

This study, prepared under a grant by the U.S. Department of Transportation, is a useful contribution to the understanding of productivity and job satisfaction in public mass transit systems. Mass transit, of course, is a subject of much current interest, as are productivity, job satisfaction, and public services. The joining of these four topics thus seems to guarantee a winner. As it turns out, however, the linkage is more of a burden than a help for this otherwise interesting study, since it reduces the generality of the findings. Public servants are not necessarily identical to private employees in their behavior. And even among public servants, bus drivers—or "transit operators" as the study calls them—are exceptional, since they are, in the words of the authors, "rulers of a minor kingdom." Being neither fish nor fowl, these civil service kings of the road may well be a special breed unto themselves.

The report consists of three separate studies, each of which is a self-contained article. The first and most substantial part is a massive investigation of the effect of job satisfaction and commitment to organizational performance. Two separate types of commitment are identified: value commitment—identification with the organization—and membership commitment—concern with retaining membership in the organization. The distinction is drawn in order to shed light on the effects of job satisfaction. The research questions—Are satisfied workers more productive?—seems at first to have an obvious and positive answer; but testing studies go back to Mayo's Hawthorne studies. Yet over the years, enough opposing evidence has been collected to raise serious doubt about this result, which is after all quite important for managerial decision making. In their attempt to resolve this issue, researchers have tended to retreat into complexity and volume. Numerous studies have been written on the subject. Of how many research questions is it said that "54 percent of the studies showed a high positive correlation," while "11 percent showed an inverse relationship"? Charting a course through this empirical swamp and providing a grid of theories for orientation, Perry and Angle make a valuable contribution to the literature.

The authors own empirical work is based on the development and use of a massive data set for 28 public transit systems in the western states. In their investigation they find an interesting degree of commitment and identification on the part of lower-ranking members of organizations, something previously doubted by other researchers because of the negative self-image of low-level jobs. The authors explain this seeming discrepancy by the great independence that bus drivers enjoy.

Another interesting result of the study is that women's job satisfaction and commitment are substantially higher than men's. This finding is at odds with almost all other results on sex differences in job attitudes.

The most important result of this chapter, however, is that where transit employees are committed to the organization it is a more effective organization. At the same time this commitment covaries with several factors that can be influenced and controlled by management, such as quality of supervision and rewards, thereby suggesting that improvements that increase commitment are likely to increase productivity in mass transit.

The second study deals with absenteeism and turnover, using a cost-benefit framework of analysis. This approach is refreshing in that it looks also at the benefits of turnover; for example, its stimulus for innovation and its reduction of wages, benefits, and pension contributions. Seen that way, turnover does not appear to be a pressing concern for the transit systems. Absenteeism, on the other hand, is more of a burden, because its costs are substantial.

The third study is the shortest but perhaps the most interesting. It deals with the choice of bargaining unit structure on the performance of transit systems. In theory, bargaining units of smaller size ought to permit more participation by union members. On the other hand, larger units are more efficient in their administration. To explain the influence of union structure, Perry and Angle test the effect of group size and fragmentation on a variety of "outcomes" such as job satisfaction, number of strikes, and so on. The results are both useful and interesting; for example, strike frequency grows with the fragmentation of bargaining units. For most other structural variations, however, there is little effect on outcomes. These and other findings would be more convincing to the reader if the empiricism were supported by a theoretical model. Economists and public choice scholars have developed a considerable body of related research in the "theory of clubs" of which the authors should take cognizance. The absence of a clearly stated model is most apparent in the issue of cause and effect. One of the problems of attitudinal studies is that the direction of causality is often unclear. Commitment affects performance, but the reverse relation is also true. While the authors recognize this problem, they do not use estimation techniques of simultaneous equations in response to their own concerns.

It would also be interesting to compare individual satisfaction and performance with the aggregate or organizational results. At present, Perry and Angle aggregate individual data within each transit system before correlation, thereby losing much information. The procedure of aggregations of individual satisfactions, a disputed but common procedure, could then be supplemented by showing how individual satisfaction affects individual performance measures. Despite these problems, however, the study is a valuable contribution to the understanding of performance and could be of great practical use to mass transit systems.

National Health Insurance: Conflicting Goals and Policy Choices.


This book presents a compendium of essays about various aspects of national health insurance. It has several strengths:

1. Its discussion of implementation issues is probably the most thorough in the literature. Such issues, as we have frequently learned, are often critical in determining the ultimate value of a public program.

2. The scope of the book is broad. Although it does not discuss either financing or a few particular benefits, such as mental health, it is probably the most comprehensive book on national health insurance. Moreover, it is written at a nontechnical level.

3. The book at several places weaves in interesting discussions of the Canadian experience. Although other discussions of the Canadian experience are available, they tend not to draw lessons for the United States about particular questions, as this book does.

4. Finally, the book has an excellent discussion of the state of knowl-