

ROLE PERCEPTION, JOB-RELATED TENSION AND ORGANISATIONAL CONFIDENCE OF THE VILLAGE EXTENSION WORKERS IN NSUKKA ZONE OF ENUGU STATE AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

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ABSTRACT

The study assessed the role perception, job-related tension and organisational confidence of the Village Extension workers (VEWS) in Nsukka Zone of Enugu State. Agricultural Development Programme. Data for the study were collected through structured questionnaire administered on 44 VEWS selected, using simple random sampling technique. Product moment correlation statistic and mean scores were used in the data analysis. The findings of the study indicated that a greater proportion of the VEWS perceived many of their role-expectations as being important. Many of the VEWS were worried about the job-related tension variables (e.g. lack of promotion opportunities, inadequate training and insufficient authority) within the organization. Their organizational confidence level $x = 2.48$ was very low. A low, though significant positive correlation existed between organizational confidence and role perception of the VEWS ($r=0.28$). However, the degree of their role perception was not related to their level of education ($r=-0.04$) and age ($r=0.02$). The need for the agency to create a more balanced environment for the purpose of lowering the organizational tension for effective role perception and organizational confidence development was indicated.

Key Words: Role perception, job-related tension, organizational confidence, Village extension workers.

INTRODUCTION

Agricultural extension is an educational process for bringing about desirable changes in people's behaviour. (Knowledge, attitude, skill and aspiration) which help to solve farm and home problems. The behavioural changes precede technical changes. Extension evaluation determines which of these behavioural changes have been accomplished (Williams *et al.* 1984). Besides, the extension implementation impact indicators such as the number and quality of staff in place, role perception and role clarity, time spent on various activities, perceived work-load, effective outcome, job satisfaction, job related tension as a result of stress (Morrow and McElory, 1987), confidence in the organization as a result of satisfaction with the organization (Blau, 1987) and job performance by Village Extension Workers (VEWs) could also be evaluated. The understanding of these implementation impact indicators would go a long way in bringing about meaningful and timely information about any needed adjustment in the objectives, policies and implementation strategies of extension programmes (Patel, 1983). In this study efforts were concentrated on the assessment of role perception, job-related tension of the VEWS and their organizational confidence.

Role refers to the responsibility, obligation or expected behaviour attached to any social position (Ekong, 1988). Perception is a process by which people select, organize and interpret sensory stimulation into a meaningful and coherent picture of the world. It is a process, which gets structured, organized and modified as the individual matures (Norman *et al.*, 1982). Role perception therefore, is the intuitive recognition of expected roles by VEWS. Role perception can have a definite impact on performance (Gibson *et al.*, 1982).

Extension Agents (EAs) have been found to differ in perception and performance of their roles (Akinbode, 1971; and Atala, 1986).

Studies have also shown the influence of role perception of EAs in determining actions (Child, 1972; Biddle, 1979). The attitude, motives and behaviour, which ultimately become hallmarks of each individual's personality rest upon the process of perception, and upon it, the process of perception and thought provide an employee with true verifiable information about organization (Rabinowitz et al., 1977; Steers, 1977). A worker's perception of the organizational goals is his estimates of the region into which he thinks the leaders of the organization would like things to move. An organizational goal is a shared goal for the organization on the part of the leaders. Goal is used here to denote a region of positive valence (Oyedijo, 1983).

Unfavourable outcomes from the organizational goals probably due to low role perception, may lower the level of aspiration and satisfaction of an employee and thereby, creating conflict between him and the organization. Recent survey data confirm that there are tensions in the public sector at both the Federal and State levels (Elling, 1986; U.S Merit System Protection Board, 1993). The need to study stress- which gives rise to tension: as a complex multivariable system has been emphasized (Lazarus and Launier, 1979). A similar view point has been expressed by Newman and Beehr (1979) and Kyriacou and Sutcliffe, (1979). Stress has been used to refer to many things, including external stimuli, perceptions of situational demands, psychological states and physiological reactions (Jackson and Maslach, 1987). The prevalence, causes and effects of stress have been reported in several studies (Kyriacou, 1980; Shirom, 1982; Jackson and Maslach, 1987; Blau, 1987; Morrow and McElory, 1987; Greehaus *et al.*, 1987). Organizational tension provides the motivation impetus to behaviour, level of aspiration, satisfaction and organizational confidence development of a worker (Cox *et al.*, 1987; Bartolome and Evans, 1989; Jackson *et al.*, 1985). The notions of equilibrium, frustration and ambivalence may increase tension that is unexpected in a constructive resolution of conflict (Dunham, 1976; Sampson, 1976; Hargreaves, 1978; Kyriacou and Sutcliffe, 1979a; Needle *et al.*, 1981). In any given imbalanced condition, an employee may undergo high tension or psychological discomfort (LaBier, 1986; Brief *et al.*, 1981; Korman *et al.*, 1981; Kelman *et al.*, 1983). Past empirical studies have shown that high tension is associated with imbalance (Caplan *et al.*, 1975; Pleck *et al.*, 1980). Conditions of perceived imbalance are always unpleasant than balanced conditions (Lawler, 1971; House, 1981; Greenberg, 1982). Various kinds of anxiety or tension arise in one's job and they may affect performance on the job. For instance there could be tension about insufficient authority, lack of promotion opportunities, too much work and insufficient organizational communication etc. (Blau, 1987). Each of these variables is capable of influencing organizational confidence of the VEWs and their performance on the job (Hackman and Oldham, 1976). The VEWs' confidence in Agricultural Development Project (ADP) as an organization could be measured in two aspects; (a) redressal of grievances and (b) fairness of supervisor's dealings-degree of satisfaction the VEWs get from the dealings with their supervisors (Patel, 1983).

