

**CONGRUENCY BETWEEN ROLE PERCEPTION AND ROLE PERFORMANCE OF AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION AGENTS IN DELTA STATE, NIGERIA**

**P. C. AJIEH**

Department of Agricultural Economics and Extension, Delta State University, Asaba Campus, Asaba, Nigeria. E-mail: [ajieh2002@yahoo.com](mailto:ajieh2002@yahoo.com)

**ABSTRACT**

*A study was conducted to ascertain the level of congruency between extension agents' role perception and role performance with a view to providing policy makers and extension practitioners with better understanding of the role inconsistencies that are contributing to the ineffectiveness of extension agents and in determining important roles for the agricultural extension agents. A sample of 72 agricultural extension agents randomly selected from a list of agents covering study area was used for the study. Data were collected through the use of validated questionnaire. Descriptive statistics such as frequency and percentage were used to summarize data. Spearman's rank order correlation coefficient was used to determine the level of congruency between extension agents' role perception and role performance. This study revealed that there were incongruence in the role perception and role performance of extension agents. Most of the role activities perceived by the extension agents were not performed by them, while many of the roles not perceived were performed by the agents. Spearman's rank order correlation coefficient performed to determine the statistical correspondence between role perception and role performance revealed a positive, but non significant correspondence of 0.70, indicating that the highest perceived role was not necessary the highest performed role. This study concludes that incongruence between role perception and role performance of extension agents could result in inefficiency on the part of extension agents. However, for optimum performance of extension agents, adequate role perception should be accompanied by other factors such as resource availability, transportation, training, promotional opportunities and other incentives for increasing the impact of extension agents.*

**KEY WORDS:** Congruency, Role perception, Role performance, Extension agents

**INTRODUCTION**

Agricultural extension agents are faced with a multiplicity of roles, especially in the developing countries. This situation usually creates a difference in role perception and performance among the agents. It has been observed that most roles perceived by extension agents are not performed by them, while many of the roles not perceived are performed by the extension agents.

Role perception and role performance of extension agents are crucial in determining their effectiveness. This is because role performance of extension agents is influenced by role perception. Thus, any discrepancy in and between extension agents' role perception and role performance could result in ineffectiveness on the part of extension agents in performing their roles.

The importance of role perception and role performance in organizations has been documented. Gibson, Ivancich and Donnelly (1982) noted that role perception can have a definite impact on role performance. There are different expectations and perceptions of the role of extension agents, and these influence strongly the activities of agents (Akinbode, 1971; Biddle, 1979; Warner and Christerison, 1983).

Early studies on role perception and role performance of extension agents focused on role perception and its influence on role performance. The congruency between role perception and role performance among extension agents has scarcely been studied. In order to fill this gap, this study examined the congruency between role perception and role performance of agricultural extension agents in Delta State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study focused on the following objectives: (a) to ascertain the role perception of extension agents; (b) to ascertain the roles performed by extension agents; and (c) to determine the congruency between extension agents' role perception and role performance.

## METHODOLOGY

Data for the study were derived from the 2008 survey of agricultural extension agents in Delta State, Nigeria. Delta North Agricultural Zone was purposively selected out of the three agricultural zones in the state because the headquarters of the state's agricultural extension agency is located in the zone. A list of extension agents in the zone was obtained from the zonal office. Out of 84 extension agents covering the zone, 72 of them representing 86% were randomly selected and used for the study. Data were collected from the respondents of the study through the use of validated questionnaire. Content validation of the research instrument was done by a team of experts in agricultural extension system. The instrument was pilot tested before administration to test for reliability.

To ascertain the role perception and role performance of extension agents, a list of 10 officially identified and selected roles was developed through a review of literature. Respondents were then requested to identify the roles they perceive as extension agents' roles and the roles actually performed by extension agents. The percentage response for each role was computed and ranked to determine the highest and lowest perceived and performed roles. Spearman's rank order correlation coefficient was used to determine the level of congruency between respondents' role perception and role performance.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### *Respondents' role perception*

Data in Table 1 show the percentage distribution of respondents according to their role perception. Results reveal that the four most perceived roles of extension agents were providing farmers with information (88.9%); writing reports (83.3%); conducting demonstrations (62.5%); and reporting farmers' field problems (55.6%). These roles are important roles of agricultural extension agents. The traditional role of agricultural extension agents is providing farmers with information relating to agriculture. It is therefore not surprising that it is the highest ranked perceived role by the respondents of this study. Agricultural extension agents are required by their duty schedule to write reports of their activities on regular basis. This should however not be done at the expense of actual contact with farmers.

