

EVALUATION OF PERFORMANCE OF EXTENSION WORKERS IN LESOTHO

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ABSTRACT

The extension service in Lesotho and other developing countries have been criticized for not being able to bring the necessary change in the farming populace, especially the rural and resource poor. Extension workers are faced with problems that need to be dealt with in order for them and extension as a whole to be effective and efficient. There are constraints that hinder extension workers to do their work which ultimately leads to poor performance and low efficiency. Extension managers have a vital role to play in ensuring that extension workers improve their work performance and as a result become more efficient and productive. In order to accomplish these managers must acquire the required skills to improve human behaviour at work through the application of personnel management techniques. The techniques include, how to direct, train and motivate employees. Regular evaluation of worker's performance is also essential. This has to be done by using the correct evaluation instrument in such a way that will clearly indicate areas which need attention.

Results of the study show that the performance ratings of extension officers suggest that extension staff were performing well. This cannot be true since most of the factors that affect efficiency were found to be negative. It is therefore obvious that the evaluation instrument currently employed was not successfully implemented. Certain factors, which determine the efficiency of the extension service as a whole, were inappropriately provided for by the Department of Agriculture. These include

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relevant training, promotion opportunities, motivation, competence and credibility of extension workers.

1. INTRODUCTION

The population of Lesotho stands at about 2.2 million, with about 75% living in rural areas. The majority of people derive their livelihoods from agricultural related activities and with thousands of immigrant workers being retrenched from South African mines the number is increasing. The main crops are maize, sorghum and wheat and are grown on a small scale. Agriculture in Lesotho is dominantly at subsistence level and there is no export of agricultural products except for wool and mohair.

There is an urgent need for change in the attitudes and production practices to at least semi-commercial. Growth in agriculture will have to come from joint improvements in agricultural research, extension, credit availability, production inputs, markets and improved infrastructure.

Agricultural extension in Lesotho and other developing countries have been criticised for not being effective and efficient in providing the farming population with appropriate technologies derived from research. The major problem is that extension workers have not managed to provide advice to influence farmers to change their production practices and attitudes. It is therefore important to investigate if factors which influence the efficiency of extension workers are correctly in place. The research hypothesis for this study was that "Extension workers in Lesotho do not perform satisfactorily"

In this paper we seek to identify the major factors that determine the performance of extension workers. These factors include training needs, levels of motivation, competencies, attitudes and knowledge of agricultural extension needed in developed and less developed countries.

2. METHODOLOGY

A descriptive survey was conducted using a structured questionnaire with both open-ended and pre-coded types of questions for data

collection. All the extension officers were included in the sample. Questionnaires were constructed in line with the objectives of the investigation from personal information, training background, knowledge/competence of extension, level of motivation and organisational aspects of extension in the country.

In order to determine the views of the farmers concerning the extension officers, particularly their knowledge related to agriculture, seventeen farmers were interviewed. These farmers were randomly selected from the dominant agro-ecological zones of Lesotho.

The personal files of the extension workers were perused with the permission of the Director of Human Resources Office in Maseru. This was done in order to find the official performance ratings of the extension workers.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1 Performance of extension workers

The performance appraisal system is used in the public service to evaluate the performance of staff. Each of the workers is rated depending on the achievement of the objectives as stated in the annual work plan. The ratings are categorised into five, unsatisfactory, satisfactory, good, very good, outstanding.

The significant finding here is that during the recent year only 9.5% of extension workers were rated as performing in an unsatisfactory manner. The rest of the staff was rated satisfactory to outstanding. Agricultural extension workers in developing countries as indicated by Atala (1986) have been accused of failing to achieve goals and bring about the necessary changes. It is somehow surprising to find that about 90% of extension workers in Lesotho were rated as performing satisfactorily.

Despite the fact that those factors which are essential for proper execution of their duties are absent or inadequate casts some doubt about the reliability of the instrument used for evaluating the performance of staff and/or its implementation. More so because the study shows that various important factors that influence performance

of workers such as motivation, positive attitude, adequate training and working experience were not perceived as being adequate by the extension workers themselves, which renders these findings very questionable.

Researchers have found peer or immediate supervisors' ratings as a performance appraisal method to have positive aspects. Such aspects included their reliability and their usefulness for feedback purposes (Kane & Lawler, 1978 and Siegal, 1982).

Conversely, others have concluded that using a peer or immediate supervisor rating method would have negative effects on satisfaction of office relationship, poor employee acceptance, less agreement between raters, leniency in ratings and the effect of jealousies and revellies on the evaluation (Batista, 1976; and Zedec, Imparto, Krause & Oleno, 1974).

