

VALUE CONGRUENCE, THE SUCCESS OF GROUP FARMING IN AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION

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ABSTRACT

Group farms are schemes involving multiple individuals not related by kin or employment relationships, who share resources for the purpose of farming. Successive group farming endeavours dictates group functioning with converging individual goals. Group farming in South Africa is common but not always successful and there is evidence that social factors are a key, but research investigating the relationship between social factors and the functioning of group farms in South Africa is lacking. This study examines value congruence as a social attribute that affect group work. Values are that which is regarded as important and pursued as goals, with values ranked in order of priority making up a value system. Value systems are both attributes of group and of the individuals making up the group. Of importance is the degree of congruency between the individual member's value and that of the group.

Evidence from organisational sociology indicates that in high performing groups the gap between group and individual value is narrow. The objective of the study is to determine the degree of value congruence between group and individual value, in group farm schemes and to link this to the functioning of the group farm.

1. INTRODUCTION

In South Africa, group farming schemes are common. Examples are the Land reform projects (Roth, Sibanda, Nxasana, & Yates, (Ed.), 2004: 20), smallholder irrigation schemes (Du Plessis, Van Averbeke & Van Der Stoep, 2002: 6) and community gardens. According to Srinath Sridhar, Kartha, & Mohanan (2000: 558), group farms are schemes involving multiple individuals not related by kin or employment relationships who share resources for the purpose of farming. Group farming is a farming approach, which relies on harmonized farming operations and collective management by a number of individuals of a locality (Srinath *et al.*, 2000: 558).

Galeski (1987: 17), distinguished among different types of group farming based on their nature and origin and the purposes of those who established them. This categorisation is useful because the values of groups in these categories tend to differ. Galeski (1987: 17) distinguished among four types of collective farms: Group farms created by believers in an ideology; Group farms created by landless families who were able to acquire the land but not to start individual family farms; Collective farms organized by government in order to reach national economic and social goals (Galeski, 1987: 17) and Collective farms organized by farmers in order to enjoy the advantages of larger operations, lower costs of production, more effective use of land, manpower, and capital and consequently higher economic returns (cooperatives).

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Even though group farming has been encouraged in South Africa their success is highly variable (Bembridge, 2000: 5). According to Bembridge (2000: 2), group projects are generally beset by problems resulting from low participation by farmers due to different reasons and also, due to lack of adequate institutional and extension support including expanded beneficiary access to inputs, credits, extension services, transport, market and government programmes (Mayende, 2004: 48). In their opinion, De Lange Swanepoel, Nesamvuni, Nyamande-Pitso, & Stroebel, (2004: 6) postulated that human capacity and human behaviour were the social attributes that affected the success and proper functioning of group projects. Human behaviour in social groups however, is informed and guided by norms and values (Popenoe, Boulton & Cunningham, 1998: 49).

Values are cognitive constructs that explain preferences in goals, principles, and behavioural priorities of individual and groups (Renner, 2003: 127). According to Cremer & Van Dijk (2002: 435), and Hamm Maclean, Kikulis, & Thibault (2008: 124), group endeavours function poorly when the values of the group and the values upheld by participating members in the group differ. Hamm *et al.* (2008: 126), states that the values that individuals hold and the congruence between these values and the values of the organization or group for which they work have been considered in relation to organizational commitment, and functioning of the group.

Hamm *et al.* (2008: 126) indicated that values differ among individual. Consequently, the behaviour of individual is to an extent unique, as what is important to individual varies (Hamm *et al.*, 2008: 126). Since variation among values of individual members of a group is to be expected, it can be assumed that complete congruence between the values of individual members of the group and the group itself is an ideal state that can never be achieved (Hamm *et al.*, 2008: 127).

However, a high degree of congruence within member values can result in shared beliefs within the group, which in turn can contribute to the formation of an organisational culture (Hamm *et al.*, 2008: 127). Hamm *et al.* (2008: 124) argued that the impact of values on work behaviour is important for the functioning of the group because the management of member values will enable actions to be manoeuvred such that they are directed toward achieving the group's goals.

Silverblatt (2004: 37), states that belonging to a group populated by members with similar values provides a climate of acceptance that is reassuring for individuals and promote environment for good work to be done. Research to investigate how groups manage to achieve group goals despite the variation between the group and members values is warranted to understand how these values are being harmonized considering the importance of value harmony to goal achievement within the group.

2. RESEARCH PROBLEM

Knowledge of the relationship between value congruence and the successful functioning of group farms in South Africa is lacking

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- a) To identify the group values in South African group farm.

- b) To identify individual member values in South African group farm.
- c) To illustrate the existence of value congruence in relation to goal achievement within the group.

4. LITERATURE

Schwartz (1994: 21) explains human values as “desirable trans-situational goals, varying in importance that serves as guiding principles in the life of a person or other social entity”. According to Schwartz (1994: 21), values promote the interests of individuals and social entities by motivating action or serving as a standard with which individuals and groups can judge themselves, others, events and objects. Organisational or group value is then defined as the value that management, executive or leadership of the group ascribe to and promote. This study looks into the harmony between the group value and the member values in group farms.

