

Ohio Young Farmers' and Young Farmers Wives' Perceptions of Program Effectiveness

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Accepted for Publication March 1988

Young farmer and young farm wives organizations began being officially chartered into statewide organizations during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Education comprised the primary mission of these organizations as they proposed to help improve the economic and social position of the members. The purposes of the organizations typically included improving leadership capabilities, furthering cooperation and citizenship, and providing social and recreational activities.

The two decades since the chartering of these organizations have seen numerous changes in the nature of agriculture, the demographics of the farm population, and the economic climate for the industry. The environment for adult education has also changed during the same time period. Agribusiness persons have increased their awareness of the need to play a role in the education of the farmers, the financial climate surrounding the Cooperative Extension Service and its mission have undergone scrutiny (Extension in the '80s, 1983; U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1983), and the trends in adult education as provided through the secondary and post-secondary school programs have not progressed significantly (Martin, 1987; Miller, 1987).

Are these organizations fulfilling their chartered purpose? Has the nature of agriculture, the need for information and education, and the nature of the delivery of adult agricultural education changed sufficiently to antiquate the relatively young educational program? These problems drove an investigation of the perceptions of the members of the Ohio Young Farmers Association (OYFA) and the Ohio Young Farm Wives Association (OYFWA).

Little was actually known about the persons who participate in these organizations. A profile of the status of the current members could benefit those attempting to recruit new members by knowing the characteristics of those most likely to join. The current members are those who are probably in the best position to assess the effectiveness of the organizations in meeting their objectives. Any variability in perceptions of effectiveness could perhaps be explained by examining the relationship between the psychosocial characteristics and the perceptions of effectiveness.

Objectives

Specifically, the objectives of this study were to:

1. Describe the psychosocial (personal, family and business) characteristics of members of the OYFA and the OYFWA.
2. Describe the members' perceptions of the effectiveness of the OYFA and OYFWA in fulfilling their purposes.
3. Determine the relationships between the psychosocial characteristics of the members and their perceptions of the effectiveness of the organization to which they belonged.

Methodology

Survey research methodology was employed in this investigation. Two populations were investigated, with the first being the 1986-87 dues-paying members of the OYFA and the second being comprised of members of the OYFWA. The frame for the OYFA was obtained from the Ohio Department of Education, Agriculture Education Service, with a population size of 1,488. A membership roster was not maintained for the OYFWA, but a list of chartered local organizations was available. The frame was constituted by writing each affiliated OYFWA chapter and requesting a list of members to produce a frame (N = 500). Lists were not found to include any duplications; therefore, frame and selection errors were considered to be controlled.

Using the sampling formula of Krejcie and Morgan (1970), a sample size of 306 was needed for the OYFA population and of 226 for the OYFWA population. Sampling error was thus controlled with a 95% confidence level and a 5% accuracy rate. The two populations were then stratified by district, and chapters were randomly selected until a proportionate sample was obtained from each district.

Instrumentation

A researcher-developed questionnaire was used to gather the data for the study. Validity was established using a panel of experts who had been involved with the OYFA and OYFWA organizations or who were involved in scholarly activities related to adult education in agriculture. A pilot test was used to establish internal consistency reliability on the instrument. Perceptions of effectiveness were intuitively divided into five domains, and several items which did not fit in a domain were reported separately as overall organizational effectiveness. The Cronbach alphas for the domains ranged from .47 to .86, which would be acceptable for this exploratory study (Nunnally, 1967). With these procedures to establish validity and reliability, measurement errors should have been minimized.

Perceptions of effectiveness on the five domains were assessed using a four-point, Likert-type scale varying from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). A response choice of NA (not applicable) was provided for those respondents who had not had an opportunity to experience the area assessed by the attitudinal statement. Frequencies were recorded for this category, but such data were not entered into the calculation of descriptive statistics. Overall domain means could be calculated by averaging across the items, since the domains were internally consistent. To assist in negating response set, some items were negatively worded, and the values assigned to individual responses were reversed across the scale for those items to calculate descriptive statistics on the domains.