3.2 Training

Training is one of the factors that determine the performance of extension workers. About 51% of extension staff thought that the training they received at college and/or university was not appropriate to the environment and resources. Results also show that those workers who were satisfied with the training performed better (Weighted Mean of 3.0) .

Table 1: Distribution of respondents according to degree of satisfaction with tertiary training and level of performance (N = 74)

Performance Rating	Satisfied		Not Satisfied		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Unsatisfactory	3	4.05	4	5.41	7	9.56
Satisfactory	11	14.86	9	12.16	20	27.02
Good	9	12.16	13	17.57	22	29.73
Very good	9	12.16	9	12.16	18	24.32
Outstanding	4	5.41	3	4.05	7	9.56
Total	36	48.65	43	51.35	74	100
Weighted Mean	3.0		2.95			

The lack of satisfaction with the training has a negative effect on the confidence of the extension workers resulting in negative implications on performance. Bembridge, Steyn and Williams (1983) in the study conducted in Kwazulu, found that 56% of staff did not perceive training they received at college to be appropriate to the environment and resources. The situation according to Bembridge et al (1983) creates negative perceptions that are not conducive to staff motivation and has important implication on the effectiveness of the organisation in general and the performance of extension staff specifically. Similarly the situation negatively affects the performance of extension workers in Lesotho.

The respondents gave reasons for their dissatisfaction with their level of training and the majority of them indicated that courses offered were out-dated, meaning they were not relevant to the prevailing conditions. Another reason was that no practical training in extension was provided during pre-service training. It therefore becomes difficult for extension workers to translate the theory they learned into practice when they join the extension service. According to Bembridge et al (1983) pre-service training normally concentrates almost exclusively on technological and management training with emphasis on academic work. They further indicated that many of the pre-service training courses in southern Africa tend to be deficient in providing practical training in normal farming operations. It is therefore, crucial to expose students to practical instructional programmes so that they enter extension organisations equipped with practical skills of dealing with farming communities.

It was also found that 55% of the respondents did not receive any in-service training in the past two years. The importance of in-service training is evident in that those workers who received it were found to be performing better (Weighted Mean of 3.0) than those who were not trained on the job (Table 2). In-service training was emphasised by Harris (1980) as being crucial for purposes of improving the performance of individual extension workers. In general, in-service training is an important programme designed to strengthen competencies of personnel while they are on the job thereby improving their efficiency.

Table 2: Distribution of extension workers who received in-service training and the level of performance (N = 74)

Performance Rating	In-service-training		No in-service training		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Unsatisfactory	3	4.05	4	5.41	7	9.56
Satisfactory	10	13.51	10	13.51	20	27.02
Good	8	10.18	14	18.92	22	29.73
Very good	8	10.18	10	13.51	18	24.32
Outstanding	4	5.41	3	4.05	7	9.56
Total	33	44.59	41	55.41	74	100
Weighted Mean	3.0		2.95			

3.3 Performance and academic qualifications

The Department of Agricultural has very few employees with post-graduate qualifications. The majority of staff, as reflected in Table 3, have under-graduate qualifications and BSc in General Agriculture. An attempt was made to compare the performances of workers with different academic qualifications.

Table 3: Distribution of respondents according to highest academic qualification and level performance (N = 74)

Performance Rating	Certificate		Diploma		BSc and above		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Unsatisfactory	0	0	2	2.70	5	6.76	7	9.46
Satisfactory	6	8.11	5	6.76	7	9.46	18	24.32
Good	4	5.41	12	16.22	6	8.11	22	29.73
Very good	12	16.22	4	5.41	3	4.05	19	25.68
Outstanding	4	5.41	1	1.35	3	4.05	8	10.81
Total	33	35.14	24	32.43	24	32.43	74	100
Weighted Mean	3.5		2.9		2.7			

Results show that extension workers who have the lowest academic qualification (Certificate) perform better (Weighted Mean 3.5) than those with higher qualifications (Table 3). This shows that highly

qualified workers are less committed to the work since they feel that their jobs are secure as they are not easily dispensable.

It is clear that high academic qualifications do not necessarily imply good performance. There are often doubts as indicated by Bembridge et al (1983) as to whether extension workers should hold a diploma or a degree. They believe that the essential concern lies in the type of training obtained at college or university and their commitment. What the final qualification is called is of less importance.

3.4 Motivation

3.4.1 Expectations of extension workers

The expectancy theory of motivation states that workers expect a good effort, resulting in good performance to be followed by a reward. The theory holds that a person will work towards a goal when he/she expects the results to be both favourable and probable (Baron, 1990 and Mossley, Megginson & Pietri, 1993). If good performance is not followed by reward then the workers become de-motivated and cease to perform well. Promotion can be one of the rewards that can motivate extension workers. The respondents were asked to indicate when last they were promoted.