According to Balazs (1990: 172), harmony and homogeneity of values would serve to ease the disequilibrium and inefficiencies that result from opposing personal philosophies and environmental disruptions in the workplace. Values have the potential to drive behaviours in general (Rokeach, 1973: 10) and according to Abbott, White and Charles (2005: 532), value congruence drive work behaviours more specifically as underlying value and value congruence contributes to various aspects of the group functioning process, including decision making and commitment to the group in general.

Hamm *et al.* (2008: 125) defined value congruence as the level of agreement between an individual member and representatives of the organisation regarding core beliefs and the behaviour that are important in the workplace. According to Jung & Avolio (2000: 950), value congruence is defined as the degree to which individual and organisational values align or agree. In their opinion, Jung & Avolio (2000: 950), argued that the values and subsequent value congruence that occurs between an employee and the values supported by the organisation greatly impacts the achievement of group goals.

A considerable number of researches, such as Abbott, White, & Charles (2005: 532), have drawn attention to the importance of congruence between the values of individual members and organisations. These researches suggests that, when individual members hold values that match the values of the organisation they belong to, they are satisfied with their jobs, identify with the group, and seek to maintain membership to the group (Hamm *et al.*, 2008: 127). These favourable outcomes of value congruence are relevant to individual members as well as the group, as they allow individual members to get fulfilment from their work and promote behaviours linked to positive individual member’s attitudes.

Hamm *et al.* (2008: 130) however postulate that the communication of the organisation’s code of conduct is a direct function of leadership and is also influenced by the level of value congruence within the group. The congruence between individual values and the group value affects performance of the group as it reflects in areas that are important to group performance, this includes, communication, predictability, attraction and trust (Dobni, Ritchie & Zerbe, 2000: 93; Edwards & Cable, 2009: 655).

5. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study adopted a case study approach whereby a food garden, Itumeleng Community Food Garden (I.C.F.G) was selected and studied as a group endeavour. Quantitative research method as describe by Baker (1999: 204) was used to assign numeric value in understanding the magnitude of values and to analyse findings on value congruence at the study area based on responses of the plot holders, this is done using a semi-structured questionnaire. The study also adopted the qualitative research method for data gathering and interpretation since it is an explorative study and adopted the use of observation and test analysis.

The population in this study consists a total of twenty five (25) plot holders and in accordance with (Krejcie & Morgan 1970: 608), the research focused on the a sample size of twenty four (24) plot holders. Different types of methods and instruments were used in gathering primary data and this includes the use of text analysis, observations, questionnaires “by mean of interview schedule” (Baker, 1999: 27). Gathering of primary data commenced between January and February, 2009 and continued through the research between June and July, 2010.

The document analysis method was used to understand the group value through scrutiny of the group constitution. The goal statement in the constitution was read thoroughly to extract what was valued (stated as being important) for the group. This generated the essence of forming the group as what the group intended to achieve from their efforts were stated on the group constitution. This informed the group value.

The non participatory observation method as described by Babbie and Mouton (2001: 293) was used in this research to collect data on the farming practices and to detect the elements of production in the study area. The behaviour of people towards production was noted as well as irrigation times, plot management, weed control, physical appearance of crops grown and plant spacing as these are expected behaviours that speaks to what such individual values as a member of the group. A semi structured questionnaire was used to further probe and quantify the elements of production noted in the observation phase and to gather data on the individual values of the members in an interview schedule.

5.1 Methods of Data Analysis

Data gathered through observation along side with co-observers were noted and later brought together to make themes and reach consensus on any variation observed to generate patterns of variables to be discussed. The structured questions from the questionnaire were analysed quantitatively using a spread sheet, whereby frequencies and tallies were generated, while the open ended questions were analysed firstly by thoroughly reading of the text several times, then collapsing (clustering) similar responses together followed by development of mini theories which were coded for discussion. The analysed data was depicted in tables and charts.

6. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The main objective of this study was to find out the existence of agreement between the individual and the group values regarding core beliefs and the behaviour that are important at the study area. Study indicated and as stated on the constitution, that production is a normal behaviour within the group, which pilots a list of values that the group subscribe to. The

group values are, profit making through generation of income, family sustenance, food security, job creation, knowledge and skill acquisition and cooperative benefits (such as reduced machinery cost) for members. The result of the interview indicated that 90% of the respondents are aware that the group was established to produce vegetable for profit making, family sustenance, food security and job creation for the community which speaks to production as an expected behaviour that leads to the group values.

This study did not over rule that there could be other premises in different context to examine member value such as in a work place, in sports, etc. The values that members of the community garden held in this context, was studied by examining plot holders' reason for involving in the food garden, plot holders' financial commitments to the food garden, relationship among plot holders, farming practices towards production.

6.1 Reasons for Involvement

Findings show that the plot holders of I.C.F.G have a set of reasons for their involvement in the food garden. Majority of the plot holders (75%) at I.C.F.G indicated that they engage in the food garden for leisure and to keep busy. This category of plot holders, occasionally sells their produce. Indications are that the set of respondents that farm for leisure obtains most of the gratitude for meeting other members at the food garden as this provides ground opportunity for enjoying other members' company.

