

Job and Organizational Commitments among Agricultural Extension Agents in Rivers State Agricultural Development Programmes (ADPs), Nigeria: Implications for Staff Management

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Abstract: The study assessed the differences in job and organizational commitments among extension agents in Rivers State ADPs. Data were collected from 61 respondents who were randomly selected from a total population of 117 Extension Agents in Rivers State ADPs using structured questionnaire. Analysis of data was carried out using descriptive and inferential statistics such as percentage, mean and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). The result revealed that about 64% of the Extension Agents are within the age group of 40-49 years, about 82% are males, about 64% have 11-15 years of working experiences in Rivers State ADPs, and about 42% possess Bachelor Degree in Agriculture. The ANOVA result showed that there are significant differences in the level of job commitment among Extension Agents of different age groups ($F = 0.0037$) and different levels of educational qualification ($F = 0.01$). It was recommended that the Agricultural Development Programmes (ADPs) should intensify efforts at boosting the Fortnightly Training of Extension Agents and other staff improvement programmes since such programmes enhance the technical and professional skills and competence of extension agents for agricultural extension service delivery.

Keywords: Job Commitment, Organizational Commitment, Staff Management.

1. INTRODUCTION

The scope of extension service delivery in many developing countries is rapidly increasing from a single-factor to broad-based development foci. Studies indicate that extension services cover a wide variety areas, which include micro-enterprise development, poverty alleviation, on-farm and off-farm livelihoods, group mobilization, urban and peri-urban extension services, youth and women development and empowerment, food security, sustainable natural resource development, skill acquisition, and so on (Echeverria, 1998; FAO, 2000). The foregoing new directions have placed new pressures on extension agencies and their managers in terms of planning and implementation of extension services geared towards meeting broad-based needs of rural dwellers in different nations.

However, in Nigeria, the ADPs – a nation-wide but state-specific extension agency in collaboration with other national and international organizations have evolved several programmes and projects to respond to the above broad-based development needs. To achieve the objectives of the programmes in line with the new development needs and adaptations require a committed workforce. This is because according to Nwaogwugwu (2003) the successful implementation of agricultural extension projects aimed at meeting the new developmental needs in rural areas depend to a large extent on

Extension Agents who exhibit positive work behaviours including commitment to their organization and job. Commitment in a workplace has been seen as a strong belief in and acceptance of the organization's goals and values; willingness to exert considerable effort in specific duties on behalf of the organization and strong desire to maintain membership in the organization doing same job and duties (Mowday, *et.al*, 1982; George and Jones, 1996; Buchannan, 1999). Extension Agents are expected to express commitment through their strong identity and belief in their job and organization, readiness to sacrifice their time and efforts, sense of happiness, strong participation and effective discharge of assigned duties as well as loyalty to the extension agency and their job. This is essential since some studies have associated organizational and job commitment of Extension Agents to other positive work behaviours such as job success, organizational longevity, job performance, job satisfaction, job involvement and organizational performance (Mathieu, 1991; Ostroff, 1992; Stoner and Freeman, 1992; Johnnie and Nwasike, 2002).

Over the years, efforts have been made by the management of various State ADPs in Nigeria to secure and retain the services of Field Extension Agents who will exhibit strong commitment to the extension agency and service. These efforts include improved policies on staff development, remuneration, work environment, facilities, recruitment, deployment and promotion and the likes. Despite the above attempts, diversity in the socio-demographic characteristics of the extension workforce appears a common feature in the ADPs in Nigeria. Such diversities may likely have critical consequences on the commitment behavior of individual agents, which in turn may pose management challenges on staff control. Furthermore, it may likely be possible that for the above reasons, employee retention, turnover and redundancy have remained recurrent challenges facing various ADPs management in Nigeria. In view of this background, the study described the socio-demographic characteristics of Extension Agents, ascertained the level of job and organizational commitments of Extension Agents and assessed the differences in organizational and job commitments of Extension Agents in Rivers State ADPs in the Niger Delta area of Nigeria.

1.1. Hypothesis of the Study:

The following hypotheses were tested in the study:

There are no significant differences in job and organizational commitments among Extension Agents of different age groups, sex, and years of working experience, educational qualifications and marital status.

