CONGRUENCY OF EXTENSION PROFESSIONALS' AND FARMERS' PERCEPTIONS OF PRIVATIZATION AND COMMERCIALIZATION OF AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION SERVICES

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the congruency between extension professionals and farmers regarding their perceptions of privatization and commercialization of agricultural extension services. The study was carried out in Delta State, Nigeria and it had a sample size of 224 respondents comprising of 134 extension professionals of the Delta State Agricultural Programme (DTADP) and 90 farmers that were randomly selected. Data for the study were collected from the respondents through the use of validated questionnaire and interview schedule. The questionnaire was used for the extension professionals, while the interview schedule was used for the farmers. Spearman's rank order correlation coefficient was used to determine the congruency in perceptions of respondents. Results of the study showed a high congruency between extension professionals' perception and their estimate of farmers' perception (rho = 0.92), while the congruency between farmers' perception and their estimate of extension professionals' perception was low (rho = 0.08). The study recommends that farmers' knowledge of issues relating to P and C should be enhanced through seminars and workshops organized by the appropriate extension agency.

INTRODUCTION

Relational communication models provide a framework for identifying the relationship between individuals or groups in a communication process. The models acknowledge that communication is a delicate process evolving from the joining of two participants into a relationship that is more than the sum of its parts. They clearly illustrate the central role of message interpretation and reciprocal perceptions between parties in a communication process. A relationship in interpersonal communication has been defined as a set of expectation which two parties have for each other"s behaviour and feelings. It is the connection that exists when: a) the interactants are aware of each other and take each other into account; b) there is some exchange of influence; and c) there is some agreement about what the nature of relationship is and what the appropriate behaviours are, given the nature of the relationship (Berko, Rosenfeld and samovar, 1997). The best known example of relational communication is the coorientation model (Littlejohn, 1992). According to Gruning and Hunt (1984), the coorientation model identifies three critical relationships between participants in a communication process. These are accuracy, congruency and agreement. Accuracy refers to the similarity between one person"s estimate of another"s perception on an issue and that other person"s actual perception. In other words, accuracy measures what one group thinks the other"s perceptions will be compared to the other"s actual perceptions (Walton, 2000). Congruency compares a person"s perception with his or her estimate of another"s perception, while agreement is the similarity of two person"s perceptions on an issue. Figure 1 shows that accuracy relationship can be estimated between persons „A" and „B" by comparing their estimates of one another"s perception with their actual perceptions, while congruency relationship can be determined by comparing each person"s perception with his/her estimate of the other person"s perception. Agreement relationship on the other hand, is determined by comparing the similarity in the perceptions of persons „A" and „B".

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Co-orientational studies have been reported among researchers, extension workers and farmers regarding attributes of plant cultivars (Groot, 1970; Dolly, 1997), community consensus building (Broom, 1977; Meiller, 1975), listening behaviour states (Buchili and Pearce, 1974) and shared behaviour among rational partners (Gantz, et al; 1995). The co-orientation model has, also, been used to compare the views of community leaders and local residents regarding Hudson River ecosystem restoration in New York State (Connelly and Knuth, 2002).

This study examined the congruency between extension professionals and farmers regarding their perceptions of privatization and commercialization (P and C) of agricultural extension services. In applying the coorientation model, the conceptualization of the congruency relationships in the perceptions of extension professionals and farmers is shown in Figure 2.

In determining the congruency between extension professionals" perception and their estimate of farmers" perception, measures between boxes A and C were compared, while the congruency between farmers" perception and their estimate of extension professionals" perception was determined by comparing measures between boxes B and D.

METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out in Delta State, Nigeria. Extension professionals of the Delta State Agricultural Development Programme (DTADP) and farmers in the state formed the population from which sample was drawn. Extension professionals of the DTADP were composed of 150 extension agents (EAs); 25 block extension agents (BEAs), 25 block extension supervisors (BESs); 12 subject matter specialists (SMS) three zonal extension officers (ZEO); 3 zonal managers (ZMs); 10 directors of sub programmes; 29 heads of component programmes and one programme manager (PM). For the purpose of the study, the PM, ZEOs and ZMs were involved in the study because they were few in number. For the others, 50% proportionate random sample was drawn. Congruency of extension professionals' perception and extension professionals' estimate of farmers' perception. This sampling procedure gave a total of 134 extension professionals involved in the study.

