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Motivation Strategies for Improved Performance of Agricultural Extension Workers in Nigeria

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Abstract

The paper described the motivation strategies for improved performance of agricultural extension workers in Nigeria. It highlighted various ways employees in agricultural extension organizations could be motivated. The necessity of building good motivational planning is to boost the morale of the agricultural extension employees in the working place and also to sharpen their attitudes and behaviours towards accomplishment of agricultural extension organization set objectives. Motivation strategies are fast becoming increasingly popular techniques in attracting, developing, and retaining employees in organizations including extension organizations. The synthesis on motivation strategies and the rationale for extension motivation strategies was documented in the paper. The paper recommended that there is need for the administrators/managers of extension organizations to regularly employ the extension motivation strategies identified in order to benefit from its effectiveness.

Keywords*:* Agricultural extension, Employees, Motivation strategies, Performance, Nigeria

Introduction:

Background to the Paper

The purpose of agricultural extension is to disseminate information to raise the production and profitability of the farmers. In a broader interpretation, the purpose of agricultural extension is to advance not alone production knowledge but the whole range of agricultural development tasks, such as credit, supplies, marketing and markets (agricultural process development).The success of Agricultural Development Projects (ADPs) depend on a large scale adoption of improved agricultural technologies by farmers and brilliant performance of frontline extension workers, that is, extension agents (EAs), block extension agents (BEAs) and block extension supervisors (BESs), saddled with this

responsibility (Mwangi and McCaslin,1995). The performance of BESs depends partly on effective supervision from the zonal extension officer (ZEO). Also, the performance of EAs/BEAs depends partly on effective supervision from BESs. Poor performance of the ZEO can result in performance failure of BESs. Poor performance on the part of the BES will largely lead to poor performance of EAs/BEAs and ultimately contact farmer groups/women groups (Ogunbameru, 2001).

Performance requirements are a determination of the acceptable behaviour directly related to the worker's performance on the job or operation. The general requirements of most jobs are stated in the form of job descriptions or job specifications, and procedures or work methods. The manager should translate the requirements of the job into meaningful and, possibly measurable objectives so as to make performance requirements understood. Ideally, these objectives should be in measurable terms, such as quantity, quality, and time. A major advantage of translating performance requirements into objectives is that objectives become a motivational tool for achievement (Okwoche and Asogwa, 2012).

Employees work harder and perform better if motivated and satisfied with their jobs (Ogunbameru, 2004). Motivation--the psychological process that gives purpose, direction, and intensity to behavior--is the most important determinant of effective job performance and is mainly responsible for differential work output (Ogunbameru, 2001). Staff motivation changes as time and conditions change. Motivation depends on incentives that the staff value and believe to be attainable with increased individual performance, and is high when staff frustration is minimal (Okwoche and Asogwa, 2012). For professional employees, job characteristics such as autonomy, task identity, and perceived task significance have an important motivational value (Ogunbameru, 2004). For example, highly educated and more experienced workers are more likely to choose the public sector, offsetting lower wages with rewards arising from the characteristics of their jobs.

If employees believe their actions lead to valuable, attainable rewards, they will work harder. Therefore, managers should identify, support and reinforce individual perception by linking appraisal to professional and personal development. Treating employees inequitably lowers their motivation and performance (Ogunbameru, 2001; Diejomaoh, and Ebo, 2010). Expected outcomes should be stated as explicitly as possible. Managers should state which behaviors will be rewarded and which ones will not, and should tie rewards to individual performance.

Ekhator (2001) sees motivation as an effective tool used by decision makers to bring out the best in employees for them to achieve better performance. Performance refers to the degree of achievement of the tasks or targets that make up an individual's job (Ogunbameru, 2001). Performance reflects how well an individual is fulfilling the requirements of the job. Obviously, one of the administration's greatest responsibilities is to provide employees with adequate working conditions and a supportive environment in order to achieve acceptable level of work performance. Furthermore, it is the responsibility of the management in any organization to encourage good employee performance by providing adequate motivational policies to enhance harmony in the organization. Of the resources acquired, the human factor has been described as the most significant because if not properly managed, it can deliberately retard organizational effectiveness. Evidence abounds to attest to the fact that all employees do not exert

the same effort towards organizational goals or in other words, some employees achieve better results than others. To achieve the desired results, employees will exhibit the required job behaviour.

The dilemma that extension administrators face in today's extension work is how they could get employees to exhibit the required job behaviour in the extension work place. Governments through extension organizations must improve the work performance, productivity, skills and ability of its employees. The problem is how extension administrators motivate the workers to achieve improved extension work performance. The capacity of extension administrators on staff motivation need to be enhanced so that they in turn will be able to motivate their subordinates (employees). Therefore, to acquaint the various administrators and different categories of extension employees to the need to embrace motivation, this paper identified some motivation strategies with a view to achieving improved performance of extension workers in Nigeria.

