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Work Environment and its Influence on Productivity Levels among Extension Officers in the Ministry of Agriculture in Kenya

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Abstract

From a broad perspective, a work environment can be defined as the location in which a task is performed. However, from an employment perspective, the work environment entails the physical geographical location of the job as well as its immediate surroundings (typically the tools and equipment required for the performance of the different tasks required for the job, work processes and procedures, quality of the air, noise level and any additional perks). As known, the work environment in an organization plays a crucial role in determining the productivity levels of its workforce and the organization's ability to sustain these productivity levels and retain its workforce and may determine, how well the employees get along with the organization, the employees' error rate/s and level of innovation and collaboration with other employees, levels of absenteeism, and ultimately, the duration of time the employee choose to stay with the organization. The purpose of this study was to determine how productivity levels among extension officers in the Ministry of Agriculture, Kilifi District have been influenced by their work environment. This was a case study which sought to identify the effects of the work environment with an aim of opening doors for further research on the same and recommending strategies for addressing the problems to ensure that the country (Kenya) becomes (once again) self sufficient in food production.

At the time of the study, there were a total of 45 extension officers in Bahari District, which had just been annexed from Kilifi District. Due to the small number of officers, a census was done and all officers involved in a focus group discussion for triangulation purposes. This is because it was only through a census that more comprehensive and accurate information could be gotten.

The data collected was analyzed for any causal- effect relationships, correlations and variances, by use of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), and the results presented in pie charts and tables to give a picture of the research findings at a glance. The findings on how the work environment influences extension officers' productivity in the Ministry of Agriculture showed that extension officers feel that their work environment is not conducive to provide for job enjoyment and consequently enable them become productive in their work. It is thus safe to conclude at this point that, an overwhelming majority of the extension officers in the Ministry of Agriculture are not satisfied with their work environment, citing lack of sufficient work infrastructure, a large work area and a poor supervision system as their main reasons for dissatisfaction with the general work environment.

Key Words: Extension officers, Agriculture, Work Environment, Employee Productivity

INTRODUCTION

Background Information

Phillips and Gully (2012) define the work environment as the constellation of an organization's rules, management practices, policies and reward systems, and point out that, some characteristics of a work environment can influence the employees' motivation, singling out supportive supervision and a fun work environment as key motivators in any given organization. On the other hand, Rollison (2002), defines productivity as the quantity of outputs obtained from a given level of inputs, and which is influenced by the variety of skills, characteristics and attitudes, including formal training and qualifications, motivation levels, initiative, team skills, attention to detail, judgement, multi-task abilities, communication skills, general attitudes and work ethos). Saari, (2006) however, defines productivity as a measure of the output from a production process per unit of output. He goes on to argue that labour productivity is measured as a ratio of output per labour-hour, and input. In this case, therefore, the word "productivity" will be used to refer to the number of man-hours the extension officer spends with the farmers and the resultant increase in on-farm food production. Several measures can be taken to increase employee productivity, among them, provision of adequate breaks for the employees to recuperate and get more focussed on the job, review of employee needs on a regular basis, profit sharing, effective rewards and recognition, employee career development strategies and a good work environment. For a long time, Kenya's civil service was among the largest in sub-Saharan Africa, having experienced a dramatic growth since the country's independence in 1963. It thus meant that a big chunk of the government's income was used to pay salaries and other remunerations to its workers (Kayizzi-Mugerwa 2003). However, by the late 1980s, it had become clear that the government could no longer sustain the high levels of civil service employment, sentiments which were shared by the donor community as well as the multi lateral institutions, who argued that it was only through the civil service reforms program that the problem could be resolved (Nzioka, 1998). Civil service reforms, they argued, would help reduce the number of public employees to manageable levels, increase wages and other conditions of

service for those remaining in the system, and generally raise the employees' morale (Kayizzi-Mugerwa, 2003:149). The government also needed to put in place management and incentive systems that would alter the attitudes and behaviour of civil servants, the goal being to create a more results-oriented public sector (Manda, 2001). This saw the launch of the civil service reform program (CSR) in 1993 to improve efficiency and productivity (Obong'o, 2007). While the civil service reform program has been continually hailed by the donor community as the solution to the poor performance in the civil service, it has continued to draw wide criticisms from different stakeholders including those involved one way or the other in the Kenyan agricultural sector. This is because there has been a steady decline in the sufficiency of services, (in this case extension services) provided by the Ministry of Agriculture, the key provider of agricultural extension services in Kenya (Government of Kenya, 2004). Based on the available literature, several factors can be cited as the possible causes for the declining performance among extension officers in the Ministry of Agriculture. These could include: lack of rewards and recognition for outstanding service, a poor career development system and a poor work environment.