Table 4: Distribution of extension workers according to last promotion and level of performance (N = 74)

Performance Rating	Never		1-5 years ago		6-10 years ago		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Unsatisfactory	2	2.70	4	5.41	1	1.35	7	9.46
Satisfactory	10	13.51	9	12.16	1	1.35	10	27.03
Good	13	17.57	6	8.11	3	4.05	11	29.73
Very good	10	13.51	5	6.76	3	4.05	18	24.32
Outstanding	4	5.41	1	1.35	2	2.70	7	9.46
Total	39	52.70	25	33.78	10	13.51	74	100
Weighted Mean	3.5		2.9		2.7			

Results in Table 4 show that about 53% of extension workers have never been promoted since joining the organisation. This works negatively towards the motivation of workers. It would normally be expected that

those who have been promoted recently (Weighted Mean of 2.9) would perform better, however, results show that extension workers who have never been promoted and those who were last promoted more than six years ago perform better (Weighted Mean of 3.5 and 2.7 respectively). The criteria for promotion are not clear since workers who perform well have not been promoted. It can be concluded from the results that good performance is not rewarded which affects motivation negatively.

3.4.2 Motivation and incentives

Any practice that motivates, or induces workers to work more effectively rather than unproductively can be a key part of a programme to increase effective work. Those include the use of proper financial and non-financial incentives.

- *Non-financial incentives:*

Such incentives include among others the work itself. People work harder, more diligently and with more enthusiasm when they are doing the work that they enjoy and that is challenging. The respondents were asked to indicate if they thought they made the right career choices by becoming extension workers.

An interesting finding here is that 50% (Table 5) of extension workers believe that they did not make the right career choice.

Table 5: Distribution of respondents according to satisfaction with career choice and performance (N = 74)

Performance rating	Not right		Right		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Unsatisfactory	4	5.41	3	4.05	7	9.46
Satisfactory	9	12.16	11	14.86	20	27.03
Good	12	16.22	10	13.51	22	29.73
Very good	8	10.81	10	13.51	18	24.32
Outstanding	4	5.41	3	4.05	7	9.46
Total	37	50.00	37	50.00	74	100
Weighted Mean	2.62		2.97			

It was further found that those who were happy with their career performed better (Weighted Mean of 2.97). This implies that since half of the staff were not following a career of their choice, they do not experience job satisfaction and therefore were not particularly motivated to perform effectively in their work. How a worker feels about his/her job has an impact on productivity. If the worker feels that he/she cannot see any future prospects, negative stress is likely to occur and poor performance will result.

- *Financial incentives*

These include salary increases in the form of promotional pay and merit pay increases. According to Ramafoko (2002), there is ample evidence that the use of financial incentives can lead to increased productivity. However, it was evident that financial incentives were not provided to extension workers who perform well. Instead, all Lesotho government employees receive an equal and insignificant increment at the beginning of the financial year. This does not discriminate along lines of performance, which therefore means extension workers who do their work well were not being rewarded. This condition does not motivate extension workers to work harder.

In general, it is likely that motivation among extension workers is low. A number of factors that motivate workers to perform well are not in place. The study revealed that most of the extension workers do not know their roles clearly. Also a large number of them have not achieved much in extension more especially in areas that are priorities of the Ministry.

3.5 Working experience and attitudes of extension workers

Table 6 shows that extension staff are relatively mature in that 85% of them are above the age of thirty, with the oldest being fifty-five, which is the normal age of retirement of public servants in Lesotho.

Results also show that extension workers who are between the ages of 50-59 perform better (Weighted Mean of 3.33) than the rest. As would be expected performance improves with age but surprisingly at age's 40-49 (Weighted Mean of 2.52) performance drops to the lowest level (Table 6). It can however, be generally concluded that extension

workers tend to perform better as they mature. The results are in line with the cultural perception that older extension workers are more efficient and knowledgeable than younger ones. It is evident that the age of extension workers does not affect their performance negatively.

Table 6: Frequency distribution of extension workers according to age and level of performance (N = 74)

Performance Rating	< 30		30 – 39		40 – 49		50 – 59		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	N	%
Unsatisfactory	2	2.70	2	2.70	3	4.05	0	0	7	9.46
Satisfactory	4	5.41	3	4.05	10	13.51	3	4.05	20	27.03
Good	1	1.35	12	16.22	5	6.76	4	5.41	22	29.73
Very good	2	2.70	8	10.81	5	6.76	3	4.05	18	24.32
Outstanding	2	2.70	3	4.05	0	0	2	2.70	7	9.46
Total	11	14.86	28	37.84	23	31.08	12	16.22	74	100
Weighted mean	2.82		3.25		2.52		3.33			

3.5.1 Length of service

The experience of workers can influence their performance. Table 7 below shows the number of years that workers have served in extension and how well they perform.

