

## **ATTRIBUTES LIKE ATTITUDE AND COMMITMENT FOR EFFECTIVE EXTENSION**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*It has become evident that South African Extension, especially in relation to the small-scale farmers has performed poorly. Human motivation is a complicated matter, but in general it has to do with needs, beliefs and attitudes. This paper has adopted a theoretical approach regarding attitude and commitment as inhibiting characteristics of an effective and successful Extension organisation.*

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

There is a widespread view throughout Southern Africa that Agricultural Extension has under performed, especially in relation to resource poor smallholders (Whiteside, 1998). Some researchers have concluded that problems of management and organizations, rather than individual competence, are the major factors responsible for poor performance of many Extension Officers. A factor to be considered in interpreting these findings is that the management and organizational structures of Extension services tend to be western in cultural orientation. Local operational staff have to adapt to a foreign management system with considerable social, psychological, value and structural differences (Mjoli, 1986).

As resources become more limited – and there is no reason to believe that this trend is not going to continue or that we have reached the end of budgetary cut-backs, the demand for higher efficiency and effectiveness will also increase, for the simple reason that the question of survival or continuation of the Extension service becomes more and more acute (Düvel, 1994).

An Extensionist has to work with people in different ways. It is often an intimate relationship and one, which demands much tact and resourcefulness (Oakley & Garforth, 1985). The question to be asked is why it is that some Extensionists are relatively more successful than others within the same work environment? There is no simple answer to this question.

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According to Bembridge, Steyn & Williams (1983) attitude, motivation, problem perception and level of knowledge of individual officers have a strong bearing on how efficiently and effectively an organization functions. An important question to be considered is the self-image of Extension Officers. The task of bringing about behavioural change could only be done successfully when an Extensionist is motivated. Various aspects which constitute motivation and influence human behaviour will be discussed very briefly.

## **2. INFLUENCIAL FACTORS**

Adams (1982) identified four personal qualities essential for Extensionists in their profession, in addition to physical fitness namely:

- Ability to communicate with farmers. Extensionists should have a sound practical knowledge of farming and how to communicate effectively.
- Ability to get on with people. Extensionists work with people and must therefore have a good working relationship with them. They must have patience, understanding and humility.
- Enthusiasm for the job. Only the people who have a positive attitude and strong commitment for Extension as a career should be encouraged to pursue this career.
- Common sense and initiative. A reasonable measure of common sense and initiative is essential irrespective of the level of education or position.

Bembridge (1979) has stated that Extension workers need to be treated as professionals in their own right. However, Adams (1982) noted that some Extensionists are more professional than others. Some people have to work hard to acquire professional qualities, which others accomplish without much effort. These qualities include empathy with the community, credibility, humility, professional commitment and a positive attitude.

### **2.1 Commitment**

Professional commitment is a fundamental professional quality of an Extensionist and yet one that is usually glaringly lacking. It is essential for Extension workers to have the will to succeed in their work as they are mostly expected to work unsupervised. Commitment has different dimensions. One of these dimensions is motivation, which can easily outweigh competence, and is probably the major contributory factor to achievement (Düvel, 1994).

According to Gold (1978) a central problem of a psychologist is the question of how a given behaviour, an action, a perception or an attempt by an individual to do one thing rather than another is kept going. Why does one individual persist longer and works harder to solve a problem than another? The level of initiation of behaviour of a particular kind, its maintenance and the level of intensity or effort constitute the problem of motivation. Many different theories and concepts have been proposed for explaining the initiation of behaviour, and sometimes the problem becomes confused with the proposed answer, so that the problem of motivation is sometimes said to consist of the finding of motives, drives or needs.

Hruschka (1974) states that: "Where the term motivation is used for the determinants of behaviour, it describes the state of readiness to strive for a subjective valued goal or to avoid unpleasant objects or situations". Human motivation is a complicated matter, but in general it has to do with needs, values, beliefs and attitudes. Motivation according to Verner & Booth (1963) is goal directed behaviour, which grows out of the needs of an individual at a specific point in time in a specific situation. This is recognised as *intrinsic motivation*, arising within the individual.

The concept of scientific management introduced by Taylor & Gilberth (as cited by Cuerden, 1980) in the early 1900's made use of time and motion studies to make better use of manpower. The motivation for improved performance was provided by a financial (*or extrinsic*) reward. The Agricultural Extensionist has to deal with both the intrinsic and extrinsic motivating forces when advocating behavioural changes. The decision as to which type of motivation is chosen is imperative and can result in either success or failure. The intrinsically motivated considerations (e.g. mutual concern for people, job satisfaction, attitudes and commitment) are as important, if not more important than the extrinsic motivators (e.g. money, working conditions, etc.).

