

A STUDY ON ATTITUDES OF RANGE AGRICULTURAL INSTRUCTORS TOWARDS THEIR JOB

K. SUBRAMANIAM

Department of Agriculture (NEP), Varothayanagar, Kanniya Road, Trincomalee

ABSTRACT

Agriculture sector faces many challenges in food production. Since All technological innovations and other relevant activities being implemented by the Department of Agriculture for peasant benefits will eventually reach the hands of the Agricultural Instructors for dissemination to farmers, one of the biggest challenges facing extension is the development and maintenance of attitudes and competencies that will make the greatest contribution in extension service delivery to community. The purpose of this study was to appraise the attitudes of Agricultural Instructors providing village agriculture extension services in the northern and eastern province of Sri Lanka towards their job. The data for this study were obtained by use of job attitude survey administered in the study area. Identified attitudinal factors for the study were the working condition, communication, the work itself, pay and co-workers relationship. Major findings indicate that the inherent nature of Agricultural Instructors is to have a positive attitude towards their job. The job factors offering the Agricultural Instructors the positive attitudes are the communication established between Agricultural Instructors and various layers of administration, the intrinsic reward of the job itself, and the relationship with co-workers and the working conditions. The job factors offering the negative attitudes were the inadequate pay for a comfortable living. Attitudes of Agricultural Instructors toward the job and the relationship with service did not significantly vary with the service.

KEYWORDS: Attitudes, Agricultural instructors, Communication, Job.

INTRODUCTION

Agricultural development increased following the severe food shortage that prevailed after World War II. Consequently, attention was focused on research, extension, and training programs directed toward peasant agriculture development. A new approach to extension evolved where an extension worker was considered to be an "encouraging companion who helped farmers obtain inputs," and thus Agricultural Instructors were deployed in every division as village extension personnel. In small scale farming situations, the extension personnel's task becomes more critical because his attitude or intrinsic motivation must convey to the farmers his interest and skill to help the farmer achieve his goal to produce crops in very small parcels. Katz (1966) defines a successful officer, as one, who has a composite of technical, human and conceptual skill. Selected extension personnel receive adequate training in technical skills. Such training usually address external rather than internal objectives. Agricultural science training produces a variety of technically skilled persons who are employed in the field of agriculture extension as extension personnel, but a proportion of the farmers receive greater benefits than others. Thus the question arises: Why and how

are some extension personnel different in their work performance. While there may be reasons for discrepancies in the job performance and task accomplishment, attitudes of staff towards the job is considered relatively important for effective extension services. All technological innovations and other relevant activities implemented by the Department of Agriculture for peasant benefits will eventually reach the Agricultural Instructors for dissemination to farmers. In case a farmer fails to adopt the new technologies, it may be attributed partially to the ineffectiveness of extension workers. Carter (1983), in his study, discussed the inadequacies present in the performance of those engaged in agricultural extension and development. Carter feels that rural development workers need to function more as educators and problem solvers than as technicians. Responding to technical requests is relatively easy compared to developing and maintaining public relationship. There is no guidance to prepare for this role other than possibly through on – the job training or mentor guidance. It is also understandable that the functions envisioned by the organization are not always synonymous with those performed by rural development workers, indicating a dichotomy between perceived and actual training needs.

According to David (1963): “A major concern of administration is to determine what professional competencies and attitudes are most needed in their staff. One of the biggest challenges facing extension is the development and maintenance of attitudes and competencies that will make the greatest contribution”. This statement emphasizes the need for positive attitudes towards extension work and that a good attitude must be maintained by the extension staff to motivate the farmer for adoption. The study indicates that the employees held a divergence of opinions as to the relative value of a large number of competencies identified with job performance. It is believed from the Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs theory that attitudes of extension workers towards the job depends on their needs satisfaction. Cognitive Dissonance theory states that satisfaction is a dynamic and changing process. Researchers generally believe that extension organizations function best with quality staff who possess positive attitude permitting them to effectively pursue both personal and organizational goals. Further, negative attitude can diminish a person’s desire to pursue one’s career in an effective way in that particular field. The literature indicates that attitudes of extension personnel are vital to the success of organizations, institutions, and agricultural development. All Agricultural Instructors do not have the same interest in extension work and such situations emphasize the need for this study. It is generally believed by sociologist that attitudes are not inherent and that they can be developed. There is wide agreement among researchers that attitudes are complex because they are composed of a number of component, characteristics or dimensions.

The study had three objectives. One was to identify the general attitude of Agricultural Instructors towards their job in agricultural extension service. Second was to identify whether there are any significant differences in attitudes among the Agricultural Instructors based on differences in length of service. Third was to identify the attitudes of Agricultural Instructors regarding working conditions, work itself, communication, salary and relationship with co-workers, all of which were identified as factors affecting attitudes in this study.

METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURE

A survey research method using mail questionnaires was employed for determining the attitudes of a range of Agricultural Instructors towards their job.

Population and Sample

The target population of this study was the Agricultural Instructors involved in village extension service attached to the Northern and Eastern Provincial Department of Agriculture in Sri Lanka. The accessible population included all Agricultural Instructors who were deployed in Agriculture Extension Centre in seven districts in the regions. A total of 95 Agricultural Instructors were deployed in the ranges in seven districts of Northern and Eastern Provinces.

The sampling unit was an individual agricultural instructor. No sampling technique was used, as the study was conducted for all sampling units.

Design

A descriptive survey was done and the instrument used to collect data was a questionnaire. The questionnaire was developed compiling from the available instruments on identifying attitudinal factors for extension personnel and from Science Research Association for Attitude Survey instruments. The questionnaire was hand delivered to respondents through the respective District Heads of Agriculture Department and received back by mail.

Data collection and instrumentation

The initial step in collection of data was the formation of questionnaire on job attitude. The Science Research Association Attitude (S.R.A) survey was reviewed for preparation of the questionnaire to confirm the validity and reliability of the statements. The survey incorporated

questions and statements which were applicable to evaluate job attitudes of Agricultural Instructors providing extension service in the village. Statements covered five attitude factors: 1. Working conditions which included statements on the nature of duty and geographic location; 2. Communications which included the statements in the questionnaire on working condition covered adequacy of training for the job, travelling, the work load, preference to service in the community, liking for field work and nature of duty, employee input into the decision - making processes and instructions and contacts with clients; 3. Work itself which included the statement on such items as a well defined work program, personal contact with clientele, opportunity for creativity, freedom from tension and pressure, self-respect and responsibility. Four co-workers which included statements on perceived competency and interpersonal relationships; 5. Salary which included statements on the perceived adequacy and fairness or equality of compensations.

The questionnaire composed of 41 statements. The respondents were asked to rank their choice of response from 1 to 4 according to how the statement agreed with their feelings about the job. A fifth choice, "Not Applicable" was available. The choices given were: 1 strongly agrees; 2 agree; 3 disagree; 4 strongly disagree; 5 not applicable statements were given in both positive and negative directions. Respondent length of service was considered as personnel characteristic which influences the attitude over time. Length of service was measured as five years or less or more than five years.

Data analysis

The data collected in this study was analyzed using the SPSS computer package. Data were reported in terms of frequency and percentages. Some statements which were negatively stated were assigned the response in the positive direction, *i.e.* "strongly disagree" and "disagree" response for negatively worded statements were adjusted to the "strongly agree" and "agree" response column. The reason for reversing the scoring of negative items was to provide a total score that reflected positive feeling towards the object in the questions.

To study the second objective, questionnaires were separated into two sets which included the responses by those with 5 years or less service and by those with more than 5 years of service; frequency and percentages were reported.

For the third objective, attitude factors identified were separated according to the factors. Frequencies and percentages were calculated and reported for each factor. Frequencies and percentages were calculated relative to positive and negative feelings about the statement.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The response rate was 95%. Eighty nine of the 95 individual Agricultural Instructors responded to the questionnaire.

General attitude

According to Carter (1983), good attitudes toward the job must be possessed to meet competency requirements and to perform effective extension service for the community.

The agreed response to statements of all attitudinal factors received the highest percentage indicating that most Agricultural Instructors agreed with the statement. However, a total of 65% showed their positive attitude to statements and 35% showed negative responses or disagreement about the statements. Thus, more respondents showed a high attitude towards their job (Table 1).

Table 1. Overall frequencies and percentage of responses by choice.

<i>Choice</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Positive	2387	65
Negative	1062	30
Neutral	167	5
Total	3616	100

Relationship with length of service

It is believed that experienced personnel have more interest in the job and a better understanding of their work tasks, organizational goal, and duty performance than inexperienced personnel.

Respondents with five or less years of service tended to have the highest morale while those with 15 or more years of service had high morale. In both cases, the percentage for the positive response was approximately equal (Table 2).

When comparing the percentage of respondents from each group for each response, both groups reported nearly comparable percentages. No conclusive difference in percentage was observed and it was proved in the t test.

Table 2. Frequency (f) and percentage of overall response by length of service.