2. SUBJECTS AND METHODS

The study was conducted among Agricultural Extension Agents in Rivers State ADPs located in the Niger Delta area of Nigeria. Data were obtained from 61 respondents randomly selected from a total population of 117 Extension Agents in Rivers State ADPs. The tool used for data collection was a questionnaire titled "job and organizational commitment questionnaire" constructed and validated by the researchers and a team of 3-experts in organizational behaviour. It contained structured items designed in two sections. Section I adopted a check list design containing socio-demographic characteristics such as age, sex, years of working experience, educational qualification and marital status. These were measured using nominal scale (1, 2, 3, and 4). Section II contained a 12 and 15 variable indicators of job and organizational commitments respectively measured on a four-point likert-type summated rating scale of agreement such as strong agree (SA) = 4, agree (A) = 3, disagree (D) = 2 and strongly disagree (SD)= 1. Data analysis was carried out using, Percentage, mean and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA).

3. RESULTS

Table 1. Socio-demographic Characteristics of Extension Agents in Rivers State ADPs.

Socio-demographic Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Age group		
30-39 years	19	31.00
40-49 years	39	64.00
50-59 years	3	5.00
Sex Group		
Male	50	82.00
Female	11	18.00
Years of Working Experience		

6- 10 years	22	36.00
11 – 15 Years	39	64.00
Marital Status Group		
Married	61	100.00

Table 2. One Way ANOVA of Job and Organizational Commitments of Extension Agents in Rivers state ADPs based on age group

Source of Variance	Between Groups	Within Groups	Total	F-ratio	p-value
Job Commitment					
Df	2	59	61		
SS	233.58	1096.23	1329.80		
MS	116.79	18.90		6.18	0.0037
Organizational Commitment					
Df	2	59	61		
SS	20.94	1453.42	1474.36		
MS	10.47	25.06			
				0.44	0.66

Table 3. One Way ANOVA of Job and Organizational Commitments of Extension Agents of different years of working Experience in Rivers state ADPs

Source of Variance	Between Groups	Within Groups	Total	F-ratio	p-value
Job Commitment					
Df	2	59	61		
SS	91.02	1356.78	1447.80		
MS	45.51	23.39		1.95	0.15
Organizational Commitment					
Df	2	59	61		
SS	21.96	1185.29	1207.25		
MS	10.98	20.44		0.54	0.59

Table 4. One Way ANOVA of Job and Organizational Commitments of Extension Agents in Rivers State ADPs with different levels of Educational Qualification

Source of Variance	Between Groups	Within Groups	Total	F-ratio	p-value
Job Commitment					
Df	2	59	61		
SS	46.26	1160.98	1207.25		
MS	23.13	20.02		1.16	0.32
Organizational Commitment					
Df	2	59	61		
SS	202.43	1271.93	1474.36		
MS	101.21	21.93		4.62	0.01

4. DISCUSSION

4.1. Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Extension Agents in Rivers State ADPs:

The socio-demographic characteristics of Extension Agents were presented on Table 1. The results revealed that majority of the respondents (about 64%) are within 40 and 49 years of age, followed by those in the middle ages of 30 and 39 years (about 31%). Majority (about 82%) are males, about 64% have relatively long years of working experience of between 11 and 15 years with about 38% and 42% of them, possessing bachelors' degree and NCE, HND respectively. All the respondents are married. In fact, this finding agrees with similar report in Ogun and Akwa Ibom States ADPs in the Western and Eastern regions of Nigeria respectively (Adebayo *et al*, 1999; Adesope and Agumagu, 2003; Nwaogwugwu

and Agumagu, 2006). This however suggests that Extension Agents in ADPs in various parts of Nigeria almost share similar socio-demographic characteristics.

4.2. Differences in Job and Organizational Commitments among Extension Agents of different age:

The result of Analysis of Variance test between three age groups (30- 39 years; 40 – 49 years and 50 – 59 years) of the respondents was presented on Table 2. The result showed that $F = 0.0037$ ($p < 0.05$) in respect to their job commitment. This result implies a rejection of the null hypothesis. Hence there is a significant difference in the job commitment among the three age groups of respondents. Mean variability test was further performed to identify the source of the difference in job commitment of the three age groups of respondents in Rivers State ADPs. The variable mean value showed that Group 1 (30 – 39 years) = 36.05; Group 2 (40 – 49 years) = 37.35 and Group 3 (50 – 59 years) = 41.73. This result implies that as age increases, job commitment gets higher among Extension Agents in Rivers State ADPs. This result corroborates previous finding by Hrebina (1984) that age and seniority are significantly related to job commitment. Increase in age is likely to be associated with a sense of maturity. Thus in extension service job, maturity is needed by Extension Agents to handle complex issues that may arise in the field, which enhance credibility of Extension Agents and in turn encourage their acceptability by rural farmers. On the other hand, the results of data analysis carried out on the organizational commitment, showed that $F = 0.66$ ($p > 0.05$). This implies acceptance of the null hypothesis that there are no significant differences in organizational commitments among Extension Agents of different age groups in Rivers State ADP as indicated in Table 2.

