A Comparison of Organizational Socialization and Job Satisfaction in New Extension Agents within the Southern Region

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- “People are definitely a company’s greatest asset. It doesn’t make any difference whether the product is cars or cosmetics. A company is only as good as the people it keeps.”

Organizational Socialization:

- Definitions:
  - A process where employees learn about and adapt to new jobs, roles and the culture of the workplace (Klein and Weaver, 2000)
  - The fashion in which an individual is taught and learns what behaviors and perspectives are customary and desirable within the work setting as well as what ones are not (Van Maanen and Schein, 1979).
  - The act, process or method by which one acquires any type of functional skill or ability that is required to perform a specific job (Taormina, 1997).

Why does Organizational Socialization Matter?

- It has a major influence on the performance of the new hire as well as the organization (Louis, Posner, Powel, 1983).
- Completion of a formal socialization program increases employee productivity, increases self assurance on the job, increases job satisfaction, motivation and commitment to the organization (Blake & Jennings, 2000).
- Extension professionals are usually hired with technical subject matter knowledge, though they often lack skills in areas that are needed to be effective extension professionals (Campbell, Grieshop, Sokolow & Wright, 2004).

Problem Statement:

- Agent turnover is great.
- Significant costs associated with agent turnover.
- Little research to determine the most effective way to socialize new agents.
- The literature indicates that the faster new hires are socialized/oriented, the higher their job satisfaction, and the higher commitment to the organization.

Employee Turnover:

- Turnover costs the organization between $7200 - $30,000 per employee (Chandler, 2004).
- $80,000 in lost dollars each year due to turnover in Ohio (Kutilek, 2000)
- Loss of $1 million for every ten professional employees that leave (Ramllall, 2004).
- NOTE: These figures are likely to be somewhat higher today!
Benefits to Extension:
- Professional development specialists will be able to maximize professional development dollars on the methods that cause the greatest impact on job satisfaction.
- Higher level of organizational socialization, leads to a higher level of job satisfaction.
- High job satisfaction, higher retention rate.
- Significant dollar savings to extension with less employee turnover.

Research Study Objectives:
- This study was designed to examine perception's of new extension agents level of organizational socialization, examine job satisfaction, and compare job satisfaction with each method of organizational socialization identified by states.
- 6 identified research objectives.

Research Objectives (1)
1. Gather demographic data on new extension agents in each state including:
   - Months on the job
   - Programmatic area
   - Extension positions held prior
2. Examine perceived level of organizational socialization using the OSI (Organizational Socialization Index) developed by R.J. Taormina (1997).
   - Knowledge, Training, Co-worker support, Future Prospects

Research Objectives (2)
3. Examine perceived level of job satisfaction of new extension agents using the aJIG (Abridged Job In General) developed by Smith, Kendall & Hulin (1969, revised 1997).
4. Compare the perceived level of organizational socialization with perceived level of job satisfaction of new agents.

Research Objectives (3)
5. Examine job satisfaction with various (seven) methods of organizational socialization
6. Compare the number of organizational socialization methods participated in by new agents with respect to their job satisfaction

Research Design and Methods:
- Participants
  - All new agents who have been on the job for 6 to 18 months at the start of this project in twelve states within the southern region.
  - Included all states except Arkansas (chose not to participate)
  - 321 were identified
  - 241 participated
  - 75.07% return rate
Methodology

Instrumentation:
- To measure organizational socialization:
  - Organizational Socialization Inventory (OSI) developed by R.J. Taormina.
  - 20 questions. Five questions for each of the four domains.
  - 5 point Likert-type scale
- To measure job satisfaction:
  - Abridged Job In General (aJIG) developed by JIG research group was used.
  - 20 questions. Five questions in each of the four areas of job satisfaction.
  - Work on present job, present pay, Opportunities for promotion, Supervision.

Data Collection:
- ZOOMERANG© an online survey management system was used
  - Very easy to use. Both instruments were used on the same survey
  - Sent to all participants via email
  - All surveys were recorded with ZOOMERANG© and researcher downloaded all data from the site

Data Analysis:
- Objective #1:
  - Gather demographic data on participants.
  - Program area
  - Months on the job
  - Previous professional employment
  - Descriptive statistics were used (SPSS version 12)

Results
- Objective #2:
  - Determine perceived level of organizational socialization using OSI
  - Training Score $M = 3.5$ SD = .80
  - Knowledge Score $M = 3.6$ SD = .65
  - Co-Worker Support $M = 4.1$ SD = .57
  - Future Prospects $M = 3.7$ SD = .75
  - Total Organizational Score $M = 3.8$ SD = .58
  - Scale of 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree

Additional Questions:
- In addition, participants were asked to answer demographic questions, socialization methods that they had participated in, and for any additional comments that they may have.
- Instrument had a total of 46 multiple choice questions and 1 “comments” question.

