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PERCEPTIONS REGARDING ADULT LEARNERS MOTIVATION TO PARTICIPATE IN EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

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Abstract

The main purpose of this study was to assess the perceptions ofyoungfarmers regarding motivation to participate in educational programs and to draw implications for program planning in agricultural education. Respondents perceived that motivation to learn was driven by multiple factors. Farmers were motivated by both intrinsic and extrinsic motivationalfactors. Respondents were motivated by thefollowing factors to participate in educational programs: desire to increase profitability, desire to learn the latest technology, relevant material, and accessibility of the educational programs. The findings show that farmers in this study preferred to learn by hands-on activities and through trial and error, whether individually or in groups. Overall, the participants in this study preferred to learn through a variety of methods.

Introduction

Individuals are believed to be active organisms rather than passive tools. Deci and Ryan (1985, p. 8) stated that human beings act on their internal and external environments to be effective and to satisfy the full range of their needs. In the process, behavior is influenced by internal structures that are being continually elaborated and refined to reflect ongoing experiences. This indicates that humans are intrinsically motivated to achieve their desired goals. On the other hand, rewards could motivate a person to engage in activities he or she otherwise might not actively participate. Cherrington and Wixom (1983) stated that people do what they are reinforced or rewarded for doing.

Blackburn (1994) explained that program planners are concerned about a long-term goal, extension agents are concerned about what they need to do next month, and farmers are concerned whether or not the program is worth attending. For adult educators, encouraging their clientele to have the motivation to participate in educational programs is a continuous challenge. The clients may choose to participate in certain programs and avoid others even though the programs are considered practical and helpful to them. Why do clients participate in some educational programs but avoid others? Barker (1997, p. 287) pointed out that our understanding of how learning affects behavior seems to be intimately connected to our understanding of what motivates our behavior.

This study was designed to help researchers and teachers understand more about the underlying factors that influence a farmer's decision to participate in learning experiences by learning more about perceptions regarding motivation to learn, motivational factors that increase participation, and adult learners' learning preferences.

Many researchers have examined several aspects of adult motivation to participate in learning activities mainly in formal settings. Others have examined adult learners who either are attempting to get a basic literacy level or haven't completed their formal high school or college education. However, recently no one has documented adult farmer's motivation to learn in non-formal settings where there is no requirement

attached for farmers to attend educational programs provided by extension officers or other providers. How do adult farmers perceive motivation to learn? What teaching/learning methods motivate adult farmers to engage in educational activities? What are the factors that motivate adult farmers to participate in educational programs? This study was designed to answer these questions.

Theoretical Framework

The first significant research in adult motivational orientation of participation was completed by Houle and published in The *Inquiring Mind* (196 1). Houle (1979) found three learning orientations were held by adults he interviewed: the goal-oriented, the activity-oriented, and the learning-oriented. Cross (198 1) identified the works of four scholars on the motivation for adult education as promising. Force-field analysis theory was developed based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs. These needs are physiological, safety, belonging and love, esteem, and self-actualization. Maslow (1970) stated that people cannot be concerned about recognition, achievement and self-actualization until they meet their basic needs for survival, safety and belonging. The Expectancy-Valence paradigm theory developed by Rubenson (1977, cited by Cross, 1981) stated that the valence depends on the anticipated consequences of participation; for example, participation in adult education can lead to higher pay, but it can also mean seeing less of the family (p. 116). Tough (1968) stated that each adult learner engages in a learning activity for multiple reasons, including the use of knowledge or skills to take action.

Human motivation is not unitary; it is a configuration of many components (Warren, 1973, p. 2). Burgess' (197 1) survey results revealed seven motivational desires: to know, to reach a personal goal, to reach a social goal, to reach a religious goal, to escape, to take part in a social activity, and to comply with a formal requirement.

Oaklief's and Oaklief s (1982) findings showed that adults participate in educational programs for non-economic benefits, that is, to gain skills to learn more. Hey (1976) stated that adult learners motivation is related to basic human curiosity besides other factors.

Knowles (1977) stated that a new idea was infused into Extension to give more emphasis on the full scope of life problems of all the people, problems that are related to agriculture, politics, social and moral issues. Knowles (1980) identified the following four characteristics of adult learners: 1) as a person matures, he or she becomes an independent and self-directed human being; 2) an adult has a reservoir of experience that can be used as a resource for learning; 3) an adult learner's readiness to learn is related to the developmental task of his or her social role; and 4) there is a change in time perspective as people mature for future application of knowledge to immediacy of application. Thus an adult is more problem-centered than subject-centered in learning (Knowles, 1980), and adults are motivated to learn by internal factors rather than external ones (Knowles, 1984). Keller and Suzuki (1988) and Keller and Kopp (1987) identified four motivational factors for learning: attention, relevance, confidence, and satisfaction.