This study assessed the role perception, job-related tension and organizational confidence of the VEWs in Nsukka Zone of Enugu State Agricultural Development programme (ADP). Specifically, the study was designed to:

1. Determine the level of role perception by the VEWs;

2. Determine the job-related tension of the VEWs;
3. Assess the organizational confidence of the VEWs and
4. Determine the relationship between role perception, job-related tension, organizational confidence and selected personal characteristics of the VEWs.

METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out in Nsukka Zone of Enugu State ADP. Out of the 56 VEWs in the zone, fifty were selected, using simple random sampling technique. Data were collected through the use of structured questionnaire.

To measure the role perception level of the VEWs, the role perception scale which was developed and used by Patel (1983) was adopted. Each of the VEWs was asked to indicate his/her perceived importance for 10 different role items (Table 1) on a six-point Likert Type scale. The six-points on the scale were weighted in order of importance; not important at all = 1 - 1.99; not important = 2 - 2.99; important = 3 - 3.99; fairly important = 4 - 4.99; very important = 5 - 5.99 and most important = 6 - 6.99. The mean perception score per each of the 10 role items was then calculated. The role perception level was computed by dividing the grand mean role perception score by number of the role items (10).

To assess the job-related tension of the VEWs, Patel's (1983), job-related tension scale was also adopted. The job-related stress scale developed and used by Jackson and Maslach (1987) confirmed the quality of Patel's scale. Each of the sampled VEWs was asked to indicate the degree of his/her worry about each of the 14 different aspects of job-related tension on a five point Likert Type scale (Patel, 1983). The five-points on the scale were weighted according to the degree of worry; not worried = 1 - 1.99, worried 2 - 2.99 fairly worried 3 - 3.99 very worried 4 - 4.99 and extremely worried = 5 - 5.99. The mean degree of worry for each of the 14 different aspects of job-related tension (Table 2) was calculated by dividing the total job-related tension score by the number of respondents. Job-related tension level (on the scale) was computed by dividing the grand mean job-related tension score by 14.

The confidence of the VEWs in Enugu State ADP as an agency was measured by asking them to indicate the degree satisfaction they derived in each of the 8 organizational confidence statements on a six-point Likert Type scale (Patel, 1983; Morrow and McElroy, 1987). The six-points on the scale were weighted according to the level of satisfaction; very dissatisfied = 1-1.99; not satisfied = 2.99; satisfied = 3-3.99; fairly satisfied = 4-4.99; very satisfied = 5-5.99; and very much satisfied = 6-6.99. The mean degree of satisfaction for each of the 8 organizational confidence items (Table 3) was calculated. The VEWs' organizational confidence level (on the scale) was computed by dividing the grand mean satisfaction score by 8.

Only 44 out of 50 copies of the questionnaire completed by the VEWs were found analyzable. Hence, 44 VEWs formed the sample size for the study.

Product moment correlation and mean statistics were used in the data analysis. The correlation statistics was used to test for the relationship between role perception, job-related tension, organizational confidence and selected characteristics (age, level of education and job experience) of the VEWs. Test for statistical level of significance was at $p < 0.05$.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to Table 1, the most perceived role by the VEWs was the communication of new technologies to the farmers ($\mu = 4.80$). This finding is valid because the VEWs occupy an important position in the Extension Agency. They are the official representatives of the Extension Service in the farming communities (Agu, 1997). They normally undergo Fortnight Training Programme, which enables them to effectively disseminate/communicate known extension technologies or innovations (Ozor, 1996).