Demographics
- Months on the job:
  - 6 – 8 months: 16.2%
  - 9 – 12 months: 31.5%
  - 13 – 15 months: 19.9%
  - 16 – 18 months: 32.4%
- Programmatic Area:
  - 4-H Youth Development: 32.8%
  - Agriculture: 22.8%
  - FCS: 18.7%
  - Horticulture: 10.8%
  - Other (split appointment): 9.5%
  - Natural Resources: 5.4%
Results

Objective #3:
- Determine perceived level of job satisfaction using a JIG
  - Yes = 2, Not Sure = 1.5, No = 1
  - Out of a total potential score of 40:
    - Mean score for job satisfaction $\bar{X} = 34.6$  $SD = 3.4$

Results

Opportunities for promotion:
- 53.1% Good opportunity for promotion
- 45.6% Promotion was based on ability
- 51.9% Good chance for promotion
Quotes:
- Why is it necessary to write a thesis to get a pay raise?
- The main problem with me foreseeing myself in this position long term is the low level of compensation. Without knowing that a pay increase ($20,000) will occur within the next 5 years, there will be no way that I will or can remain in this position.

Results

Highest Scores were on Work in Present Job:
- 83.4% Job is satisfying
- 86.3% Job gives sense of accomplishment
- 90.3% Job is challenging
Quotes:
- I worked as a program assistant before accepting the job as an agent. Even though I had a good understanding of the job, I was still required to do the new agent orientation. I think that this was a very good idea. I learned a lot of additional information from this orientation.
- I do not think that my level of satisfaction with extension reflects the quality of the orientation process. I love my job!

Results

Lowest scores were in the area of present pay:
- 32.8% Pay was adequate for current expenses
- 41.1% Current pay is fair
- 20.3% Well paid
Quotes:
- I feel that I am paid fairly for the work that I do, but not for the hours I put in at the office.
- The pay might be okay if we weren’t traveling all the time or required to work weekends and night with no comp time.
- Another issue is the pay and “comp” time. I would not have a problem with that salary I receive if I did not have to work nights and weekends. I would be more inclined to accept my pay if I were given proper “comp” time.

Results

Objective #4:
- Compare organizational socialization with job satisfaction to determine if they are correlated
  - A Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated
  - $r = .675$, indicating a strong positive correlation between how participants felt they were socialized compared to their total job satisfaction score

Results

In addition, a Pearson's Correlation was used to determine if there was a relationship between job satisfaction and time (months) in extension
- The longer participants were on the job, the lower their job satisfaction ($r = -.165$)
- The longer participants were on the job the less likely they felt their training to be adequate ($r = -.035$) and the less positive they were about their future prospects ($r = -.166$)
- Knowledge score was a positive relationship to months of extension ($r = .014$)
### Results

**Objective #5:**
- Compare job satisfaction with the type of organizational socialization to determine if there is a significant difference in the methods used.
- One-way ANOVAs were conducted, controlling for months in extension, and explored the impact of job satisfaction with each different method of organization socialization employed by the different states in the southern region.

### Seven Identified Methods of Organizational Socialization:

- Formal mentors (assigned)
- Informal mentors (self-selected)
- Immediate orientation program (less than 3 months)
- Orientation after 3 months
- Web based training modules
- County extension director orientation
- Discussion of job expectations and duties with co-workers

### Results

- A high level of significance was found with the following methods:
  - Self selection of mentors \( F(1, 239) = 4.554, p = .034 \)
  - New agents participating in orientation immediately after being hired (3 months or less), \( F(1, 239) = 6.394, p = .012 \)
  - County Extension Directors meeting with new agents and discussing job expectations and duties, \( F(1, 239) = 10.24, p = .002 \)