## **2.2 Needs**

All of us have our own individual sets of needs that motivate our communication and our responses to messages. Knowing something about our needs is important since much of our behaviour can be explained by the existence of these needs and also reflects the way we go about satisfying them. What motivates you? What makes you do things the way you do? These are certainly puzzling questions, especially at times when you are not sure why you did what you did.

There are numerous theories regarding the motivation of people. Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory (1954), Herzberg's hygiene motivation theory, the Schultz theories (1966) and McClelland's achievement needs theory (as cited by Gold, 1978) will receive consideration.

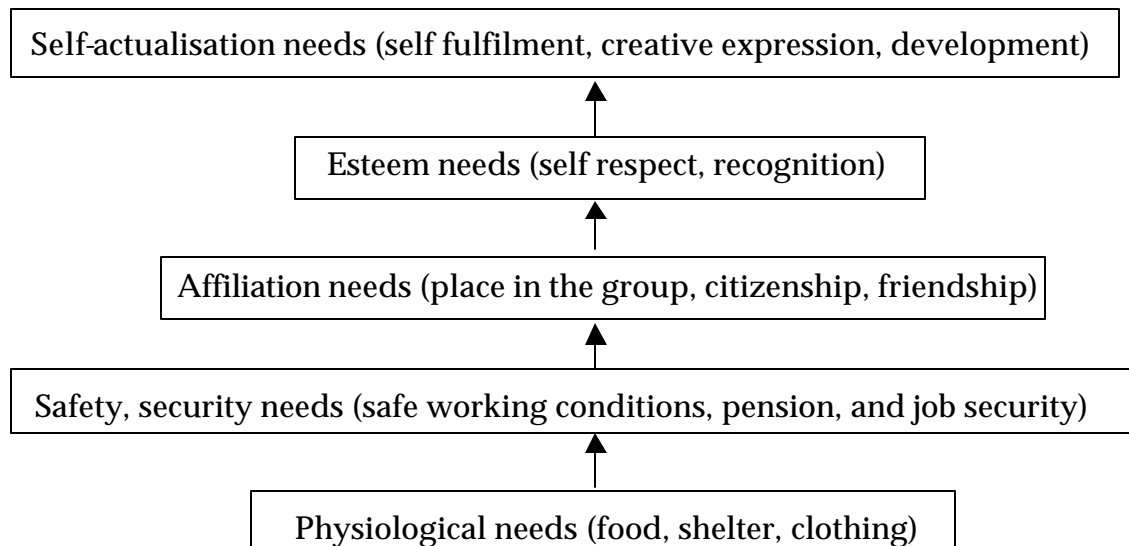
### 2.2.1 Maslows hierachy of needs theory (1954)

Tully (1981) states that motivation can also be understood in terms of Maslow's hierarchy of human motivation (1954). Maslow's theory identified five basic human needs that motivate behaviour namely survival, safety, social, esteem and self-actualisation needs. According to Maslow (1954) motivation can be seen as a pyramid with the most sophisticated needs at the apex. This theory is based on the concept that people are motivated by the desire to satisfy personal needs.

Maslow's theory is based on two fundamental assumptions namely:

- Only when the first basic level of need is satisfied can people seek need satisfaction of the next level; and
- Once a need is satisfied, it no longer acts as a motivation force.

The essence of Maslow's theory is set out in Figure 1.



**Figure 1: Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory (Maslow, 1954)**

According to Geldenhuys (1975) the layout of Maslow's theory is perhaps a little simplistic and could lead to misunderstanding. Every person does not necessarily have to go through each step of the pyramid. A single need does not necessarily have to be fulfilled before a person strives for a higher need. It does not necessarily mean that once a need has been fulfilled that a person will continue to the higher need. Although perhaps simplistic, Maslow's theory is often offered as a flexible theory to explain motivation.

### **2.2.2 Herzberg's hygiene motivation theory**

The Herzberg hygiene motivation theory (as cited by Gold, 1978) suggests that when people are dissatisfied, their bad feelings are generally associated with the environment in which they work. When people feel good about their jobs, this is generally associated with the work itself. Herzberg labelled the factors that prevented satisfaction as *hygienic factors* and those that cause satisfaction as *motivators*.

### **2.2.3 Schutz's theories**

Schutz (1966) identified three interpersonal needs, which underlie most of your behaviour around other people. He calls these interpersonal needs "the need for inclusion", the "need for control" and the "need for affection".

- *Inclusion needs*

A person with a high need for inclusion, needs recognition and attention from others and likes to be in the spotlight, to be singled out and to be noticed.

At the one extreme we have the obnoxious child who does every thing to attract attention, even if it results in punishment. To be punished is better than to be ignored. On the other hand a person with low inclusion needs prefers not to stand out and does not like to feature prominently in the public eye.