Results (Table 7) show that the most experienced workers perform much better (Weighted Mean of 3.71) than less experienced workers. It must be noted that young and fresh extension workers join the service with a lot of energy and enthusiasm and perform well. However, with time they loose the spark and become de-motivated. The results indicate that there is need to ensure that motivation and attitudes are kept positive and maintained at high levels.

3.6 The perceived level of competence of extension workers

As farming gets more and more complex and greater crop yields are required to feed burgeoning populations, farmers' know-how needs to be constantly upgraded. In order for that to happen extension workers themselves must have adequate knowledge of the subject matter as well as the ability and skills to pass on the knowledge to the farmers in an

Table 7: The length of service of extension workers and performance (N = 74)

Performance Rating	1 – 5		6 – 10		11 – 15		16 – 20		21 – 25		26 – 30		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	N	%
Unsatisfactory	2	2.70	1	1.35	3	4.05	0	0	1	1.35	0	0	7	9.46
Satisfactory	6	8.11	4	5.41	4	5.41	3	4.05	3	4.05	0	0	20	27.03
Good	6	8.11	8	10.81	2	2.70	0	0	2	2.70	4	5.41	22	29.73
Very good	6	8.11	6	8.11	2	2.70	0	0	3	4.05	1	1.35	18	24.32
Outstanding	3	4.05	2	2.70	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2.70	7	9.46
Total	23	31.08	21	28.38	11	14.86	3	4.05	9	12.16	7	9.46	74	100
Weighted Mean	3.09		3.19		2.27		2.00		2.28		3.71			

effective manner. Agricultural research benefits no one if its results are not communicated systematically to the farmers.

It was not within the terms of reference of this study to conduct an objective assessment of extension workers' knowledge of applied technology and extension. The respondents were however, requested to rate their own perceived knowledge of applied technology in animal husbandry, crop husbandry, Unified Extension System, economics, marketing and community knowledge.

The general finding here was that the overwhelming majority of extension workers rated their competence as average to very poor. Only 30% rated themselves as good to very good. According to the results, the general indication is that extension workers have below average knowledge in technical areas such as animal and crop husbandry. They also indicated lack of competence in as far as the Unified Extension System, economics and marketing were concerned.

3.7 Credibility

An attempt was made to determine the perceived level of credibility of extension workers. Farmers were asked to rank the credibility of extension workers in their areas. They were to be ranked into five categories namely: very high, high, average, low and very low.

Results in Table 8 show that only 29% of farmers rated the credibility of extension workers at high to very high.

Table 8: The level of credibility of extension workers as perceived by the farmers (N = 17)

Level of credibility	Frequency	Percent
Very low	2	11.8
Low	4	23.5
Average	6	35.3
High	4	23.5
Very high	1	5.9
Total	17	100

This substantiates the fact that farmers did not trust the workers and that the workers were not effectively addressing the needs and problems that were perceived important by the farming communities.

The extension workers themselves were requested to rate their own credibility using the same scale as above. It is worth noting that it was likely that some of the respondents would overrate themselves in this regard. Nevertheless, results show that only 30% of the respondents thought that their credibility was high to very high. These results fully concur with those in Table 8. This clearly shows that the level of credibility of extension in Lesotho does not match with their performance ratings. It is a clear indication that extension workers themselves are not satisfied with their own work. This further casts questions on the performance ratings of the extension workers as implemented by the Department of Agriculture.

4. CONCLUSION

Referring to the research hypothesis "Extension workers in Lesotho do not perform satisfactorily", it can be concluded that even though the official performance ratings of extension workers indicated that performance was overwhelmingly satisfactory, other factors that determine performance do not support the performance ratings. The performance ratings are very questionable. It is assumed that the instrument used for the evaluation (Performance Appraisal System) of extension workers in Lesotho was not implemented properly hence the results give an impression that the performance was satisfactory. The performance ratings are questionable because factors that determine good performance such as, motivation, positive attitudes, adequate and quality training, knowledge of subject matter were generally very lacking.

The performance appraisal system is still new in the Ministry of Agriculture and it is very likely that supervisors are not yet familiar with it. There is therefore a need for the Department of Human Resources of the Ministry to engage supervisors in intensive training in the implementation of the extension workers' evaluation system.

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