Knowing the technologies or having adequate knowledge of the technologies to be disseminated was perceived to be very important ($\mu = 4.73$). An Extension Agent (EA) should be a person with adequate knowledge of the technologies to be disseminated to the farmers (Ozor, 1996). With the adoption of the Unified Agricultural Extension System (UAES) by the Agricultural Development Projects (ADPs), the VEWs assumed the responsibility for the dissemination of different technologies to farmers. Hence, the need for them to actually possess adequate knowledge of the relevant technologies (Agu, 1998).

The role of feeding back of the problems of the farmers to the researchers was perceived as fairly important ($\mu = 4.10$) by the VEWs. This particular finding is in line with the finding of Agu (1994). In her study on the effectiveness of the feedback process in the Training and visit Extension System in Enugu State, she discovered that the feed-back process was effective. The need to maintain good records ($\mu = 3.64$) was perceived to be important. According to Ozor (1996), one of the major duties of Extension Agents (EAs) is to keep clear, accurate and up-to-date records. Also perceived to be important is the studying of the village situations ($\mu = 3.43$). It is imperative that functional EAs must be very conversant with the geographical limit of their circle (Ozor, 1996). Organizing of farm families ($\mu = 3.22$), facilitating programme implementation ($\mu = 3.20$) and knowing sources of farm inputs ($\mu = 3.14$), were also perceived to be important by the VEWs. Planning, implementation (execution) and evaluation of programmes are important activities which competent extension agent should get themselves conversant with (Williams et al., 1984; Ozor, 1996). Although VEWs are not supposed to be involved in the distribution of farm inputs, they are expected to know and direct farmers to sources of farm inputs.

Roles such as helping farmers to prepare farmland ($\mu = 2.82$) and arranging supplies ($\mu = 2.52$) were perceived as not important. This is because the two roles are outside the primary role of the VEWs. According to the table, the ground mean score for role perception was 35.70, while the role perception level was 3.57. This shows that a greater proportion of the VEWs perceived many of their role expectation as being important.

Job-Related Tension

Table 2 presents the means of job-related tension items for the VEWs. Entries in the table reveal that lack of promotion opportunities ($\mu = 3.93$) was a major source of anxiety for the VEWs. Lack of promotion opportunities could serve as a source of feelings of frustration, tension and psychological fatigue. One of the factors influencing job satisfaction is promotion (Morrow and McElroy, 1987). Table 2 also indicates that the VEWs were fairly worried about inadequate training ($\mu = 3.20$). It is the expectation of an agency to train its agents in order to improve their technical competence and awareness of

modern technologies. On-the-job training and/or in-service training are important for improving organizational commitment among The Extension Agents (Ekpere, 1980).

The VEWs were affected (worried) by the existing insufficient authority ($\mu = 2.82$) political interference/instability ($\mu = 2.75$) and pressure to increase output ($\mu = 2.70$), (Table 2). In the Swedish study, one of the most frequently stated causes of stress was excessive demand on teachers' output (Wahlund and Nerell, 1976). The table also indicates that the VEWs were tensed-up as a result of conflicting orders ($\mu = 2.66$) and family life neglected ($\mu = 2.64$). If a worker's job has strong negative impact on family life, the worker may consider giving up the job to preserve the family (Jackson and Maslach, 1987). Others were pressure to improve quality ($\mu = 2.63$), non-acceptance by others ($\mu = 2.61$), unethical work ($\mu = 2.59$), too much work ($\mu = 2.55$), heavy work-load affecting quality ($\mu = 2.36$), unaware of the supervisors expectations ($\mu = 2.07$) and inefficient organizational communication ($\mu = 2.06$). For a meaningful organizational commitment on the part of the VEWs, there should be an efficient organizational communication. The grand mean score for job-related tension of the VEWs was 37.57, while their job-related tension level was 2.68, implying that majority of the VEWs were affected by many of the job-related tension variables within the organization and this could hamper the level of their role-performance.

Confidence of the VEWs in Enugu State Agricultural Development Programme

Table 3 shows that majority of the VEWs were very much satisfied with the level of interactions between them and their supervisors. Mount (1984) reported a similar finding, he discovered that company workers were satisfied with the level of interactions between them and their supervisors and thereby, increased their level of organizational commitment. However, the VEWs were not satisfied with the monitoring and evaluation system of the organization. Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation is an important component of an Agricultural Development Project whose major functions are to plan and carry out context, on going and terminal evaluation of the extension activities embarked upon by the project (Ajayi, 1996). Probably due to project monitoring and evaluation experts, the performance of this particular component is below level of expectation in most of the Agricultural Development Projects in Nigeria. The VEWs were also not satisfied with the co-ordination and supervision techniques in use.

