each group with a flip-chart and magic marker so that they can record the major ideas that are brought forward. (This helps prevent repetition of ideas, lets members know that their ideas have been heard and shows the group what they have accomplished.)
7. encourage participation of all through techniques like the nominal group process.

For a discussion of these factors, refer to Extension Circular 1292, “Group Communication.”

The way conflict is handled in meetings also impacts on the satisfaction that members derive from participation. For a discussion of conflict management, see MontGuide 8515 HRD, “Conflict Management.”

Cliques exist in many groups for both social and task functions. Often there is an established “in” group that makes all of the decisions at meetings. Such cliques prevent other members from satisfying their social and growth needs. Leaders can plan both task and maintenance activities to reduce the impacts of cliques and ensure participation by more members. Techniques for so doing are described in MontGuide 8401 HRD, “Setting Group Goals.”

The Importance of Success

Leaders need to be aware that groups as well as individuals attribute their successes or failures either to their own efforts or to the environment in which they operate. As noted earlier, studies of group goal setting indicate that groups are more likely to set goals that are beyond their reach than are individuals. Since other studies have shown a tendency to reduce effort on subsequent activities if we experience failure on the current activity, leaders need to guide their groups toward setting realistic goals. Then they need to exert the effort to ensure success.

CONCLUSION

By understanding the factors that motivate participation of group members, planning activities to provide satisfaction of member needs, conducting group meetings to encourage participation of all members, and setting and accomplishing reasonable goals, leaders can increase the amount of participation in their groups.

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