### Results

- Marginally significant method included:
  - Co-workers assisting new agents with understanding roles and responsibilities \( F(1, 239) = 2.03, p = .165 \)
  - Not significant included:
    - Assigning a formal mentor \( F(1, 239) = .535, p = .465 \)
    - Holding new agent orientation after being employed for 3 months or longer \( F(1, 239) = 1.276, p = .263 \)
    - Web modules \( F(1, 239) = .515, p = .474 \)

### Results

**Objective 6:** Compare the number of organizational socialization methods participated in by new agents with respect to their job satisfaction

- An ANOVA was conducted to determine if the number of methods of organizational socialization that agents participated in impacted their job satisfaction
- Agents were grouped according to how many organizational methods they selected
- It was found that the number of methods that agents participated in did impact job satisfaction \( F(3, 238) = 3.52, p = .031 \)

### Limitations of the Study:

- A southern region study only
- Can affect generalizability
  - 75% return rate
  - Census study with entire population
- Agents with 6 – 18 months
- Possible researcher bias
  - Zoomerang©
    - Controlled all data - NO missing data
    - Allowed respondents to have easy access to survey
    - Had assistance with data input into SPSS
Implications:

- Objective 1:
  - More 4-H agents were considered new than any other group
  - A recommendation to address this issue calls for research in job satisfaction in programmatic areas
  - Working towards identifying satisfaction levels of the different program areas, and which organizational socialization methods made the largest impact per programmatic group might yield some additional discoveries on agents making the decision to leave or stay within the organization

- Objective 2:
  - There is a strong positive correlation between knowledge and training. The more training a new agent receives, the higher the knowledge perception.
  - With respect to future prospects, only 52% of new agents felt that they had a good chance for promotion, however 78% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that the organization would employ them for many more years to come.

- Objective 3:
  - Satisfaction with pay and salary was low with approximately 62% of agents reporting that they felt they were not well paid, and 55% felt they were underpaid
  - Extension agents have traditionally been required to work nights and weekends as well as the traditional 40-hour a week

- Objective #4:
  - Research findings indicate that the perceived level of organizational socialization for new extension agents does have a positive relationship to job satisfaction, as the literature also indicates.
  - A strong positive correlation exists between how participants felt they were socialized compared to their total job satisfaction score.

Recommendations:

- Provide opportunities for growth and development by allowing agents to hold district and state-level leadership positions, serving on committees, and even serving as mentors to new professionals.
- Work toward a system that can address the five to seven years it takes to obtain a promotion in an extension position in a more proactive manner.
- The first recommendation that addresses the issue of pay, salary and lack of "comp time" would be to make sure prior to hiring new agents, that time commitment issues are understood.
- The second recommendation that addresses this issue is to undertake a process that allows those hired into extension positions to have opportunities that they seek in order to stay in a position.
- Hiring the right person for the right job is key and allowing a potential hire to examine aspects of the position prior to interviewing, can assist with pre-conceived notions of the job itself.
Recommendations

Objective #5:
- Of the several organizational socialization methods employed with extension in the southern region, the impact of the C.E.D./immediate supervisor was most significant with respect to job satisfaction for new extension professionals.
- This study points out that the longer new agents are on the job, the less satisfied they are with the job.

Recommendations

Objective #6:
- It was determined that the number of methods used with socializing new agents did increase job satisfaction.
- Using those methods that were determined to increase job satisfaction (CED/immediate supervisor discussions, immediate orientation, and self selection of mentors) as primary methods of organizational socialization is highly recommended.
- Make sure that those methods are used effectively, by studying the research and literature, is highly suggested.

Additional Recommendations:

- Give new agents ample opportunities to meet other agents in the district/region to assist with self selection of mentors.
- Use exit interviews to facilitate understanding of why new agents leave.
- Undertake research to identify characteristics of effective mentors.

Additional Recommendations:

- Working toward a method to socialize/orient and train new employees immediately has the potential to increase job satisfaction and, as the literature indicates, increase job tenure.
- The selection of mentors, if following Bandura, would involve a mentor that is seen as similar to the new agent.

Additional Recommendations:

- Job satisfaction and longitudinal studies.
  - Follow new agents after 18 months to determine at what point they decide to stay or leave.
  - Examine programmatic areas and job satisfaction. (4-H agents represent the largest group of new hires).
  - Follow up with CED’s. Review research and present the IMPORTANT findings related to CED’s and job satisfaction.
  - Organizational socialization DOES impact job satisfaction.
  - Consider expanding on use of methods deemed significant.

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