The second category is constituted by 25% of plot holders who are engaged in the food garden for profit making reasons. These categories of plot holders are inclined to focus on increasing quantities and qualities of their produce. However, the set of respondents that are inclined to make profit has something to show for it at the end of the season as findings showed that 20% of the respondents have savings ranging from R300 – R1500 per month after harvesting their produce.

Plot holders producing for the purposes of supporting their families and attaining general food security form another 25% of the respondents. The value of 25% of the respondents in securing food and supporting their families is being frustrated as a result of the absence of value compatibility among the plot holders as plot holders are not having a unified agreement on what to produce and to what extent to produce to secure the quantities of food supply needed to support their family and secure food for the community.

6.2 Financial Commitment

At I.C.F.G, it was found that 85% of the plot holders who rely on personal savings as their source of funding to finance the running of their plots are reluctant to be financially committed to their plot. Their lack of financial commitment is because they are involved in production for leisure and to keep fit. Since they were not expecting financial returns from their production capacity, they seem contented with the value they place on leisure.

Financial commitment is seen as a normal behaviour expected of plot holders that value production. Financial commitment is expected for the purchase of better seed varieties, purchase of better farm implements other than the adapted old implements being used at the study area. Financial commitment is also expected for the purchase of fertilizer to improve soil fertility to boost production since the soil is believed to be low on nitrogen which is a vital nutrient for plant development.

6.3 Relationship among Plot Holders

At the study area, it was observed that plot holders sit together and form small discussion groups during resting periods. In support of what was observed, findings revealed that at I.C.F.G, 95% of the respondents indicate that there is a friendly relationship among members. It was observed that plot holders show signs of cohesion as they form small groups and have private talks during their resting periods after work. However, further probes into this revealed that plot holders have a cordial relationship with one another as indicated by 95% of the respondents and plot holders communicate freely, especially on issues directly affecting the affairs of the food garden.

6.5 Farming Practices toward Value

Findings revealed that the majority of the respondents (55%) are ignorant of any inappropriate farming practices being carried out on the plot, while 45% of the plot holders noticed some inappropriate farming practice ranging from the use of adapted inefficient implement, poor and inconsistent plant spacing, and poor weed control to inadequate knowledge of farming system in general. To empower plot holders on different farming practices that can improve production to achieve the group values, trainings on vegetable production were arranged by the Agriseta and some individuals who are interested in the success of community gardens. Despite these arrangements, majority (55%) of the plot holders do not notice any inappropriate farming practices that could have had an impact of production at the community garden.

By implication, more than half of the farmers at I.C.F.G, carry on with their farming practices without getting to know if what they are doing is in order or not, but it works for them and they are contented with what they realize from their produce. This is because their value is not measured in tangible physical forms like profit making, but in none tangible form of good relation, time keep or leisure. This makes the accomplishment of value congruence between the group and the members almost impossible as their plot evidently is under-utilized and not properly managed to achieve the stated values.

On the other hand, 45% of the respondent that observed some inappropriate practices which includes poor weed control are not communicating their views about the practice to other members due to the absence of group cooperation and harmony of purposes (leisure, profit making, food security).

7. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From the findings of this study through document analysis, observation and interview, the following conclusions were drawn:

Plot holders at I.C.F.G show both incongruent and congruent values to the values subscribed to as the group value. The value of majority (75%) of the plot holders is not congruent with the group value. Majority of the plot holders values leisure, which is not what the group subscribe to. On the other hand, the value of 25% of the plot holders is congruent with that of the group. The value to make profit was subscribed to by 25% of the plot holders which is the same as what the group wants to achieve and an equally percentage subscribed to the group value of food security.

This higher percentage (75%) of respondents showing incongruent value frustrate the production value of the group since the majority of plot holders produce only for leisure and the fun of being in the group. This is evident as they do not show attitudes that can support the productive value of the group. Value incongruence affects the level of production in community garden as every member produces individually based on the member's expectation from the food garden. Incongruent value makes it almost impossible for plot holders to understand the essence of being a member of the group and this prevents the attainment of a unified group value.

Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that within the group, there are some members that have congruent values to the group and there are some members that show incongruent value to the group, therefore, the following recommendations were made:

Any intending member must undergo a value aligning screening or interview that ensures that only members with values similar to the group's value are allowed to be part of the group and as such ensure the transmission of value within the group. This will bring uniformity in the value within the group and there will be little or no need to enforce any value on the members since the value brought by the members is still intact as the value of the group.

Meetings should be organised among the plot holders as a socialisation method and at such meeting, there should be more emphasis on the essence of being part of the group. Group values must always be communicated to the members of the group to allow for any member straying away from the group value to align their value with that of the group. From time to time, a sub group should be arranged to visit each plot holder and understand to check on the performance of the members to ensure that such member is in line with the group value and to give support to members that may need help on the plot to avoid negligence of the plot due to frustration

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