For the farmers, a multistage sampling technique was used in selecting respondents. In the first stage, three extension blocks were randomly selected from each of the agricultural zones in the state, giving a total of nine extension blocks. In the second stage, two extension cells were randomly selected from each of the
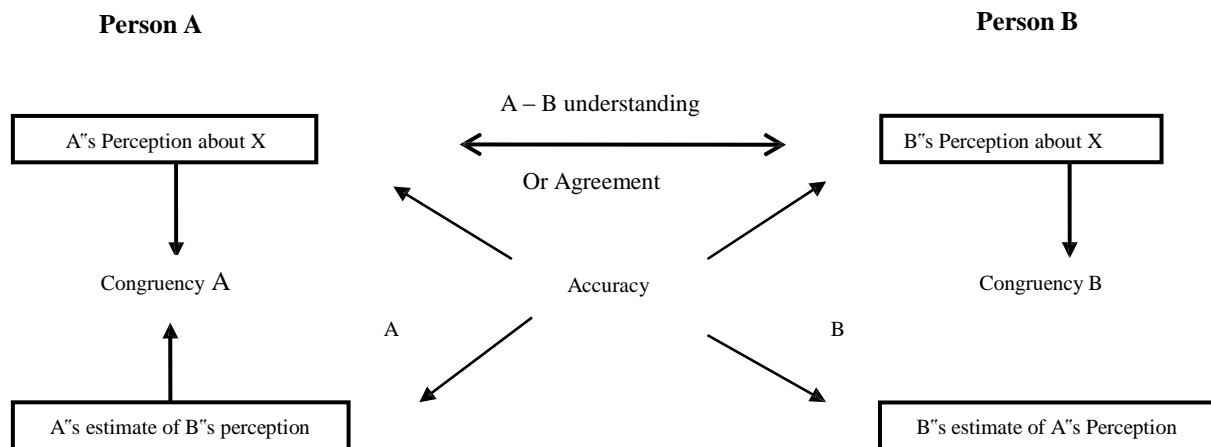

Person A   **Person B**

A – B understanding

Or Agreement

A"s Perception about X   B"s Perception about X

Congruency A   Accuracy   Congruency B

A   B

A"s estimate of B"s perception   B"s estimate of A"s Perception

Figure 1: Relationships in co-orientation   Source: Chaffee, S. H. and McLeod J.M. (1973)
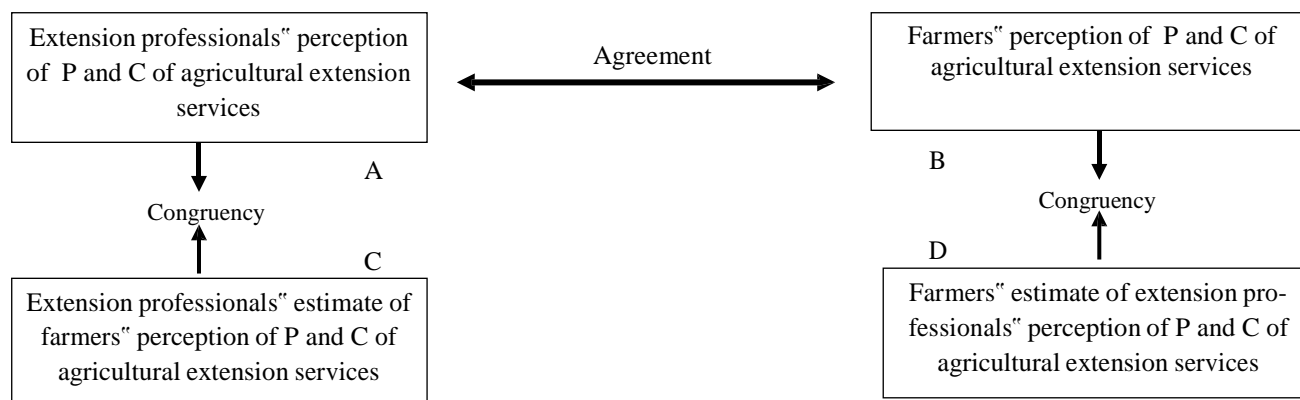
Figure 2: Conceptual framework for analyzing the congruency relationship between extension professionals and farmers