Data Collection

Data were collected using modification of the Dillman (1978) techniques. The questionnaire was printed in booklet format and included in a packet sent to the subjects at each round of the mailings. An initial packet comprised of questionnaire, cover letter, and a preaddressed, stamped return envelope was mailed to each individual in the sample. After a two and one-half week waiting period, a second packet, with new cover letter, was sent to all nonrespondents. To control nonresponse error, late respondents were assumed to be like the nonrespondents (Miller & Smith, 1983), and an ANOVA was run between early and late respondents on each of the domains of effectiveness. No significant differences were found, and the results were deemed generalizable to the

samples and the populations. A total of 240 usable questionnaires (36% from the OYFA and 56% from the OYFWA) comprised the data sample, with 252 being in the accepting (returning) sample, but 11 had incorrect mailing addresses and 1 respondent indicated she had never been a member of the OYFWA. Of this number, 110 (47%) were from OYFA members and 126 (53%) were from OYFWA members.

Data Analysis

Data were coded and analyzed by the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences program of the Instruction and Research Computer Center at The Ohio State University. Descriptive statistics and inferential statistics were used. Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficients and point biserial correlation coefficients were utilized. Scatterplots were examined for linearity and homoscedasticity when using the Pearson calculation.

Results

The typical OYFWA member was 34 years of age, married, lived in a rural area, was a high school graduate, and had children in her family. These members responded that their occupations were primarily as a homemaker with an off-farm occupation. The most frequently reported off-farm employment for these women was in non-agriculturally related businesses.

The typical OYFA member was 32 years old, married, lived in a rural area, was a high school graduate, and had children in his family. They were principally full-time farmers. Those who had off-farm occupations responded that they were employed primarily at agricultural businesses.

Most members classified themselves as active members of their organization and chapter. On the average, young farmers and farm wives had been members three to six years. The majority of the respondents reported that, among the state-sponsored activities, they had most frequently participated in the state tour or state conference, but only a minority had participated in the state camp program.

At the chapter level, respondents indicated that the chapters most frequently had five to eight meetings per year and at least one community improvement project per year. Fifty-three percent of the members indicated that they had had input into evaluating the program of activities for their local chapter.

The perceptions of effectiveness were divided into domains of: (a) organizational effectiveness in leadership development, (b) effectiveness of state and local planning, (c) effectiveness of OYFA/OYFWA in working with other organizations, (d) effectiveness of the state association, (e) local chapter effectiveness, and (f) an area of individual items labeled overall organizational effectiveness.

The perceptions of effectiveness in leadership development domain (Table 1) produced an overall average of 2.9, which would be very near the agree category of the scale. Within the domain, the quality of local leadership garnered the most positive response; the local activities to develop leadership produced the lowest mean value.

Similarly, the mean value for the domain of organizational planning effectiveness (Table 2) average was a 3.0, which was in the agree category. Local planning received the highest values, and innovativeness of local and state programs tied for the lowest values in the domain but were still near the agreement level.

Table 1

Members' Perceptions of Organization Effectiveness In Leadership

Statement	n	Level of Agreement	
		M	SD
I have learned to be a better leader since I joined this organization	224	2.84	.64
Few people have a chance to obtain a state leadership office	195	2.85 ^a	.77
We have poor leadership in our local chapter	235	3.09 ^a	.76
I have many opportunities in this organization to develop my leadership skills	222	2.89	.60
We have few activities at the local level to develop leadership	228	2.66 ^a	.73

Note. Domain mean = 2.9, SD = 0.48. Scale: SD = strongly disagree (1), D = disagree (2), A = agree (3), SA = strongly agree (4).

^aReverse scored.

Table 2

Members' Perceptions of Organizational Planning Effectiveness (State and Local)

Statement	n	Level of Agreement	
		M	SD
Our local chapter poorly plans its yearly educational programs	235	3.20 ^a	.78
Our local members plan the local educational program	226	3.19	.67
The OYFA/OYFWA state programs show little innovation	174	2.88 ^a	.64
Our local programs show little innovation	230	2.88 ^a	.72

Note. Domain mean = 3.0, SD = 0.50. Scale: SD = strongly disagree (1), D = disagree (2), A = agree (3), SA = strongly agree (4).

^aReverse scored.