<i>Length of service</i>	<i>Positive</i>		<i>Negative</i>		<i>Neutral</i>	
	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
5 years or less (n=30)	1171	75.8	308	19.93	66	4.27
More than 5 years (n=59)	1520	73.4	450	21.73	101	4.88

Attitudes factors

To assess the factors identified that have potential effect on the attitudes, each of the job attitude factors was examined separately. Responses to each statement were classified into "positive and negative" categories towards statements and interpreted accordingly. Positive responses to statements were combined. Both "strongly agree" and "agree" responses and the summated value of both was used for the positive response and so did for negative response and so was the frequency of positive and negative responses calculated. Respondents unwilling to give their opinion could have responded to fifth choice. Table 3 shows the data dealing with the attitude factors giving the frequency and percentage of responses for each factor calculated in relation to positive or negative categories.

Table 3. Frequency (f) and percentage of total responses to overall factors in relation to positive and negative attitude.

<i>Factor</i>	<i>Positive</i>		<i>Negative</i>		<i>Neutral</i>	
	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
Working conditions	503	56.5	348	39.0	31	3.48
Communication	574	71.4	182	22.7	39	4.86
Work itself	868	69.64	302	24.21	65	5.21
Co-workers	302	84.80	41	11.53	10	2.80
Pay	140	39.5	189	53.25	22	6.20
Total	2387	64.36	1062	30.13	167	4.51

In general about 65% of the respondent revealed that they had a high level of positive attitude for all attitudinal factors identified in this study. However, respondents were not satisfied with their pay.

Working conditions

Based on the responses to statements about working conditions, 80% of the Agricultural Instructors agreed that working conditions were acceptable while negative feeling was shown towards working condition due to high rate of travelling and other factors. Nature of extension work involves frequent field visits that might make extension worker tired of work. This perception was not agreed by 80% of the respondents (Table 4).

Table 4. Frequency (f) and percentage of respondents in relation to positive and negative feelings to the statements about working conditions.

Statement No.	Statement	Positive		Negative		Neutral	
		f	%	f	%	f	%
3	I feel I have been adequately trained for my job	71	80	18	20	0	0
4	I often feel worn out and tired of my job	43	48	41	46	4	4.5
11	For my kind of job working conditions are satisfactory	71	80	11	12	3	3.4
20	My job provides excellent opportunity to serve the community	46	52	34	38	8	9
41	Too much travelling often makes me tired	8	9	80	90	1	1.1

Eighty percent of the total respondents felt that they had been adequately trained for the work. Though the negative feeling on the statement about worn – out and tired on the job existed, they felt that they were given an excellent opportunity to serve the society. However, 56% of the respondents had a positive attitude towards working condition, while 39% revealed negative response.

Communication

Research has shown the importance of communication in job situations, such as knowing what is expected, being able to make suggestions, voice complaints, knowing what the goals of organization and being involved in the decision making process. The frequency of responses relative to positive and negative communication factors are given in Table 5.

Personal evaluation, appreciation and commendation are valued in the performance improvement and this has intrinsic motivation towards job. However, 52 respondents or 58% agreed that they are given credit and praise for a job well done.

Organizational structure is another component of job attitude. It appears that increased goal sharing of an organization is positively related to job attitude. The structure is also affected by the supervisor-subordinate relationship. The more employees and supervisors agree on how the work should be performed, the better the job attitudes (Carroll, 1973).

A good management would value the suggestion and complaints made by the subordinate. The study reveals that 66 respondents had negative feeling about their suggestions and complaints being ignored by overall management. This covertly reveals that the management were expected to give due consideration for the complaints made by them. It further

discloses that organization had communication gap between strategic level management and operational level management. However, directions from high level for work were expected by the respondents.

Table 5. Frequency (f) and percentage of respondents in relation to positive and negative feelings to the statements about communication.

Statement No.	Statement	Positive		Negative		Neutral	
		f	%	f	%	f	%
5.	I am given credit and praise for a job well done	52	58	33	37.1	4	4.5
32.	I wish my boss would give me more direction	81	91	6	6.7	1	1.1
34.	I know what is expected of me	85	95	1	1.1	1	1.1
36.	Extension ignores our suggestions and complaints	16	18	66	74.2	7	7.9

The goal expectations by the organization were not well perceived by 50% of the respondents while they expressed positive response to what is expected from them in the job by the organization. This gives an ambiguity in understanding of organization's goal.

Work itself

Tilburg (1988) showed that the intrinsic reward of work itself ranked high on the job satisfaction level of extension personnel. Respondents in this study felt that their jobs were very interesting, rewarding and had high prestige in the society (Table 6). Respondents were proud of being Agricultural Instructors as they felt that they really did something for society through this job.

Twenty eight respondents felt that their job was often dull and monotonous. This reflects that extension needs a change in extension management strategy.