- *Control needs*

The need for control involves a striving for power or being in charge, for running things and for influencing one's environment. Naturally people with a low need for control are probably not interested at all in taking initiative in assuming responsibilities in making decisions or leading a group.

- *Affection needs*

The need for affection is concerned with how close people want to be with one another. Some people prefer to be very intimate and enjoy warm relationships even with a relatively casual acquaintance. They strive to be liked. Others usually perceive them as being too friendly.

On the other hand some people prefer to keep an interpersonal distance. These people are generally classified as being cold, aloof or arrogant.

#### **2.2.4 McClelland's achievement need theory**

McClelland's theory (as cited by Gold, 1978) is based on a single motive, namely achievement. High achievers have the following characteristics namely:

- They like situations where responsibility is needed in order to find solutions to problems;
- They do not set goals and objectives which are relatively easy to achieve and would not provide satisfaction in accomplishment, nor do they set exceedingly high goals which have very little chance of succeeding; and
- They require constant feedback as to how well they are doing.

It appears amongst above-mentioned theorists that a person cannot be motivated if he/she is only treated well financially and/or physically. A person's needs, in terms of creation, recognition and feeling of personal worth should also be addressed. Both Maslow (1954) and Hertzberg (as cited by Gold, 1978) include the achievement need in their motivational needs, but McClelland (Gold, 1978) emphasises the achievement need as the key underlying factor.

#### **2.3 Self-concept of self-image**

According to Covey (1990) the way in which people perceive themselves creates a mental image or a self-concept, which they have of themselves. People are not born with self-concept. It is shaped by our relationships with others. In general the more positive you feel about factors such as your physical appearance, capabilities, and the impression that others have of you, the more positive your self-concept and your non-verbal communication. On the other hand the more negative you feel about yourself and the impression others have of you, the more negative your self-concept will most likely tend to be.

Self-fulfilling prophecies occur when our expectations of an event help to create the very condition that allows them to happen. Self-fulfilling prophecies can have a positive or negative influence. If a child is often praised by his/her parents for his/her efforts, the child will probably be a good student at school. As a result the child would strive to live up to his/her expectations and study hard. Because of the positive self-concept of the child, he/she will most likely prepare carefully for the examination, enter the examination hall full of confidence and probably do well. On the other hand if a child is constantly criticised at home he/she will develop a poor self-concept and will probably perform poorly at school. Self-fulfilling prophecies are normally carried over into adulthood and influence for example, the way people perform at work or the quality of their interpersonal relationships (Cook, 1971).

There is a common saying that states that you have to like yourself before you can like others. This would be in a very superficial way if you did not know yourself, if you did not control yourself and if you did not have mastery over yourself. Real self-respect comes from dominion over self, from true independence and a win-win interdependence (Covey, 1990). Our motives, words and actions (behaviour) should come from our own inner core (character ethic) instead of human relations techniques (the personality ethic) to sustain an effective win-win relationship.

## **2.4 Discipline**

Discipline is the ability to make and keep promises and honour commitments. When one makes a commitment, it is a personal statement about oneself. Poor performance can often be attributed to poor prioritisation and organisation. One needs to begin small, and to generally strengthen ones sense of personal honour and build ones capacity to make and keep larger promises (Whitten, 1995). Eventually ones sense of personal honour becomes stronger than ones moods, and one will start honouring commitments.

It often helps to write commitments down in a diary as a constant reminder. Successful people claim that there is an enormous power in the principle of keeping promises and honouring commitments. It usually leads to strong self-esteem and personal integrity, which in term is considered the foundation of true success.

### 3. ATTITUDE

There are many definitions of attitude to be found in the literature. Allport's definition (1935) is considered most relevant namely: "An attitude is a mental and neural state of readiness, organised through experience, exerting a directive or dynamic influence upon the individual's response to objects and situations with which it is related". Culbertson (1968), having studied the history of the concept of attitude in social psychology puts forward the following definition with the idea of including many of the central ideas used by different attitude theorists namely: "An attitude is an idea charged with emotion, which predisposes a class of actions to a particular class or social situation". This definition suggests three major components of attitudes namely beliefs, feelings and a tendency to behave in a certain way towards an object.

According to Van den Ban & Hawkins (1996) an attitude can be defined as the more or less permanent feelings, thoughts and predispositions that a person has concerning certain aspects of his or her environment. Components are knowledge, feelings and inclinations to act. To say it more simply, an attitude is the disposition manner, or approach that you bring to everything you do.

Janis & Gilmore (1965) as well as Bem (1970) have indicated that attitudes are based on three aspects namely personal experience, the influence over other people and self-emotional reactions. According to Bem (1970) the influence or non-influence of other people appears to be the most important outcome result of our attitudes.