One of the many factors that influence performance among employees is the environment in which they work. This is because, as Business Performance (2006) explains, the work environment determines how well the employees engage with the organization, especially with their immediate environment, their error rate, level of innovation and collaboration with other employees, and also, their absenteeism rate, and ultimately, how long they stay in the job. Ctdol (2009) defines the work environment as the employer's premises and other locations where employees are engaged in work-related activities or are present as a condition. The environment that people work in can have a significant impact on their ability to undertake their tasks, and can lead to their being either productive or unproductive, and in the end affecting both their health and general well-being. Some of the factors which constitute an employee's work environment include the organizational plans such as the allocation of responsibilities at all levels of the organization, definition and job descriptions, the facilities the employee has access to as he/she discharges his/her duties and responsibilities and the degree of access the employees have to the management and the administrative support needed to complete their tasks (Manning, 2009)

McCoy and Evans (2005) point out that environmental stressors (noise within the environment, poor relations with fellow workers, a demanding boss etc) influence physiological processes, produce negative affect, limit motivation and performance, and impede social interaction. This is typical of extension officers in the Ministry of Agriculture. This is because the work of an extension officer requires him to see a given number of farmers, usually in a location or sub-location and since the facilities are not enough, many times the officers do this on foot. This is very stressful and is more likely to negatively influence the productivity levels of the officer in question (Ochieng' 2009). Williams (2000) goes on to argue that for any organization to be able to retain its employees, it has to build a winning environment, one which would not only attract others to join the organization, but which would ensure that the employees within it would not

want to leave and would instead be proud to be associated with the organization. This study thus sought to determine the factors influencing productivity levels among extension officers in the Ministry of Agriculture. While Rollison, (2002) defines productivity as the quantity of outputs obtained from given level of inputs, and which is influenced by the variety of skills, characteristics and attitudes, including formal training and qualifications, motivation levels, initiative, team skills, attention to detail, judgement, multi-task abilities, communication skills, general attitudes and work ethos, Saari, (2006) refers to productivity as a measure of the output from a production process per unit of output. He goes on to argue that labour productivity is measured as a ratio of output per labor-hour, and input. In this case, therefore, the word “productivity” will be used to refer to the number of man-hours the extension officer spends with the farmers and the resultant increase in on-farm food production.

Problem Statement

There has been a general outcry on the insufficient extension services provided by the Ministry of Agriculture, the main provider of agricultural extension services in Kenya, and the main conduit of innovations in new agricultural technologies from the research stations to the farmers (Government of Kenya, 2004). Several explanations have been offered for this trend, the key one being the lack of adequate frontline extension workers. This problem has been made worse by the continued loss of extension workers through different avenues, for example death, retirement, sacking or resignation (Government of Kenya, 2009).

According to the Ministry of Agriculture, 80% of Kenyans live in the rural areas and derive their livelihoods from agriculture (Government of Kenya, 2004). This, according to the encyclopaedia of nations (2009) means that there are about 3 million farming families who need agricultural extension service to realise any sufficiency in agricultural production. Given that there are only 3396 extension officers employed by the Ministry of Agriculture (Government of Kenya, 2009), it goes without saying that the officers are overwhelmed by the workload and can not sufficiently offer the required services. This coupled with low motivation and sheer laxity among extension officers has adversely affected agricultural production in the whole country because the farmers are not facilitated with sufficient technical know-how to increase food production to levels of self- sufficiency (Ochieng’, 2009). This can be cited as the cause of frequent famines in the country, due to the farmers lacking the knowledge on the right seed varieties for the different climatic zones. It then means that the country has ended up importing food from outside to take care of perennial shortfalls in food production (UNDP, 2009). There is also the problem of lack of motivation among the few extension officers working with the Ministry of Agriculture and this has had the effect of reducing their productivity even further. Given the foregoing factors, it can also be safely argued that the extension officers have had poor working conditions and environment, which has worked to diminish their performance. This is because the government does not have enough resources to provide the current officers with enough transport facilities, meaning then that officers are expected to cover their areas of duty (usually a sub-location, location or even a division) and most of the times on foot (Ochieng’ 2009). This coupled with