nine extension blocks, giving a total of 18 extension cells. In the third stage, five farmers in contact with extension were randomly selected from the list provided by the extension agents
in each of selected extension cells. This gave a total of 90 farmers that were sampled. In all, 224 respondents comprising of 134 extension professionals and 90 farmers were used for the study.

A set of questionnaire and structured interview schedule were used for data collection. The questionnaire was used for extension professionals, while the interview schedule was used for the farmers because of their low educational status. Content validation of the research instruments were done by a team of experts in agricultural extension system. The instruments were pilot tested before administration to test for reliability. Trained assistants in addition to the researcher collected data for the study.

To determine congruency in perceptions of extension professionals and farmers, 17 positive and negative statements regarding the features of P and C of agricultural extension services were framed through a review of literature and interviews with experts. Extension professionals and farmers were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the statements. They were also asked to estimate one another's perception. A 4 – point Likert type scale with values of strongly agree =4; agree=3; disagree=2; and strongly disagree=1 was used to determine respondents' level of

agreement to the statements. Means of their responses were then used for analysis. Spearman's rank order correlation coefficient was computed for: (i) congruency of extension professionals estimate of famers' perception and (ii) congruency of famers' perception and famers' estimate of extension professionals' perception.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Congruency of extension professionals' perception and extension professionals' estimate of farmers' perception of P and C of agricultural extension services : Data in Table 1 show the congruency of extension professionals' perception and their estimate of farmers' perception. Results of the analysis indicate a high level of congruency between extension professionals' perception and their estimate of farmers' perception. Spearman's rank correlation coefficient for the 17 statements was 0.92. Information in Table 1 further reveal that there were significant variations between extension professionals' perception and their estimate of farmers' perception in only 3 statements, while there were no significant variations in the remaining 14 statements. This shows that there was similarity between extension professionals' perception and what they think farmers' perception is.

The statements in which extension professionals' perception and their estimate of farmers'

Table 1: Spearman's rank correlation showing the congruency of extension professionals' perception and extension professionals' estimate of farmers' perception of P and C of agricultural extension services

SN	Statements	Extension profs' perception	Rank	Extension profs' estimate of farmers' perception	Rank
1.	Privatization and commercialization will encourage competition among extension service provider	3.50	1	3.14	4.5
2.	Privatization and commercialization will make agricultural information delivery to become more effective	3.43	2	3.15	3
3.	Privatization and commercialization will make it possible for more farmers to be reached	3.30	3	3.16	1.5
4.	Privatization and commercialization will improve linkages between research and extension	3.28	4	3.14	4.5
5.	Privatization and commercialization will provide opportunity for neglected areas of agric production to be attended to	3.25	5	3.16	1.5
6.	Privatization and commercialization will break the monopoly of public extension service	3.21	6	3.01	8
7.	Privatization and commercialization will make extension services to be directed at specific needs of the people	3.18	7	3.13	6
8.	Privatization and commercialization will increase priority areas of extension coverage	3.61	8	3.07	7
9.	Privatization and commercialization will help reduce govt. financial burden on agriculture	3.13	9	2.99	9
10.	Privatization and commercialization will create job opportunities	2.94	10	2.72	11
11.	Privatization and commercialization will lead to job insecurity among public extension workers	2.74	11	2.65	12
12.	Privatization and commercialization will make agricultural extension services unaffordable by farmers	2.58	12	2.96	10
13.	Privatization and commercialization will encourage exploitation of farmers	2.47	13	2.60	13
14.	Privatization and commercialization will lead to poor capacity building	2.31	14	2.35	16
15.	Privatization and commercialization will promote corruption and nepotism	2.10	15	2.22	17
16.	Privatization and commercialization will encourage foreign domination in the provision of extension services	2.04	16	2.46	15
17.	Privatization and commercialization will encourage income inequality	1.93	17	2.56	14