Reporting farmers' field problems is another important role of the extension agents. It enables the agents to bring problems encountered by farmers on their fields to the attention of the research team for discussion at training sessions. It is only at such training sessions that the felt needs and crucial problems of farmers are shared, discussed and possible solutions decided. Conducting demonstrations attained an expected position as the third most perceived role. It is a high credibility technique used by extension agents for teaching farmers.

Four least perceived roles by the agents were teaching home economics (20.8%); planning programmes and work calendar (31.9%); supervising government programmes (41.7%); and organizing community projects.

**Table 1. Percentage distribution of respondents according to their role perception**

Role activities	perception		Rank
	Frequency	Percent	
Conducting demonstrations	45	65.5	3
Providing farmers farm materials	64	88.9	1
Distribution of farm materials	32	44.4	6
Reporting farmers' field problems	40	55.6	4
Writing reports	60	83.3	2
Holding meetings, farmers home visits	35	40.6	5
Supervising government programme	30	41.7	7
Organizing community projects	30	41.7	7
Teaching home economics	15	20.8	10
Planning programmes and work calendar	23	31.9	9

*Source: Field data, 2008*

## ***Role Perception and Performance by Agric. Extension agents***

### ***Respondents' role performance***

Entries in Table 2 show the percentage distribution of respondents according to their role performance. Results indicate that the four most performed roles of extension agents were providing farmers with information (73.6%); organizing community projects (69.4%); writing reports (61.1%); and distribution of farm materials (55.6%). Providing farmers with information which was the highest ranked perceived role was also the highest ranked performed role of extension agents. This suggests that it is an important role of extension agents.

It is noteworthy that organizing community projects which was ranked as one of the least perceived roles, was second most performed role. This was an unexpected finding because organizing community projects is neither a visible nor a much discussed activity in the Nigerian agricultural extension services. This activity is considered the responsibility of the community development department of the Local Government Authorities (LGAs) in Nigeria. However, the new thinking in agricultural extension services in Nigeria which now lay emphasis on community projects like Young Farmers Clubs, Farmer Groups and Cooperatives may have made it possible for extension agents to be involved with this role. Writing report was second most perceived role and third most performed role. This is an indication that extension agents give regular reports of their activities. It however, suggests that perhaps much time is spent on paper work at the expense of actual contact with farmers. Distribution of farm materials ranked as the fourth most performed role. This suggests that this role is still important in the Nigerian agricultural extension services despite expert recommendations that distribution of farm materials should be handled by a separate agency to enable extension agents concentrate on their primary roles of informing and educating the farmers.

Four of the least performed roles were teaching home economics (10.1%); planning programmes and work calendar (27.8%); supervising government programmes (30.6%); and conducting demonstrations (38.9%). It was surprising to note that conducting demonstration which was the third most perceived role was among the least performed roles. This suggest that perhaps the most effective extension teaching techniques are not emphasized probably, due to the lack of demonstration materials as a result of poor funding of extension services.

**Table 2. Percentage distribution of respondents according to their role performance**

Role activities	Performance		
	Frequency	Percent	Rank
Conducting demonstrations	28	38.9	7
Providing farmers farm materials	63	73.6	1
Distribution of farm materials	40	44.4	4
Reporting farmers' field problems	36	50.0	5
Writing reports	44	61.1	3
Holding meetings, farmers home visits	30	41.7	6
Supervising government programme	22	30.6	8
Organizing community projects	50	69.4	2
Teaching home economics	13	18.1	10
Planning programmes and work calendar	22	27.8	9

*Source: Field data, 2008*

### ***Congruency in respondents' role perception and role performance***

Data in Table 3 show the ranking ordering of role perception and role performance scores and the differential between these scores. A differential score of 0 indicates that there was no discrepancy in the perception and the performance of the particular role activity, while a difference of 1 and above indicates some degree of incongruity in the perception and the performance of the particular role activity. In other words, rank score differential is an indicator of existing congruency between role perception and actual role performance.