lack of allowances such as lunches, transport reimbursements leads to the officers being highly demoralised and this greatly affects their performance, and in the long term affects the realisation of the overall organizational goals and objectives, and can be said to be one of the causes for high turnover among extension officers in the Ministry of Agriculture (Manda, 2001). While the government has put in place management and incentive systems to alter the attitudes and behaviour of civil servants, with an aim of creating a more results oriented public sector and reversing the turnover rates (Manda, 2001), it has not been sufficient to deal with the problem. There has been a lot of speculation on the causes for poor performance among civil servants in Kenya, ranging from poor recruitment and staffing procedures, poor rewards, benefits and recognition, lack of an adequate and attractive career development strategies, to poor work environments (Manda, 2003). This study sought to investigate the factors influencing the extension officers' productivity under their existing work environment and came up with recommendations on strategies to mitigate the problem in the Ministry of Agriculture.

Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine the extent to which the work environment influences job performance levels among extension officers in the ministry of Agriculture in Kenya. The specific objectives included:

1. To establish the extent to which employee relations influence the job performance levels of extension officers in the Ministry of Agriculture in Kenya
2. To determine the extent to which stress and stress levels influence job performance levels among extension officers in Kenya
3. To find out how empowerment with regard to decision making influences job performance among extension officers in the ministry of Agriculture in Kenya.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter will review the available literature on work environment and employee productivity. It will seek to define productivity, work environment and how employee relations, stress and employee empowerment impacts employee productivity.

The work Environment and Productivity

This section will look at the Rollison, (2002) defines productivity as the quantity of outputs obtained from given level of inputs, and which is influenced by the variety of skills, characteristics and attitudes, including formal training and qualifications, motivation levels, initiative, team skills, attention to detail, judgement, multi-task abilities, communication skills, general attitudes and work ethos. "Productivity" in this case will be used to refer to the number

of man-hours the extension officer spends with the farmers and the resultant increase in on-farm food production.

According to the Connecticut department of labour (2008), the work environment consists of the employer's premises and other locations where employees are engaged in work-related activities or are present as a condition of their employment. The work environment includes not only physical locations, but also the equipment or materials used by the employee during the course of his or her work. Vischer (2007) defines 'work environment' by incorporating psychosocial dimensions such as employee-employer relations, motivation and advancement, job demands and social support. Employer-employee relations here refer to the relationship between the employees in any given organization and their employer. Miles and Bennett (2009) point out that successful employer/employee relationship involves striking a balance of interests. They go on to argue that the employer's main interest is for the organization to continue being successful, while the employee's interest is to secure the best possible working condition and enjoy a good standard of living. Maintaining employer-employee relationships that contribute to satisfactory productivity, motivation, and morale among the employees should be the focus of any given organization. It is important to establish relationships which help in preventing and resolving problems involving individuals which arise out of work situations. One of the ways of ensuring a healthy employee-employer relationship is the adoption of an appropriate leadership style. Command and control leadership style is the style used by most managers in the civil service, especially in the ministry of agriculture (Ochieng' 2009), and while it serves the purpose of ensuring that things are done when they need to be done, it has the impact of creating distrust between the employer and the employee, and as Wheatley (2005) points out, leads to employee disengagement and loss of motivation, which ultimately leads to the stifling of creativity and loss of initiative. This is a problem which could be solved by the employer adopting a more accommodating and interactive leadership style.

The work of an extension officer in the ministry of agriculture requires the extension officer to cover large areas (usually a sub-location, location or even a division), many times on foot, due to lack of the necessary facilities (Government of Kenya, 2004). This coupled with the lack of allowances for their transportation or lunches, leaves the officers highly demoralised and greatly affects their performance (Ochieng' 2009). This is a factor of the extension officers' work environment which could end up contributing to low or poor productivity among the extension officers in the ministry of agriculture, and is an area which requires further investigation to establish its impact on their productivity.

Impact of Employee Relations on Productivity

Rollison and Broadfield (2002) define employee relations as the relationship between an organization and its employees, which includes the full range of interactions and communications between the two parties and the processes through which they adjust to each other's needs and wants. Unfortunately this has not been the case in the relationships between the

supervisors and subordinates in the extension field in the Ministry of Agriculture, where according to the respondents interviewed in the focus group discussion meeting, there is rampant bullying meted upon the extension officers by their supervisors. As Phillips and Gully (2012) explain, there is a widespread belief that productivity improvements can only be achieved through a fundamental reform in the area of employee relations, which means that, the need for the maintenance of healthy employee relations cannot be over emphasized because healthy employee relations in an organization is an obvious pre-requisite for organizational success. Also, strong employee relations are required for high productivity and human satisfaction (Quick & Nelson, 2013). As Industry Canada (2014) explains, job quality should be a key objective of any employer because happy employees create happy customers, who in turn offer repeat business. They further explain that the key determinants of job quality include the pace of work and work stress; opportunities for input; job security; work- life balance; workplace relationships; individual development and physical working conditions. Employees also look for excellent employee benefits, competitive salaries, flexible schedules, and a focus on placing employee's personal well-being front and centre, which do not seem to be present in the current package for extension officers in the Ministry of Agriculture (GOK, 2004).