Johnstone's and Rivera's (1965) findings show that adult learners prefer practical over academic, applied over theoretical, and skill over knowledge or information. Mezirow (1985) described the process of learning and problem solving as instrumental learning, whereby adult learners use the new skill or knowledge to adapt to their changing environment.

Wlodkowski (1985) stated that when adults are given what they need and desire, they will tend to be highly motivated. Merriam & Cunningham (1989) noted that the relationship between the adult learner and teacher is considered

collaborative. The needs assessment practice is based on the concept of the learner's needs because the adult learner is a self-directing organism with initiative, intentions, choices, freedom, energy and responsibility (Tough, 197 1, p. 5).

A common thread in the literature concerning adult learning is the premise that adult educators or program planners should respond to the needs, interests, and real-life problems of adult learners. Customers frequent a business that satisfies their needs. The same is true with adult learners.

Brundage and Mackeracher (1980) reported that motives arise internally. They recommended the following four steps for educators to use to maintain a high level of learner motivation: 1) discovering, through consultation, what the prime motives and specific learning needs of each individual learner are; 2) assisting the learner to establish specific objectives which can be translated into specific behaviors and hence into specified feedback; 3) providing feedback on the basis of these decisions; and 4) allowing the feeling of success and satisfaction from these processes to be the major reinforcements of learning (p. 40). Knowles (1984) argued that the process of adult education program planning should include the following: 1) creating an appropriate and comfortable physical environment; 2) mutual planning of the learner and program planner; 3) participation in the decision-making and identifying their own needs; 4) learners should identify their own learning objectives; 5) individualizing instruction; 6) flexibility to adjust to conditions as they change; and finally, 7) learners should evaluate themselves comparing their achievements with the original objectives.

Wlodkowski (1985) listed five critical assumptions about adult motivation to learn: 1) people are always motivated; 2) people are responsible for their own motivation; 3) if anything can be learned, it can be learned in a motivating manner; 4) there is no one best way to instruct; and 5) every instructional plan needs a motivational plan (pp. 12-15).

Blackburn (1994) stated, ... those who apparently lack the motivation to apply the knowledge that is being dispensed often do not perceive their situation in the same way as those who attempt to teach them (p. 27).

While a number of studies have focused on motivation for adult education, none of these studies have focused on motivation for adult education in agriculture in general and farmers in particular.

Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this study was to identify and analyze the perceptions ofmembers of the Iowa Young Farmers Educational Association regarding motivation to learn, preferred learning methods, motivational factors of participation and barriers to participation in educational programs. Specific objectives of this study were to: 1) identify adult learner perceptions regarding motivation to learn 2) identify adult learners preferred learning methods; and 3) identify motivational factors (incentives) for participation in adult education programs.

Methods and Procedures

Population and Sample

The population for this study consisted of all the members of the Iowa Young Farmers Educational Association during the summer of 1997. According to the records of the Iowa Young Farmers Educational Association, there were 148 members. The whole population was surveyed.

Instrumentation

Data for this study were collected using a

mailed questionnaire. The instrument for the study was developed by the researcher based on a literature review, interview information from five Iowa young farmers, and review and feedback from three selected College of Agriculture faculty at Iowa State University. The instrument was designed to measure farmer perceptions regarding motivation to learn, learning preference, motivational factors, and barriers to participation in educational programs. The first frame consisted of data on perceptions of motivation to learn by adult learners. This section had 11 questions designed to measure the adult learner's perception regarding motivation to learn. The second frame consisted of 4 questions that helped identify the adult learner's preferred way of learning. The third section consisted of 10 questions that helped identify motivational factors to participate in educational programs.

The questions regarding motivation to learn, preferred learning style, motivational factors and barriers were formulated to be answered using a five-point, Likert-type scale with 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = unsure, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree. The socio-demographic factors were formed into multiple choice items. The instrument consisted of three pages and contained forty-five questions.

The reliability of the instrument was tested using selected adult learners in agriculture not included in the study. The alpha coefficient for the first section (perceptions of motivation to learn) was 0.54; the second section (learning profile) was 0.67; section three (motivational factors) was 0.74.