There were notable discrepancies in the perception and performance ranking scores for: (1) conducting demonstrations; (2) distribution of farm materials; and (3) organizing community projects. Conducting demonstrations had a low perception and a high performance ranking, while distributing farm materials had a high perception and a low performance ranking. Organizing community projects equally had a high perception and a low performance ranking. Three other role activities had discrepancies in their perception and performance rankings. These are: (1) providing farmers with information; (2) teaching home economics; and (3) planning programmes and work calendar.

Providing farmers with information had a high perception and performance ranking which indicates that it was perceived as an important role and equally performed by extension agents. Teaching home economics had a low perception and performance ranking, suggesting that it was perceived as an unimportant role and equally less performed by the agents. This may be due to the general neglect of post harvest technology in Nigeria's agricultural extension services. Planning programmes and work calendar had a low perception and performance ranking. This indicates that the role was perceived as an unimportant and equally less performed by the agents. This may be due to the fact that programme plans and work calendar are designed by the head office of the state's extension agency. Even though, extension agents make input during programmes and work calendar preparation, it is not their sole responsibility.

Spearman's rank order correlation analysis performance to determine the statistical correspondence of the ranks revealed a positive but non significant correspondence between role perception and role performance. In other words, the highest ranked perceived role activity was not necessarily the highest ranked performed role activity and vice versa.

**Table 3. Rank order of respondents' role perception and role performance**

Role activities	Rank		
	Perception	Performance	Difference
Conducting demonstrations	3	7	4
Providing farmers farm materials	1	1	0
Distribution of farm materials	6	4	2
Reporting farmers' field problems	4	5	1
Writing reports	2	3	1
Holding meetings, farmers home visits	5	6	1
Supervising government programme	7	8	1
Organizing community projects	7	2	5
Teaching home economics	10	10	0
Planning programmes and work calendar	9	9	0

Spearman's rho (Rs) Coefficient = 0.70, not significant ( $p \geq 0.05$ )

## CONCLUSION

The majority of the extension agents in this study perceived many roles to be their responsibilities but only a few of the perceived roles were performed by the extension agents. The most perceived roles were providing farmers with information, writing reports, conducting demonstrations and reporting farmers' field problems. Whereas, the most performed roles were providing farmers with information, organizing community projects, writing reports and distribution of farm materials.

The least perceived roles were teaching home economics, planning programmes and work calendar, supervising government programmes, and organizing community projects. The least performed roles were: teaching home economics, planning programmes and work calendar, supervising government programmes, and conducting demonstrations.

The above findings indicate that there were incongruence in the role perception and role performance of extension agents. Most of the role activities perceived by the extension agents were not performed by them,

### ***Role Perception and Performance by Agric. Extension agents***

while many of the roles not perceived were performed by the agents. This incongruence in role perception and role performance may be due to the lack of resources and incentives for carrying out the roles. If extension agents are to perform most of the roles, there is the need for sufficient resources and incentives to be provided. This may include provision of adequate funds, improved work environment, transportation, training and other support facilities. In other words, it should be noted that even though the congruency between role perception and role performance is important in increasing the efficiency of extension agents, other factors such as resource availability, transportation, good work environment and other incentives are equally important in enhancing the effectiveness of extension agents.

### **REFERENCES**

- Akinbode, I.A. (1971) Roles of Divisional Extension Officers in the Western State of Nigeria. *Quarterly Journal of Administration*, 6, pp. 21-22.
- Biddle, B.J. (1999) *Role Theory: Expectations, Identities and Behaviours*. New York: Academic press.
- Gibson, J.I., Ivancerich, J.M. and Donnelly, H.I. (1982) *Organization Structure, environment, and Performance*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Plano, Texas: Business Publications, Inc.
- Warner, P.D. and Christenson, J.A. (1983) Looking beyond extension stereotypes. *Journal of extension*, 21, pp 27-33.