The mean value for the domain of effectiveness in working with other organizations (Table 3), at 2.7, was near the agreement level. Assistance from extension agents received the highest overall mean score, and the lowest was produced by the College of Agriculture at The Ohio State University.

Table 4, related to the effectiveness of the state association, again showed that the members perceived agreement with a mean domain

value of 3.0. The organization of the state tour received the highest value and importance of the state association the lowest, but it was still near the agreement value.

Table 3

Members' Perceptions of the Effectiveness of the OYFA/OYFWA Working With Other Organizations

Statement	n	Level of Agreement	
		M	SD
Our chapter often works with other community organizations	232	2.75	.72
Local Ohio Cooperative Extension Service agents do not provide educational assistance to our local chapter	212	3.02 ^a	.82
The OSU College of Agriculture provides little assistance of our organizations	166	2.63 ^a	.72
The OSU Department of Agricultural Education needs to give more organization and guidance to the organizations	191	2.68	.68

Note. Domain mean = 2.7, SD = 0.42. Scale: SD = strongly disagree (1), D = disagree (2), A = agree (3), SA = strongly agree (4).

^aReverse scored.

Table 4

Members' Perceptions of the Effectiveness of the State Association

Statement	n	Level of Agreement	
		M	SD
The OYFA/OYFWA Summer Farm Tour is very educational	130	3.31	.49
OYFA/OYFWA Summer Tour is poorly organized	134	3.38 ^a	.53
The OYFA/OYFWA State Association is important to me	211	2.80	.72
State officers are poorly trained	152	3.04 ^a	.54

Note. Domain mean = 3.0, SD = 0.04. Scale: SD = strongly disagree (1), D = disagree (2), A = agree (3), SA = strongly agree (4).

^aReverse scored.

Local chapter effectiveness (Table 5) was also valued near the agreement value (2.9). Frequency of recreational activities obtained the highest value, and the lowest value resulted from the equality of member involvement in chapter activities.

Table 5

Members' Perceptions of Local Chapter Effectiveness

Statement	n	Level of Agreement	
		M	SD
All local members are equally involved in our chapter	233	2.12	.76
The quality of the educational programs are poor in my local chapter	232	3.18 ^a	.68
Recreation is an important part of our chapter	236	2.79	.70
We have too many recreational activities in our chapter	233	3.19 ^a	.48
My family has limited involvement in our local chapter	230	2.68 ^a	.81
Meetings are held when it is convenient for the vocational agriculture teacher	213	3.06 ^a	.75
We have too many guest speakers at our local meetings	237	3.15 ^a	.43
Local chapter officers are poorly trained	228	2.72 ^a	.68

Note. Domain mean = 2.9, SD = 0.33. Scale: SD = strongly disagree (1), D = disagree (2), A = agree (3), SA = strongly agree (4).

^aReverse scored.

Table 6 contains an array of statements related to the organization. Each statement on this table should be considered independently; therefore, statements have not been averaged due to the diversity of statements in the category. The reader may wish to note that the highest scoring item in this category was related to the learning motive of the member for participating, which confirms that education is the primary purpose of the organization for the members. The lowest value for the social aspect of visiting with my friends at the meetings does not support the findings of Todd and Paulus (1960), which may indicate the need for some further research into the motivation of adults for attending, since the socialization dimension may not be as great as once perceived.

Using the conventions of Davis (1971), the results in Table 7 illustrated that most of the relationships between the selected psychosocial characteristics and the domains of effectiveness were low to negligible. A moderate association was found (.33) between the attendance of members on the state tour and the perceptions of the members of the effectiveness of the state association. One could clearly conclude that these characteristics do not help explain the variability in the ratings of the effectiveness domains. Future investigations would do well to seek other explanatory relationships.

When the psychosocial characteristic investigated was nominal in nature, analysis of variance was used to test for significant differences. For example, between OYFA and OYFWA members, ANOVA was run on each domain. These further analyses to examine relationships did not produce significant or practical differences.