In creating an effective and productive work environment, the key thing to remember is that it must promote trust (of the employee to the employer), optimism in the employee about his/her future in and out of the organization and it must provide enjoyment and opportunity for growth for the employee. This not only works in ensuring that the employee is motivated to give their best to the organization, but also enables the employee to exploit his/her full potential and in the process increase production within the organization, because it creates an effective work environment (based on trust and hope), which is vital for the success of any organization. Kingston (2005) says that in an environment of trust and hope, employees make real sacrifices for the betterment of the organization. The main focus in improving the work environment should thus be to ensure an empowerment of the people with the ability to make decisions and speak freely. Kingston, (2005) goes on to argue that to ensure efficiency and optimal performance among employees, an employer should provide the necessary facilities and be ready to listen to the employee's concerns and address them accordingly. This, he argues, motivates the workers and increases production by fostering an environment that promotes trust, optimism, enjoyment, and opportunity.

While there has been a prolonged outcry over the performance of extension officers in the Ministry of Agriculture, all hope is not lost. This is because the Ministry of Agriculture is a public office, with service to the Kenyan farmers being its main input. With the increasing levels of awareness among the members of the public, there is bound to be an increased demand for quality services by the Kenyan farmers. One of the dimensions in public service is service quality (Dyer and Reeves, 1995), and the Kenyan farmers have a right to expect that from the extension officers. It then means that the stakeholders in the agricultural sector in Kenya have a lot of work to do in ensuring that the quality of services provided is improved to meet the

increasing demands. From the review above, it is clear that the employees' work environment is an important component in ensuring their achievement of their production potentials. The work environment in this case includes both the physical

aspects such as the housing and facilities and psychosocial aspects such as silence or noise, relations with co-workers, supervisors and the customers. It is thus important that there is a balance between the different aspects to ensure that optimum productivity is achieved by the employees.

The Impact of Stress on Productivity

One of the most pressing issues facing most organizations today is the need to raise employee productivity. Although the available studies on stress in the work environment tend to focus on psychosocial influences in the work environment, evidence is accumulating that the physical environment in which people work affects both job performance and job satisfaction (Clements-Croome, 2000; Newsham, Veitch, Charles, Clinton, Marquardt, Bradley, Shaw, & Readon, 2004). This then suggests that working conditions could be one of the reasons for poor performance among extension officers in the ministry of agriculture, because it would be difficult for a person to work for his/her entire career by walking from farm to farm, year in year out, without the necessary facilitation and maintain top-notch performance. The working conditions are obviously stressful and need to be investigated further to determine whether it could explain the afore mentioned turnover rates.

The U.S. National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (UNIOSH)(1999) defines workplace stress as the harmful physical and emotional response that occurs when there is a poor match between job demands and the capabilities, resources, or needs of the worker. Robbins (2003, p. 261) on the other hand defines stress as a "dynamic condition in which an individual is confronted with an opportunity, constraint or demand related to what he or she desires and for which the outcome is perceived to be both uncertain and important". He goes on to argue that stress is not necessarily bad in and of itself because though often discussed in negative context, it also has a positive value, particularly when it offers a potential gain. In turn, these conditions may eventually lead to poor work performance, which in the long run could end up affecting an employees and in the larger context, the organizational productivity. The UNIOSH (1999) on the other hand points out that stress-related disorders encompass a broad array of conditions, including psychological disorders like depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorders and other types of emotional strain, dissatisfaction, fatigue, tension, etcetera, arguing further that it can also lead to maladaptive behaviors such as aggression, substance abuse, and also cognitive impairment such as loss of concentration and memory problems, and is also associated with various biological reactions that may lead ultimately to compromised health, such as cardiovascular disease or in extreme cases, death. In their overview of stress related to the physical work environment, McCoy and Evans (2005) characterize as stressful those situations where elements of the physical environment interfere with the attainment of work objectives.