Problem Statement

The problem is how to motivate the extension workers to achieve improved work performance. Whereas, a number of motivational factors have been identified, proven and documented in literature, unfortunately, little attempt has been made to develop appropriate strategies that capture the various motivational factors for improved performance of extension workers in Nigeria. This paper, therefore, identified some motivation strategies for improved performance of extension workers in Nigeria.

Objectives of the paper

The main objective of the paper was to identify motivation strategies for extension administrators in Nigeria. The specific objectives were to:

(i) highlight the relevant information on motivation;
(ii) itemise the symptoms of poor motivation and the importance of motivation;
(iii) identify the guides to be followed in motivating extension employees in Nigeria;
(iv) inventorize the various motivation strategies for use by extension administrators in Nigeria; and
(v) describe the key considerations in motivating the extension employees in Nigeria.

Methodology:

Existing current documents/literature on motivational factors were assembled and critically reviewed. Consultations were also made with experts, professionals, academics and farmers on the subject matter with a view to improving the performance of extension workers through motivation. The gathered information were synthesized and presented herein.

Presentation of Results:

The Concept of Motivation

Motivation is a general term applying to the entire class of motives, drives, desires, needs, and similar forces. To say that managers motivate their subordinates is to say that they do these things, which they hope will satisfy these drives and induce the subordinates to act in a desired manner. Therefore, there must be some motivating factors that will boost the morale of individuals in order to perform well as well as to improve work performance and increase output. There is an assertion that if human beings

(employees) are not motivated there is the tendency for lower output, inefficiency and ineffectiveness in their performances.

Several management scholars have given several definitions of motivation. According to Deci and Rhyan (1985), "Motivation is the willful desire to direct one's behaviour toward goals. Buchanan and Hueznski (2004) defined motivation as: "The cognitive decision making process through which goal directed behaviour is initiated, energized, directed and maintained". Deci, (1971), opined that motivation generally implies when somebody is stimulated or aroused the interest of a workers so as to be able to work and bring or breeds efficiency in his work. A well structured local government should therefore, be motivated to improve the work performance of staff. Work Performance is considered to be a function of ability and motivation, thus: Work performance =f {(ability) (motivation)}.Motivation can be either intrinsic or extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation stems from motivations that are inherent in the job itself and which the individual enjoys as a result of successfully completing the task or attaining his goals. While extrinsic motivations are those that are external to the task of the job, such as pay, work condition, fringe benefits, security, promotion, the work environment and conditions of work.

Symptoms of Poor Motivation

The symptoms of poor motivation are the indications of poor motivation. They include the following as reported by Aremu (2005).

1. Higher than the usual absenteeism.
2. Dissatisfaction and low morale.
3. Poor quality of work.
4. Reduced productivity.
5. Deterioration of general attitude to work; such as lack of cooperation and general conduct.
6. Numerous incidences of industrial disputes.

Importance of Motivation

Followings are some of the importance of motivation in an organization (Paul and Marc, 2007).

1. Motivation puts human resources into action.
2. It leads to improved level of efficiency of employees.
3. It leads to achievement of organizational goals.
4. It brings about opportunity for personal growth and development.
5. Motivation leads to stability of work force.

Guides for Motivating the Extension Employees

As an administrator; extension staff can effectively be motivated by following these guides (Ogunbameru, 2001):

1. Identify' and understand the needs and personal goals of the extension staff. Beware of assumptions which may be false and misleading.
2. Remember that money is not the only motivator. There are many other rewards that may be required in getting extension staff to work harder for example recognition and in-service training.

3. Set staff targets which are realistic and achievable but also stretch their ability. If possible, involve subordinates in setting their own targets.
4. Always recognize achievement by praise or some other rewards.
5. Do not alter targets without consulting with the staff concerned. If changes are necessary, should be agreed jointly.

Strategies for Motivating the Extension Employees

In identifying a motivation strategy for extension employees, it is important to recognize their needs. Some of the strategies for motivating the extension employees are identified as follows:

i. Performance appraisal: Evaluating performance is to encourage extension workers motivation. An accurate appraisal gives extension workers an important piece of information. A positive appraisal lets them know that their current levels of motivation and performances are both adequate and appreciated. Consequently, this knowledge makes workers feel valued and competent and motivates them to sustain their current levels of inputs and performance. An inadequate appraisal, on the other hand tells extension workers that their performance is unacceptable and may signal that either they are not motivated to contribute sufficient inputs to the job or they cannot contribute certain inputs that are required (Perhaps due to lack of certain key abilities).