Table 6

Other Statements Concerning Members' Perceptions of Organizational Effectiveness

Statement	n	Level of Agreement	
		M	SD
My main reason for being in this organization is to obtain knowledge which I can use	235	3.11	.63
I have learned many useful business management skills through the educational programs	225	2.78	.65
Vocational agriculture teachers are well prepared to teach adults in agriculture	214	2.64	.80
The local vocational agriculture instructor does not provide enough personal instruction through home visits	192	2.59	.89
My main reason for going to meetings is to visit with my friends	232	2.34	.67
I recommend membership in the OYFA/OYFWA to my friends	231	3.08	.56
We promote our chapter on local radio	219	2.42	.80
The awards program is fair to all members in the OYFA/OYFWA organizations	186	2.55	.83

Note: Scale: SD = strongly disagree (1), D = disagree (2), A = agree (3), SA = strongly agree (4).

Conclusions and Implications

These results were generalizable to the 1986-87 members of the OYFA and the OYFWA within the confines of the sampling error. Frame, selection and nonresponse errors were controlled to improve the generalizability of the results.

Given that active membership in Ohio is defined as extending to 35 years of age, the results indicate that the average member of the OYFA (32 years) and OYFWA (34 years) was approaching the upper age limit for active involvement. This may limit to some extent the leadership opportunities for the average member. Thirty-nine percent of the OYFWA members were above this mean age, with the mode being 33; 41% of the OYFA members were above this age, with a mode of 28. Only about 6% of the members of both groups were in the 19-23 range. Efforts to recruit more active involvement of younger members may be in order.

Over 51% of the OYFWA association members and 56% of the OYFA members had some formal education beyond high school. This seems to support the generally held opinion that members are better educated than in the past, but such a conclusion cannot be verified because of the lack of longitudinal data available from this study.

Other characteristics provided illuminating information. Approximately 11% of the respondents were not married. Off-farm employment was reported by 44% of the wives, with most in professional or semi-professional occupations. Twenty percent of the OYFA members who worked off-farm were engaged in non-agricultural pursuits. About 53% of both

Table 7

Relationship of Psychosocial Characteristics With Effective Domains

Psychosocial Characteristics	Domains				
	1	2	3	4	5
Membership	-.05	-.17	-.17	-.11	-.05
Member type	-.08	-.18	-.07	-.11	-.03
Years of membership	.03	-.12	.05	-.01	.11
State tour participation	.08	-.03	-.09	-.03	.33
State conference participation	.19	-.08	.02	.07	.13
State camp participation	.05	-.01	.09	-.02	.18
No. chapter mtgs./year	.26	.22	.09	.18	.10
Local residence	-.002	.02	.09	-.05	.007
Type of occupation	-.05	-.12	-.04	.001	-.10
% acres farmed owned	-.07	-.08	-.08	.06	.07
Acres farmed	-.09	-.15	-.09	-.05	.003
Years farmed	.05	-.001	.03	.08	.07
Education level	.003	.06	-.03	-.002	-.001
Vo. Ag. In high school	-.02	-.06	-.04	-.02	-.05
4-H member	-.09	-.001	-.13	-.02	-.05

Note. Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficients and point biserial correlations were used. Domains: 1 = Organizational effectiveness in leadership development, 2 = Effectiveness of state and local planning, 3 = Effectiveness of OYFA/OYFWA in working with other organizations, 4 = Effectiveness of the state association, 5 = Local chapter effectiveness.

groups had been members for seven or more years. About 40% farmed 600 or more acres, and nearly 12% farmed less than 100 acres. Most did not participate in civic organizations; those who did participate listed a parent-teacher organization most often. Nearly 40% of the OYFA members had not had vocational agriculture in high school. About 77% had been 4-H members. These data can aid in conceptualizing the background and status of the members and help in program planning and recruitment efforts.

The profession is certainly aware of the changing nature of agribusiness. The clientele being served through the young farmer and young farm wives organizations may also be changing. These results imply that a thorough examination of who is being served through these organizations should be made. The members were in general agreement with the effectiveness of the organization. The question is, how can the organization better serve the members? Further, would different types of programs better serve the needs of persons who are not current members? Since these groups are self-selected, what are the educational needs of non-members? What is the status and perception of those who select not to continue to participate in the organizations? Would alternative content, delivery modes and times, and so forth, serve to open the window of opportunity for other learners?

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