Data Collection and Analysis

The instrument was mailed to 148 Iowa Young Farmers Educational Association members on August 23, 1997. The first follow-up reminder letter was mailed on September 8, 1997 to all participants who had not yet responded. The total response rate as of September 27, 1997 was 58%. The second reminder was mailed on September 25, 1997. The total response was 103 (69.6%). To determine if there was a difference between the respondents and non-respondents to the written questionnaire, the researcher did a telephone follow-up survey of 22% of the non-respondents using the entire instrument. The t-test analysis indicated no significant differences between respondents and non-respondents. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) computer program was used to analyze the data. Descriptive statistics consisting of means, standard deviations and percentages were used to describe the population.

Findings

Ninety-three participants provided usable data for this study. Over 91% (N=85) of the respondents were male, and less than 7% (N=8) were female.

The data in Table 1 presents the distribution of respondents by educational level. A majority of the respondents (over 95%) had high school or higher levels of education. Sixty-two percent of the respondents had a two-year college education or more. One respondent (1.1%) did not identify his or her educational level. Only 11 (11.8%) respondents participated once a month in educational programs. Twenty-four (25.8%) respondents participated six times a year and 18 (19.4%) four times a year. Thirty (32.3%) respondents participated only twice a year. Nine (9.7%) respondents didn't participate in educational programs at all. One of the respondents (1.1%) did not indicate his or her level of participation in educational programs. Over 43% of the respondents believed that their participation in program planning would increase their participation in educational programs. Twenty-two percent of the respondents did not believe that their participation in program planning would increase their participation in educational programs while forty-one percent of the respondents were unsure. One of the respondents

Table 1. Educational Level of Members of Iowa Young Farmers Educational Association (N=93).

Educational level	Frequency	Percent
<12th grade	4	4.3
12th grade	31	33.7
12 + 2 years	28	30.4
12 + 4 years	19	20.7
17 or > years	10	10.9
Missing	1	1.0
Total	93	100.0

Note: A majority (87.1%) of respondents were between the age of 21 and 45. Less than 13% of the respondents were age 46 or older.

(1.1%) did not indicate whether or not his or her level of participation in educational program planning would increase his/ her participation in educational programs.

Table 2 indicates the mean ratings and standard deviations for the perception statements regarding motivation. The item "I believe motivation to learn is directly related to ambition to succeed" had the highest mean rating of 4.39. "I believe motivation to learn is directly related to personal desire to learn" was the second highest item with a mean rating of 4.35. Usefulness of the content was the third rated item with a mean rating of 4.26. All other items ranged from 4.17 to 3.45.

Table 2. Percentions Regarding the Motivations to Learn as Reported by Members of the Iowa Young Farmers Educational Association (N=93).

Statements	Mean	Standard Deviation
I believe motivation to learn is directly related to:		
1. Ambition to succeed	4.39	.66
2. Personal desire to learn	4.35	.75
3. Usefulness of the content	4.26	.64
4. Immediacy of the need	4.17	.81
5. Satisfaction from achievement	4.14	.72
6. Attention capturing ability of the presenter	3.95	.97
7. Confidence of the learner	3.85	.86
8. Clearly stated goal	3.75	.90
9. External incentives	3.53	.84
10. Getting pleasure	3.45	.85

Note: A Likert-type of scale 1 to 5, with 1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree.

Data in Table 3 indicates the learning method preference for selected young farmers in Iowa. The highest rated item was "I like to learn by hands-on experience", with a mean rating of 4.61. "I like to learn with a variety of methods" and "I like to learn individually" rated second and third with mean ratings of 4.28 and 4.03, respectively.

Data reported in Table 4 indicates the

Table 3. Learning Method Preferences as Reported bv the Members of Iowa Young; Farmers Educational Association (N=93).

Statements	Mean	Standard Deviation
I like to learn:		
1. By hands-on experience	4.61	0.59
2. With a variety of methods	4.28	0.73
3. Individually	4.03	0.77
4. In groups	3.95	0.83

Note: A Likert-type of scale 1 to 5, with 1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree.

mean ratings and standard deviations regarding factors that may motivate educational program participants as perceived by members of the Iowa Young Farmers Educational Association. The top rated factor that may encourage participation in educational programs was increasing profitability with a mean rating of 4.35. Both "to learn the latest technology" and "to learn something new" followed with the same mean rating of 4.29. All other ratings were relatively lower.