4.3. Differences in Job and Organizational Commitments among Extension Agents of different Years of Working Experience:

Results in Table 3 showed that $F = 0.15$ ($p > 0.05$) for job commitment and $F = 0.59$ ($p > 0.05$) for organizational commitment. . The result revealed that the null hypothesis, which states that there are no significant differences in the level of job and organizational commitments among Extension Agents of different years of working experience in Rivers State ADP could be upheld. The finding refutes past studies which identified years of working experience in the organization as a variable related to commitment behavior of employees (Sheldon, 1981; Port et.al, 1983; Glisson and Durrick, 1988). This contradiction finds explanation in the fact that employees in government parastatal and public sectors in Nigeria such as the ADPs are economically insecure, as the tenure system and years of working experience do not offer job security and immunity due to retrenchment and rationalization policies in recent years. Often, those affected by the two policies are the longer serving employees. Consequently, it tends to balance the commitment equilibrium among Extension Agents no matter their years of working experience. This view, however, confirms the position of Johnnie and Nwasike (2002) that experiences that promote commitment are conditioned by organizational and environmental forces which are beyond the direct control of the employing organization. Since no significant differences in job and organizational commitments exist among Extension Agents of different years of working experience, then the dynamism associated with extension service job ushers a common ground for Extension Agents to carry out their duties within the extension agency on the basis of innovations available at the time. These innovations vary overtime. This is indicative of the new packages that form the nucleus of ADPs training sessions, workshops and seminar for Extension Agents in recent times.

4.4. Differences in Job and Organizational Commitments among Extension Agents of different Educational Qualifications:

Results on Table 4 revealed that $F = 0.32$ ($P > 0.05$) and $F = 0.01$ ($P < 0.05$) for job commitment and organizational commitment respectively. Thus there are no significant differences in the level of job commitment among Extension Agents of different levels of educational qualification in Rivers State ADPs. However, significant differences exist in the level of organizational commitment among Extension Agents of different levels of educational qualification. This result implies that the job commitment behaviour of the respondents is absolved from their educational qualification level but likely on professional knowledge, competence and skills fostered through Fort-Nightly Trainings (FNT) on current innovation packages receiving the attention of the agency. This argument is in line with the finding of Becker and Carper (1986) that identification with a profession (commitment) was related to the development of technical interest and skills. This explains the reason behind the high level of job and organizational commitment found among Extension Agents in Rivers State ADPs (Agumagu and Nwaogwugwu, 2006). On the other hand, significant differences were found to exist among Extension Agents of different levels of educational qualifications in Rivers State ADP. The difference in

organizational commitment was found to increase with a decrease in educational qualification level and reached the highest at National Diploma in Agriculture group. This finding implies that the lower the level of educational qualification the higher the organizational commitment of Extension Agents. This finding is in conformity with Steers (1987) who found that education was inversely related to commitment of employees to their organization. The finding further validates the view that with higher educational qualification, Extension Agents might be better equipped to compete for job opportunities in other related work organizations than Extension Agents with lower educational qualifications. Thus Extension Agents with lower educational qualification level have to remain committed to the ADPs. No wonder there is constant drain of Field Extension Personnel with higher educational qualification from the ADPs in Nigeria to other work organizations.

5. CONCLUSION

The study has showed that Rivers state ADP is made up of Extension Agents with diverse socio-demographic status in terms of their age, sex, years of working experience and educational qualifications. There is a significant difference in job commitment behaviours among Extension Agents of different age groups. Again, organizational commitment behaviour differed among extension agents of different levels of educational qualification in Rivers State ADP.

6. RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made.

ADP management should intensify efforts at boosting the Fortnightly Training (FNT), Workshop, Conferences and other staff improvement programmes with innovations relevant to the farmers since no significant differences in job and organizational commitments exist among Extension Agents of different years of working experience. Such staff improvement programmes will enhance technical and professional skills, competence and credibility of Extension Agents within the rank and file, which in turn will boost commitment to their job and loyalty to the ADP.

Since the finding indicate that significant differences exist in the level of organizational commitment among Extension Agents of different levels of educational qualification with low qualified Extension Agents showing higher commitment to their organization, the ADPs in Nigeria should upgrade the working conditions (emolument, rewards, other fringe benefits, etc) of Field Extension Agents better than conditions of service in the civil service and other similar work organizations as a strong measure to retain highly qualified personnel in the ADPs. This will forestall the possible cases of attrition of field staff with higher qualifications to other work organizations.

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