They go on to point out that there are two main types of stressors, which are external and internal stressors. External stressors could include loud or continuous noise, noisy co-workers, demanding bosses, and complaining customers. On the other hand, internal stressors are basically problems of perceptions and include feelings of dissatisfaction, irritability, inability, and the feeling that your efforts aren't properly rewarded or recognized. They finish by pointing out that stressors in the work environment affect employee performance adversely when they are of high intensity or prolonged; slowing down the individual's ability to process and understand the number and predictability of 'signals', which increase with task complexity. In conclusion, McCoy and Evans (2005:222) point out that environmental stressors (such as noise, air pollution, crowding, traffic congestion, extremes of temperature, etc) influence the physiological processes, produce negative affect, limit motivation and performance, and impede social interaction. As Dakotta (2009) postulates, workplace stress many times causes many workers to lose their loyalty and confidence in the organization. It can be safely concluded that this is the current scenario among extension officers working with the ministry of agriculture. This is because as a result of the poor working conditions, many have left the organization in search for organizations which can offer them better working conditions. According to Vischer (2007), the prevailing theoretical model of stress at work emphasizes the need for a good fit between a person's abilities, skills and degree of control—or decision latitude—and the work environment's demands, complexity, expectations and challenges, to make sure that the employee has what he/she requires to ensure optimum performance of his/her duties. As far as extension officers in the ministry of agriculture are concerned, this is not a real problem because all extension officers in the Ministry of Agriculture are trained one way or the other in agriculture, and they hence possess the necessary skills to competently perform their jobs. As Czikszentmihalyi, (1990) points out, a poor fit in either direction (too many skills, not enough demands, or too many demands and insufficient control) generates stress. It cannot be ruled out that there are some officers who are not entirely fit to be in extension work, but they are few and do not really make much difference on the performance by extension officers in general. These are the officers who could be defined as unfit (or misfits in the ministry). As Robbins (2003) observes, one way of reducing employee stress is by job redesign. This is because, as he explains, when employees are in over their heads, their stress levels tend to be typically high. Consequently, an objective job preview during the selection process should be to lessen stress by reducing ambiguity. He further argues that improved organizational communication can work to keep ambiguity induced stress to a minimum. On the other hand, he argues that goal-setting and job redesign serves to clarify job responsibilities and in the process provides clear performance objectives.

The Impact of Employee Empowerment on Productivity

Employee empowerment refers to giving people the authority to make decisions in their own areas of operations without the approval of someone above (Rollison & Broadfield, 2002). Phillips and Gully (2012) define employee empowerment as the degree to which an employee has the authority to make and implement at least some decisions. On the other hand, Quick and

Nelson (2013) define it as the creation of conditions for heightened motivation through the development of a strong sense of personal sense of efficacy. They further argue that empowerment not only enables employee to use more of their potential, but also requires a commitment on the part of managers to delegate not just some of their responsibilities, but some of their decision making authority as well. They go on to give the following as some of the ways to empower employees: Articulating a clear vision and goals, fostering personal mastery experiences to ensure self-efficacy and building of skills, modelling successful behaviours, sending positive messages and arousing positive emotions in employees, connecting employees with the outcomes of their work and giving them feedback and building employee confidence by showing competence, honesty and fairness. According to Quick and Nelson (2013), empowerment serves to unleash an employee's creativity and productivity. It requires eliminating traditional hierarchical notions of power.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This section covers the research methodology that was used in this study and provides a general framework for the study. A research methodology forms the operational framework within which the facts are placed so that their meaning may be seen in the context of the research. This study adopted a post-positivist philosophy and was cross-sectional in nature where extension officers serving with the Ministry of Agriculture were interviewed and the relationship between the emerging variables measured.

Methodology

This study was both descriptive and causal in nature and sought to determine the influence of the work environment on the overall performance of extension officers in the Ministry of Agriculture. The target population in this study was all the extension officers working in Kilifi District, forty five (45) in number, which made this study a census. The findings were triangulated by the use of a focused group discussions, in which all the officers participated. Both qualitative and quantitative data was collected using a semi-structured questionnaire which was administered personally. The data was analysed using the social statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) and presented in the form of frequencies, percentages in charts and tables.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