Table 4. Perceptions of Motivational Factors as Reported bv the Members of Iowa Young Farmers Educational Association (N=93)

Statements	Mean	Standard Deviation
I participate in educational programs:		
1. To increase profitability	4.35	.74
2. To learn the latest technology	4.29	.67
3. To learn something new	4.29	.67
4. Because of relevance	4.03	.68
5. To increase my job options	3.76	1.04
6. Because of its accessibility	3.76	.76
7. Because of affordability	3.47	.88
8. To maintain my job status	3.43	1.03
9. Because of time convenience	3.33	.89

Note: A Likert-type of scale 1 to 5, with 1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicated that respondents were mostly in agreement with the perception statements regarding motivation to learn. The farmers in this study perceived that motivation to learn is related to ambition to succeed, personal desire to learn, usefulness of the content material, immediacy of the need and satisfaction from achievement. The findings revealed that multiple variables are involved in adult motivation. Warren (1973) stated that human motivation is not unitary, but rather it is a configuration of many factors. These findings appear to confirm for adult education in agriculture what has been reported in the literature in other areas of adult education. There is no limit to the number of reasons why adults might want to learn something, as long as adults feel a sense of choice (Knowles, 1980). Ambition to succeed, personal desire to learn and satisfaction from achievement are internal sources of motivation.

This information indicates that adults are primarily motivated by internal factors either to learn or to do other things. On the other hand, usefulness of the content and immediacy of the need are extrinsic sources of motivation. Adults are motivated to learn by both intrinsic and extrinsic factors. These findings are in agreement with the findings of Deci and Ryan (1985) and Knowles (1980) that adults are motivated to learn by internal and external factors.

Internal and external sources of motivation appear to be inseparable. One might have personal desire to learn, but this desire may be linked to ambition to succeed materially. This relationship may not be true in every situation, but it is human nature to think about what a person might gain fi-om participation in any activity. For example, people may make contributions for religious reasons because they expect rewards after this life or even in this life.

The results of this study show that the farmers involved in the study preferred to learn by hands-on activities. The findings of Gresh (1995) also show that most adult learners preferred hands-on learning approach. The findings also indicate that adult farmers prefer learning through a variety of methods and individual projects.

It can be said that these farmers were participating in educational programs mainly for economic reasons. Desire to learn new technology was linked to a desire to increase efficiency and profitability. Interest in relevant material indicates once again the farmer's desire to use the information to enhance their economic gain and/or to minimize economic loss.

Conclusions/ Implications

Based on the findings of this study, various conclusions were drawn. Regardless of demographic differences, respondents were motivated to participate in educational programs for economic reasons. For example, learning new technology and other factors that could help them achieve profitability motivated these farmers to participate in educational programs. The study indicates that client involvement in program planning would increase participation in educational programs. Motivation to learn is driven by multiple factors, both internal and external. The preferred method of learning was through hands-on activities using a variety of approaches.

The results of this study may assist educational leaders to improve their program planning and provide programs that meet the needs of farmers, and as a result improve farmer participation. Farmer associations and extension educators may also benefit from the findings of this study. Based on these findings, allowing farmers to choose what they want to learn before planning any educational programs; and giving them opportunities to voice their views while in these sessions may motivate them to participate in educational programs. Practical and hands-on teaching and learning methods may motivate farmers to engage in learning activities. These findings could be incorporated into teaching methods courses to enrich the content and make adult programs in agriculture more appropriate to the needs of the clientele.

Recommendations

Several recommendations were made based on the findings and conclusions drawn from this study, Increasing profitability continues to serve as a marketing point for educational programs and educators to increase farmers' participation in educational programs. It is recommended that program planners should maintain a focus on profitability as an integral part of all educational programs designed for farmers. The need to know about the latest technology is popular among farmers. Focusing on technology could motivate farmers to attend educational programs. Program planners should interact with the farmers and identify real world challenges they

encounter and design programs that would provide practical solutions to their problems; and program material must be of interest to farmers. Providers must make sure the educational material is based on the latest information and is relevant to the situation of potential participants. Providers must make sure that participants get something to take home with them, and program planners should incorporate more hands-on learning activities into programs.

It is recommended that further studies be conducted that focus on a larger population. Use should be made of both quantitative and qualitative methods in order to compare the results and increase the reliability of the findings. Further studies should focus on a non-farming population or agri-business persons to test perceptions of motivation among a wide range of adult learners.

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