The following deserve to be highlighted in this context:

- *Personal life experience.*  
The many experiences one has throughout life and which interact to determine one's attitude.
- *Emotions.*  
Not all attitudes are focused on a realistic adjustment to the environment. Some function as the expression of an individual's emotional reactions, either aroused emotionally by some frustration or related permanently to the individual's personality. Prejudices may sometimes be an outlet for frustration.



- *Influence over other people.*

There are a wide variety of social sources which influence attitudes namely culture, parents and peers, school, church and the mass media. Bem (1970) maintains that “the major influence upon people is people.”

It is obvious from these definitions that attitude reflects a predisposition to behave in a certain manner. One of the most admired traits that an Extensionist can have is a positive attitude. A positive attitude can bring pleasure to the performance of a difficult task. A positive attitude can make a long day seem short and can even improve the productivity and quality of work being performed. People who consistently maintain a positive attitude tend to have higher energy levels than those who are less positive. Positive people consistently look for something positive – and they find it – in every challenge or work that they accept.

As a most revealing but unfortunately anonymous quote states: “A pessimist finds difficulty in every opportunity while an optimist finds opportunity in every difficulty”. Perceptions are very important in the way people think. A glass of water for instance could be either half-full or half empty. The way that a person perceives the glass of water will not change the fact that the glass has 50 percent of its capacity filled with water. But the way in which one chooses to think does have an effect on the efficiency with which the task is completed and also on the enjoyment the person derives from accomplishing that task (Covey, 1990).

The manner in which the Extensionist approaches his/her work is also the manner most likely to be adopted by those who work under, alongside and above him/her. Adopting a winning attitude will create winning people and winning products in the process.

The first step towards being deliberately positive in your attitude is to attend to the environment within which you live and function. According to Neethling (2001) you ask yourself if the physical environment and the people involved are tapping your positive energy? He is of the opinion that it is imperative that we should manage our physical environment. People are sometimes referred to in the creativity world as either “flow stoppers or flow supporters”.

Furthermore everyone who comes into contact with you has an effect on you. Some support the flow of energy and creativity, while others slow it down or even stop it entirely. Perhaps you yourself may be one of the people that find joy in being a “flow stopper” in the lives of others around you. If this is the

case it will leave you with limited positive energy or attitude required to perform important tasks. One should make the utmost endeavour to break such negative attitudes. One should also avoid being influenced unduly by people with negative dispositions.

A positive and optimistic attitude leads to a spirit of enthusiasm, hopefulness and believing. According to Covey (1990) positive attitudes are like an energy field or aura that surrounds one and that similarly changes weaker or negative energy fields (attitudes). Positive attitudes in general will attract and even magnify smaller positive attitudes.

Be happy and feel good about yourself. Being happy is the cornerstone of your continued effectiveness. You have everything you need to be happy. Happiness is an attitude and acceptance of what is. It comes from within – not from external events or things, and therefore, no one can take it away from you. This does not mean that you should stop working for self-improvement. You should however be able to define success for yourself. You will only improve your likelihood of attaining your goals once you have recognised and exercised your ability to retain happiness.

Attitude forms part of the character of an Extensionist and according to Burger (1971) an Extensionist's credibility will suffer if his/her attitude and therefore character is perceived to be unacceptable. Effective Extensionists with positive attitudes respond to community needs. They do not just carry out policies. They have empathy and a real desire to help rural families to attain a higher quality of life.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

The success of any organisation depends to a large extent on the calibre of people who work for it. It is important to have the right people in the right place at the right time i.e. people who are willing and able to work effectively in carrying out the job ahead. According to Bembridge (undated), the field Extension worker must be self-motivated because of his/her isolation and individual responsibilities.

Human motivation is a complicated issue, but in general it has to do with needs, beliefs and attitudes. The most important trait is a positive attitude towards ones work and the organisations to which we belong. In order to maintain a positive attitude it is advisable to avoid people referred to as “flow stoppers” as this could have a negative influence on our own work situation.

It is evident from the foregoing that we should take cognisance of the needs theories of Maslow (1954), Herzberg, Schutz (1966) and McClelland (as cited by Gold, 1978) to have a better understanding of ourselves and the people with whom we are associated in the work place.

A self-fulfilling prophecy is a cycle of our expectations and how others perceive us which encourages us to act in such a way that ultimately helps is to develop in others the kind of perception by thought they had of us in the first place. A requirement for effective Extension is the professional commitment of the Extension Worker. This commitment has two important elements namely motivation and the desire to succeed. This include, self-development, usually through self-study to improve competence and knowledge.

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