Statements associated with social interaction like client contact and sense of belongings were positively responded though some disliked in individual contact.

Many complaints have been made about reports required by Department of Agriculture regarding extension program implementation. But, study revealed the acceptance of the necessity of report submission.

Poor opportunity for involving in program planning affected respondents' morale in using their maximum capability.

More than 72% positive responses were obtained to the statement that dealt with pride in working in extension and with service to clientele.

Table 6. Frequency (f) and percentage of agricultural instructor's responses in relation to positive and negative feeling to the statements about work itself.

Statement No.	Statement	Positive		Negative		Neutral	
		f	%	f	%	f	%
1.	I have a most interesting and rewarding job	88	99	0	0	1	1.1
2.	My job has high prestige in society	81	91	8	9	0	0
6.	My job is often dull and monotonous	45	50	28	31	14	15.7
10.	I don't like a person to person individual contact basis	43	48	32	36	14	15.7
24.	I am proud of working in extension	68	76	18	20	3	3.4
29.	I have little opportunity to use my maximum ability in the program	20	22	69	77	0	0
37.	The reports I fill out are needed	78	88	9	10	1	1.1

Co-workers

Agricultural Instructors indicated the quality of the relationship between them and their co-workers. Table 7 reveals their responses about co-workers.

Table 7. Frequency (f) and percentage of respondents in relation to positive and negative statements about co-workers.

Statement No.	Statement	Positive		Negative		Neutral	
		f	%	f	%	f	%
13.	The people who get promotion usually deserve the promotion	78	87.6	8	9	1	1.1
17.	Personnel evaluation helps to improve my job	60	67.4	22	24.8	6	6.7
39.	The people I work with help each other	84	94.3	5	5.6	0	0
40.	The people I work with think they run the program	80	89.9	6	6.7	3	3.4

Seven percent of the total respondents disagreed with the promotion awarded to the people. However, majority of the respondents agreed that the promotions were given to deserving people.

Personal evaluation on the work performance is agreed as a necessary tool for performance improvement. Sixty respondents (67%) showed positive response for personnel evaluation. Statement on program ownership and mutual assistance in running the program had a high positive response.

Salary

In most of the research conducted on attitudes and job satisfaction, researchers found dissatisfaction with extrinsic component the pay and promotion (Tilburg, 1988). Salary affects attitudes in a relative manner. The employees seem to measure their salaries against the salaries others receive and adequacy for livelihood.

Statements regarding adequacy of pay, their pay compared to others in similar agencies were felt negative while respondents were satisfied with employee benefits and privileges. The responses to statements with respect to pay issues are shown in Table 8.

Table 8. Frequency (f) and percentage of agricultural instructor's responses in relation to positive and negative feelings to the statements about pay.

Statement No.	Statement	Positive		Negative		Neutral	
		f	%	f	%	f	%
8	My pay is adequate to live comfortably	21	24	57	64	11	12.4
12	I am underpaid for the work I do	22	25	54	61	11	12.4
23	I am satisfied with our leave and employee benefits	81	91	8	9	0	0
30	In my opinion the pay in extension is lower than that of other similar jobs	16	18	70	79	0	0

A total of 61% of those who responded felt that they were underpaid for the work they did. Only 21 of Agricultural Instructors agreed that their pay was adequate to live comfortably.

CONCLUSIONS

Based upon the findings the following conclusions are drawn:

1. The attitude of Agricultural Instructors providing village level extension services was generally positive.
2. Only 35% of the Agricultural Instructors had negative attitudes toward their job.
3. When comparing the number of respondents by length of service, no differences were observed between the groups.
4. Agricultural Instructors had positive attitudes toward the communication factors associated with their job. However, management should address their grievances and develop good governance, and value the operational level officers' complaints.
5. Agricultural Instructors receive positive intrinsic rewards in the work itself.
6. Agricultural Instructors had a positive quality of relationship between themselves and their co-workers.

7. Respondents were not satisfied with the pay while being contented with other privileges.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Acknowledge the Sri Lanka Institution for Development Administration for opportunity given to conduct this study.

REFERENCES

- Carrol, B. 1973. Job Satisfaction. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University.
- Devid, P. and J.C. Bledsoe. 1974. Mr. Chairman Your behavior Affects Morale. Journal of Extension, 12 (Spring), 12-19.
- Carter, G.L. 1983. Competencies Required of Extension and Rural Development Workers. International Programs Paper Series. Paper #8, School of Agriculture and Life Science, Carolina State University, Raleigh, N.C.
- Katz, R.L. 1966. Executive Skills: What Makes a Good Administrator. In: Readings in Personnel Management, Second Edition.