The table also indicates that the VEWs were not satisfied with the timeliness of salary payment ($\mu = 2.68$). This finding is in contrast to the finding of Mount (1984) who discovered that company workers were satisfied with their pay packets and/or time of payment. Provision of basic logistics ($\mu = 2.09$) was also not satisfactory to the VEWs. They were equally not satisfied with the promotion/appraisal exercise of the agency ($\mu = 2.02$) and its poor concern for the staff social welfare ($\mu = 2.00$). timely promotion of workers and concern for their social welfare are important tools to improve job-involvement and organizational commitment (Morrow and McElroy, 1987). The grand mean organizational confidence of the VEWs was 19.86, while their organizational confidence level (i.e the overall level of satisfaction with the organization) was 2.48; implying that majority of the VEWs were not satisfied with the organization.

Correlation Matrix

Table 4 presents correlation matrix between age, level of education, job experience, role perception, job-related tension and organizational confidence of the VEWs. The table shows that organizational confidence expressed a non-significant positive association with job-related tension ($r = 0.06$), level of education ($r = 0.07$), age ($r = 0.16$) and job experience ($r = 0.05$), while it showed a significant positive association with role perception ($r = 0.08$). The implication of this finding is that, the more a VEW was able to perceive his/her role-expectations, the more he/she understood the organization and hence, the more he/she developed in the organization.

Table 4 also reveals that job-related tension showed a non-significant positive association with role perception ($r = 0.15$), level of education ($r = 0.12$), age ($r = 0.01$) and job experience ($r = 0.02$). It is also evident from the table that role perception showed a non-significant positive association with job experience ($r = 0.18$), while it expressed a non-significant negative relationship with the level of education ($r = 0.04$) and age ($r = -0.02$). This implies that the degree to which a VEW perceived his/her role expectations was not related to the educational level and age attained.

CONCLUSION

Communication of new technologies to the rural farm families was the most important role to the VEWs, while arranging supplies was no importance to them. Majority of them perceived many of the role items as being important.

The major source of anxiety for the VEWs was lack of promotion opportunities, while the least source was insufficient organizational communication. A greater proportion of them were affected by many of the job-related tension variables within organization.

The level of interactions between the VEWs and their supervisors were very much satisfactory. Majority of them were not satisfied with the organization, especially, in the area of its concern for staff social welfare.

A significant relationship existed between the organizational confidence of the VEWs and their role perception, while a non-significant relationship existed between their role perception and educational level, and age attained.

To sustain and improve the confidence of the VEWs in Enugu State Agricultural Development Programme for effective role perception and performance, the agency should not relent in its effort to train and intimate the VEWs with its operational principles and at the same time, continue to provide balanced conditions (e.g creation of promotion opportunities, effective organizational communication and timely payment of salaries etc.) for the purpose of lowering the organizational tension.

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Table 1: Role perception by the VEWs (n = 44)

Role perception	μ Role perception score
Communicating the technology to the farmers	4.80
Knowing the technology	4.73
Feedback the problems to the researchers	4.10
Maintain records	3.64
Studying Village situation	3.43
Organizing people	3.32
Facilitating programme implementation	3.20
Knowing sources of farm inputs	3.14
Helping farmers to prepare farm plans	2.82
Arranging supplies	2.52
Grand Φ role perception score	35.75
Role perception level	3.57

Table 2: Job-related tension (n = 44)

Job-related tension variable	μ Tension score
Lack of promotion opportunities	3.93
Inadequate training	3.20
Insufficient authority	2.82
Political interference	2.75
Pressure to increase output	2.70
Conflicting orders	2.66
Family life neglected	2.64
Pressure to improve quality	2.63
Non-acceptance by others	2.61
Unethical work	2.59
Too much work	2.55
Heavy work-load affecting quality	2.36
Unaware of supervisor's expectations	2.07
Inefficient organizational communication	2.06
Grand Φ Job-related tension score	37.57
Job-related tension level	2.68

Table 3: Confidence of the VEWs in Enugu State ADP (n =44)

Confidence statement	μ Satisfaction score
The level of interaction between the VEWs and their supervisor(s)	3.14
Monitoring and evaluation system	2.84
Co-ordination and supervision techniques being used	2.80
Timeliness of salary payment	2.68
Provision of incentives	2.30
Provision of basic Logistics	2.09
Promotion and appraisal exercises	2.07
Concern for the staff welfare	2.00
Grand Φ Organizational confidence score	19.86
Organizational confidence level.	2.48

Table 4: Correlation Matrix

	Organizational confidence	Job-related tension	Role perception	Level of Education	Age	Job experience
Organizational confidence	1.00					
Job-related tension	0.06	1.00				
Role perception	0.28*	0.15	1.00			
Age	0.16	0.01	0.02	0.23	1.0	
Job experience	0.05	0.02	0.18	0.16	0.13	1.00

*Significant at $P < 0.05$