ii. Carreer opportunities: A carreer is the sum of work-related experiences throughout one's lifetime (Ogunbameru, 2004). Effective career management helps to ensure that members of an extension organization are motivated to perform at a high level and receive the career opportunities they should, while also ensuring that the organization is making the best use of its human resources.

iii. Pay: This helps in satisfying physiological, security and other needs. Employee needs to believe that he is paid a decent living wage, which compares, favourably with what is offered in other organizations. However, the design of a monetary compensation system as extension motivation is exceedingly complex. Since it serves to satisfy multiple needs and cannot alone motivate the person.

iv. Staff Training: No matter how automated an organization may be, high productivity depends on the level of motivation and the effectiveness of the extension workforce. Staff training is an indispensable strategy for motivating extension workers. The extension organization should have good training programme. This will give the extension workers opportunities for self-improvement and development to meet the challenges and requirements of new techniques of performing a task.

***v.* Security of job:** With this age of automation, machines are fast replacing human labour. Many people lose jobs for this reason. In Nigeria today, socio-economic problems make both the private and public sectors retrench workers. This has greatly demoralized an average Nigerian worker including that of extension organization. To be effectively motivated, the extension employees must be constantly assured of the security of their job.

vi. ***Opportunity to advance:*** Most employees want opportunity for personal growth and development so as to be able to reach their greatest potential, the extension employees are not in exception. This feeling is influenced by a cultural tradition of freedom and opportunity.

vii. ***Recognition****:* Employee recognition as an incentive, offered at relatively low cost but have a high-impact means of reward to extension employees. This recognition could be done by holding annual dinners, luncheons, etc at which high-achievers or performers in extension organizations are celebrated. Other recognition techniques include the distribution of certificates and gold nameplates to well performing extension employees.

Special Considerations in Motivation

It is wrong to assume that workers are equally motivated. In this sub- section, attempt was made to describe how the following categories of workers can be motivated (Ogunbameru, 2004; Ude and Coker, 2012).

(a)Motivating professionals:- The typical employee today is a more highly trained professional with higher education than a blue-collar factory workers**.** Such professionals receive a great deal of intrinsic satisfaction from their work. What then motivates professionals? Money and promotions typically are low on their priority list. This is because they tend to be well paid and they enjoy what they do. In contrast, Job challenge tends to be ranked high. They like to tackle problems and find solutions. Professionals also value support. They want others to think what they are working on is important.

(b)*Motivating contingent workers:* **-** It should be noted that one of the more comprehensive changes taking place in organizations is the addition of temporary or contingent employees. As downsizing has eliminated thousands of "Permanent" jobs, increasing number of new openings are for part-time, contract and other forms of temporary workers. Contingent workers don't have the security or stability that permanent employees have. They also are typically provided with little or no health care, pensions or similar benefits. What will then motivate temporary employees? An obvious answer is the opportunity for permanent status. In those cases when permanent employees are selected from the pool of temporaries, temporaries will often work hard in hopes of becoming permanent.

(c)Motivating low-skilled workers: **-** One of the most challenging motivation problems in organizations is: How do you motivate individuals who are making very low wages and who have little opportunity to significantly increase their pay in either their current jobs or through promotions? These jobs are typically filled with people who have limited education and skills, and pay levels are below or little above minimum wage. Traditional approaches for motivating those people should focus on providing more flexible work schedules and filling these jobs with retirees and others whose financial needs are less. Others include increase in pay levels.

Conclusion and the Way Forward:

The paper indicated that motivation strategies are importantly, fast becoming a popular technique in attracting, developing, and retaining employees in organizations. It consequently, stressed the need to

enhance the capacity of extension administrators on motivation strategies with a view to motivating their employees for improved extension work performance in Nigeria. This paper therefore, identified the motivation strategies that extension administrators might use to heighten subordinate's work motivation and improve performance.

The following suggestions, if implemented, will go a long way in enhancing the efficiencies and effectiveness of motivation in achieving improved extension work performance in Nigeria:

- Since motivation is very effective towards achieving higher work performance, there is need for extension administrators to regularly use it in order to benefit from its effectiveness.
- The various strategies for motivation identified by the paper should be strictly adhered to by extension administrator, so that work performance level that could be increased in the course of using the motivation strategies can be maintained and even increased.
- The packages (incentives) should be enjoyed by all the workers without any discrimination and discrepancy to prevent loopholes in achieving improved extension work performance in Nigeria. The incentives must be feasible for implementation. Extension organizations should, therefore try to balance material considerations with non-material reinforcements to maximize job quality and quantity.
- Extension administrators should seek and obtain feedback on how employees perceived motivations. Feedback combined with appropriate motivation strategies produces the strongest effect/impact on job performance of extension workers in Nigeria.

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