This study sought to determine the influence of the work environment on productivity levels among extension officers in the Ministry of Agriculture. In this study, more men were interviewed compared to women at 74.4 percent while women represented a count of 10 (23.3 %). During the interview, the respondents were asked to rank their responses on a scale of 1-5, where 1 = strongly agrees while 5 strongly disagrees. When asked whether they were satisfied by their work environment, 27.9% of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the

statement, 60.4% of them either just disagreed or strongly disagreed with that statement. When asked to rank their satisfaction with the infrastructure available for their day-to-day work, the responses were almost overwhelming in disagreement. This is because while 4 of the respondents (8.8%) of the respondents felt satisfied with the available infrastructure, a whopping 44 (88%) of the respondents felt that the available infrastructure was not sufficient to enable them effectively perform their day-to-day work. When asked whether they felt adequately trained and qualified for their job requirements, 40 (89%) of the respondents felt adequately trained and thus qualified for the demands of their job. Only 4 (8%) of the respondents felt that their qualification was inadequate for the demands of their job. When asked whether they had the support they needed to dispense of their duties effectively, 22% (10) of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed, while 34 (75%) either disagreed or strongly disagreed. This consequently means that most of the workers do not agree and feel that they are not given the support needed to be effective in their jobs.

When asked whether they received all the allowances needed to make their work possible, 65% (29) of the respondents either just disagreed, 17% (8) agreed while 15% (7) strongly agreed. It then means that while some of the officers do indeed receive their allowances or the allowances they need to facilitate them to be productive in their jobs, a majority of them do not and this can be pretty demoralizing.

The Influence of the Work Environment on Productivity

From this study, a general dissatisfaction with the work environment for extension officers emerged. This was confirmed by over 81% of the interviewed officers in the ministry of agriculture. Following the focused group discussion aimed at bringing out the causes for the dissatisfaction, several factors came up. First, the officers felt that the relationships in their work environment were not good enough to facilitate productivity and job satisfaction. During the focus group discussions, the officers cited performance evaluation as one of the main contributors to poor relations in their work environment, arguing that in most cases, their evaluation results was not based on their performance, but on their relationship with the evaluator. It is important here to remember that because evaluation is one of the most important factors related to job satisfaction, continuous, accurate, and objective staff evaluation is essential in improving agents' job satisfaction, performance and productivity. Vroom (1964) explains that staff performance should be assessed accurately, based on standards that employees perceive to be fair, achievable, and equal for all. Another contributing factor to the extension officers' dissatisfaction and a strain on their relations with their supervisors was identified as a tendency by the supervisors to be very fast at identifying employee failures and dwelling on them while at the same time totally ignoring anything good the officers had done in the past. During the focused group discussion what came out was that if the supervisors praised their employees or subordinates and chose to use positive reinforcement instead of dwelling on their shortcomings and failures, then it would go a long way in enhancing employee satisfaction.

The second key contributing factor to poor performance by extension officers in the Ministry of Agriculture is stress and high stress levels in their day to day operations. As earlier noted, UNIOSH (1999) defines workplace stress as the harmful physical and emotional response that occurs when there is a poor match between job demands and the capabilities, resources, or needs of the worker. The officers need facilities like transport and other work incentives (where work incentives here refers to work infrastructure, bonuses and other allowances related to the job) for job effectiveness to be realized. This, according to the officers, has not been forthcoming and has caused a lot of stress to them as they seek to fulfil their mandate. A third contributing factor to poor performance among extension officers emerged as the lack of empowerment where the extension officers expressed a clear dissatisfaction with the existing channels of communication, lack of sufficient training on emerging trends (through seminars and workshops), which left them at a loss on how to deal with more advanced farmers, lack of delegation provision by their supervisors and poor and ineffective supervision. Also, the officers cited poor administration and supervision as other causes of stress and increased stress levels in their discharge of duties. During the discussion, it emerged that though the extension officers in the ministry of agriculture are well trained, they are unfortunately not skilled in human relations and so does not offer effective supervision to their subordinates to motivate them to aim higher in their performance and in the process enhance job satisfaction. This is due to their habits of dwelling on the failures rather than successes of their subordinates.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The work environment in any given organization is a big determinant to the employees' levels of productivity. The Ministry of Agriculture is no exception. This is because the extension officers in the Ministry of Agriculture need a favorable work environment to be able to give their best in their day to day roles. Consequently, the Ministry of Agriculture should strive towards providing the facilities needed to ensure that the extension officers have what is needed to make them effective in their dispensation of their duties and responsibilities. Secondly, the ministry should strive to create friendly work environments with high learning curves and leadership mentoring, and an effective flow of communication between supervisors and subordinates. Lastly, the Ministry of Agriculture should employ more extension officers with an emphasis on gender balancing in stations to reduce the size of the area an extension officer is expected to cover in his day to day work.

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