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Special Features . . .

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A Study of the Factors Involved in the Decisions of Unemployed, Unskilled Workers to Forego Retraining Under the Manpower Development and Training Act of 1962

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This is a report of research completed by the Norfolk Division of Virginia State College under contract with and supported by funds from the Office of Manpower, Automation and Training, United States Department of Labor. This study attempted to identify the factors involved in the decisions of unemployed, unskilled workers to forego retraining for a higher level of skill under the Manpower Development and Training Act of 1962 and to appraise these factors in terms of the implications involved for future planning and execution of retraining programs.

Basic to the success of the efforts of government and industry and to provide retraining for unemployed, unskilled workers are the choice processes of workers themselves in deciding to invest the time and effort in retraining. In many cases the workers needing the most assistance are the rejecters of offers by agencies to lend it.

The study attempted to gain insights concerning these choice processes in order to guide future planning of retraining programs and the manner in which the opportunities for retraining are offered to prospective trainees. The study was completed in Norfolk, Virginia. It used a combination of interview and attitude assessment techniques. Men who had rejected retraining opportunities and men who enrolled in retraining programs were the subjects.

PROCEDURE

A total of 314 unemployed and unskilled men in the Norfolk—Portsmouth Metropolitan Labor Market Area were interviewed in an attempt to identify the factors involved in the decisions of workers to forego retraining. The sample consisted of 90 who enrolled in retraining and 224 men who were offered the opportunity to enroll but decided not to do so. A combination of interview

and attitude assessment technique were used to gather data. A team of interviewers from Virginia State College and the Virginia Employment Commission visited homes and conducted the interviews.

Ten hypotheses were tested in the study. They were as follows:

1. That communications with the men were not sufficient to adequately convey the requirements for enrollment in the program or the potential benefits.
2. That education, level of income, size of family and other personal-family characteristics distinguished the men who did not enroll.
3. That the men who did not enroll in the program felt that the training allowances were too low.
4. That the men who did not enroll in the program would have felt academically insecure in a structured learning situation.
5. That the idea of school attendance for older persons conflicted with cultural expectations for the men who did not enroll in the program.
6. That the men who did not enroll in the training program regarded it as some form of government relief which would have compromised their dignity as self-sufficing citizens.
7. That the men who did not enroll in the training program had some reservations about migrations for placement.
8. That the men who did not enroll in the program felt that the economy would eventually reabsorb them.
9. That the men who did not enroll in the program felt that they would experience difficulties in placement.

10. That the men who did not enroll in the program were apathetic.

FINDINGS

The study revealed three major factors which seemed to influence the decisions of a majority of the men to forego retraining. The study also revealed certain attitudes of the men concerning resumption of formal school work, returning to labor market and toward the role of government in the solution of unemployment. The deterrents to enrollment in retraining which seemed operative were:

1. **The training allowance of \$25. per week.** The men considered it inadequate to support their families over the period of the training programs. Approximately 65 percent of the men who did not enroll indicated that this was a factor in their decisions to forego retraining. The regulations discouraging after-school employment during the training period seemed to reinforce this reservation.
2. **The length of the training program.** The men were concerned that they would not be able to support their families over a long period of time. Approximately 80 percent of the men who rejected training programs of 52 weeks stated that they would have enrolled if the program had been shorter.
3. **Communications with prospective trainees.** This was difficult in the recruitment of trainees for these programs and resulted in some misunderstandings concerning the nature of the training programs. The fact that the programs were the first to be initiated in the area seemed to exacerbate this situation. Approximately one sixth of the rejecters reported that they did not feel eligible for the program when they first received information about it. About a fourth of the rejecters received information about the program by word of mouth. About half stated specifically that the lengths of the programs were not clear when they first received information. More than a fifth received the information too late to enroll even if they had attempted to do so. All of these proportions were significantly different from those of the enrollers when statistical tests were applied.

Backgrounds of experiences in the military service and formal education were different for rejecters and enrollers. The data regarding association with skilled workers and work experiences outside the home community also revealed differences. More than 60 percent of the enrollers had served in the military service as compared to about 40 percent of the rejecters. Thirty-six percent had received general education equivalency training in the military service as compared to about eight percent of the rejecters. Nearly two-thirds had worked with skilled tradesmen and two-thirds had worked outside their home com-

munities as compared to approximately two-fifths and one-third respectively of the rejecters.

Psychologists concerned with occupational choice and upward mobility where occupations are concerned consider propinquity to a given occupation as an important factor in the decision of an individual to enter such an occupation. Psychologists concerned with the decisions of individuals to innovate in business and work regard experiences which contribute to a cosmopolitan view as important, i.e., military services, broad work experiences.

The men were asked to give their opinion of how best to solve unemployment in their community. The rankings of opinions of the rejecters were led by more government retraining programs as a possible solution. Other possible solutions stated by large numbers of the men were the initiation of public works programs, improved job placement services in the community and more on-the-job training by industry.

The men reacted negatively to items in the interview instrument designed to ascertain the presence of apathy or a "welfare mentality." Most seemed eager to find employment and many were interested in retraining themselves if they could arrange to do so. The polarity of these and other attitudes in the study was expressed by a Likert sums of ratings index in which the highest rating is 6, the lowest is 2 and a neutral rating is 4. The average sum of rating in this area was 2 plus. It is well, perhaps, to reiterate the limitations of the instrument in attempting to measure the attitudes of these people. The investigators regard this finding as worthy of future study. Psychologists generally believe that a combination of poverty and bigotry promotes apathy. Both were operating in a large percent of these cases.

There seemed to be some reservations on the part of the men toward leaving the community to find work. Most men seemed to prefer to search for work in this area. The area is commonly referred to as "Tidewater, Virginia." and it has certain provincial aspects. The average sum of rating was 4 plus for both enrollers and rejecters here.

The men did not seem to regard the training program as a form of relief (the average sum of ratings was 3 plus).

School attendance at an advanced age seemed to pose a problem for the men who did not enroll, but the same obtained for those who did enroll (the average sum of ratings was 4 plus). The veterans in both groups were less apprehensive than the non-veterans. Their average sum of ratings was 2 plus. There was no significant differences in the attitudes of older men vis-a-vis younger men.

Most men in both groups felt that with new skills, they would have little difficulty in finding employment.

In sum, the investigators felt that the data supported two of the ten hypotheses tested and partially supported a third. These three were numbers 1, 2 and 3 in the previous listing of hypotheses. Adequate support, it is believed, was given the first hypothesis concerning the room for further perfection of communication techniques. Support seemed adequate also for the contention in the third hypothesis that the men felt that the training allowances were too low. Support was adequate for only a part of the second hypothesis which postulated education, level of income, size of family and personal-family characteristics as distinguishing characteristics of the rejecters. The data seemed to support only the personal-family aspects of this hypothesis. Also the support requires an interpretation of personal-family differences as a sort of cosmopolitanism evolving from military and work experiences and background of propinquity to skilled workers.

A portrait of a rejecter of retraining programs as revealed by the data in this study would be similar in many ways to a portrait of an enroller. Like the enroller, the rejecter was likely to be 35 or 36 years old and married. He was likely to have three or four dependents including his wife. His level of education was likely to be the 10th grade. It was likely that one additional member of his household worked. This person was likely to be his wife. Their combined earnings totaled about \$50 per week. This figure was apt to be higher if his level of education was higher than average or if he was white.

Unlike the enroller, the rejecter was less likely to have served in the military service or to have worked outside his home community. He was also less likely to have worked with or near skilled tradesmen.

The rejecter seemed to be a person who was more prone to misunderstand information about the new training programs. He also seemed to be a person who for some reason did not think that he could make his way over a long training period with the training allowance and the strictures on after-school employment involved in these programs.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The investigators concluded that none of the deterrents revealed in the study was too difficult to overcome. The investigators suggest the initiation of broad and long range information programs designed to facilitate community understanding of retraining programs and the gradual acceptance of their benefits and responsibilities.

Demonstration retraining programs designed to inform and to change attitudes are suggested. These programs would utilize techniques similar to those of rural social-psychologists in the Agricultural Extension Service in the diffusion programs for new farming practices.

Study of an experimentation with new recruiting techniques by directors, supervisors and re-

cruting agents for retraining programs is also suggested.

The investigators predict a lessening of reservations toward enrollment through an amelioration of the inadequacies related to the training allowances. This will be done, it is believed, by the broadened provisions of the 1963 Amendments to the Manpower Development and Training Act. These include the provisions for employment of trainees after school hours and the provision of supplements to the allowance.

The investigators suggest further that directors of retraining might well combine with directors of welfare in their communities to assure severely deprived families of support during the training period. Food stamps, free school lunches for the children, well baby clinics and medical assistance for the adults are possibilities for providing support. This small investment over a short period of time seems justified by the potential gains in self-sufficiency on the part of these families.

The investigators suggest, too, that planners note the findings of this study and re-examine the literature, generally, concerning the growing respect of poverty-ridden individuals for the value and power of education. This respect is deepening with each passing day as automation rapidly decimates the ranks of the unskilled worker. Planners might well become acutely aware of the nature of the frustrations of these people in trying to secure education for themselves and for their children and recognize what might be a tremendous opportunity to help these people to transcend barriers to learning and development and break out of their straits and cycles of poverty.

Finally, the investigators suggest replications of this type of study in other regions of the country. Communities with extreme variances in education need study. Also, rural people and youth and young adults are some examples of populations which might yield valuable information if studied. America is a diverse country and attempts to generalize too broadly from findings in one metropolitan area might cause planners to misjudge in attempting to aid certain groups which might be at the extremes in their differences.

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