Spearman's Rank Correlation Coefficient, corrected for ties = 0.92

perception are similar include: P and C will make agricultural information delivery to become more effective; P and C will make it possible for more farmers to be reached, P and C will improve linkages between research and extension; P and C will break the monopoly of public extension services; P and C will make extension services to be directed at specific needs of the people; P and C will increase priority areas of extension coverage; P and C will reduce government financial burden on agriculture; P and C will create job opportunities; P and C will encourage exploitation of the farmers; P and C will promote

corruption and nepotism; P and C will lead to job insecurity among public extension workers; P and C will make agricultural services unaffordable by farmers; P and C will encourage foreign domination in the provision of extension services; and P and C will lead to poor capacity building.

Congruency of farmers' perception and farmers' estimate of extension professionals' perception of P and C of agricultural extension services : Data in Table 2 show the congruency of farmers" perception and their estimate of extension professionals" perception. Results of the analysis indicate a low

Table 2: Spearman's rank correlation showing the congruency of farmers' perception and farmers' estimate of extension professionals' perception of P and C of agricultural extension services

S/N	Statements	Farmer's perception		Farmers' estimate of extension profs' perception	Rank
1.	Privatization and commercialization will encourage competition among extension service providers	3.44	1	3.43	5
2.	Privatization and commercialization will make agricultural information delivery to become more effective	3.33	2	3.36	8
3.	Privatization and commercialization will increase priority areas of extension coverage	3.28	3	3.11	11
4.	Privatization and commercialization will make extension services to be directed at specific needs of the people	3.19	4	3.10	12
5.	Privatization and commercialization will provide opportunity for neglected areas of agric production to be attended to	3.14	55	3.45	4
6.	Privatization and commercialization will help reduce govt. financial burden on agriculture	3.14	55	3.04	13.5
7.	Privatization and commercialization will break the monopoly of public extension service	3.12	75	3.38	7
8.	Privatization and commercialization will make agricultural extension services unaffordable by farmers	3.12	75	3.52	2
9.	Privatization and commercialization will make it possible for more farmers to be reached	3.04	9	3.04	13.5
10.	Privatization and commercialization will improve linkages between research and extension	3.01	10	3.62	1
11.	Privatization and commercialization will lead to job insecurity among public extension workers	2.92	11	2.77	17
12.	Privatization and commercialization will create job opportunities	2.76	12	3.32	9
13.	Privatization and commercialization will encourage exploitation of farmers	2.72	13	3.03	15
14.	Privatization and commercialization will promote corruption and nepotism	2.21	14	2.84	16
15.	Privatization and commercialization will encourage foreign domination in the provision of extension services	2.06	15	3.41	6
16.	Privatization and commercialization will encourage income inequality	1.98	16	3.22	10
17.	Privatization and commercialization will lead to poor capacity building	1.77	17	3.46	3

Spearman's Rank Correlation Coefficient, corrected for ties = 0.08

level of congruency between farmers" perception and their estimate of extension professionals" perception. Spearman"s rank correlation coefficient for the 17 statements was 0.08. Information in Table 2 further show that there were no significant variations between farmers" perception and their estimate of extension professionals" perception in only 4 statements, while there were significant variations in the remaining 13 statements.

The implication of this finding is that there was no similarity between farmers" perception and their estimate of extension professionals" perception. The 4 statements in which farmers" perception and their estimate of extension professionals" perception are similar include: P and C will provide opportunity for neglected areas of agriculture to be attended to; P and C will break the monopoly of public extension service, P and C will encourage exploitation of farmers; and P and C will promote corruption and nepotism.

CONCLUSION

The study examined the congruency in the perceptions of extension professionals and farmers regarding the Privatization and Commercialization of agricultural extension services. Results show that there was a high congruency between extension professionals" perception and their estimate of farmers" perception (rho = 0.92), while the congruency between farmers" perception and their estimate of extension professionals" perception was low (rho = 0.22). The low congruency between farmers" perception and their estimate of extension professionals" perception could be attributed to poor educational background of the farmers and their low knowledge of issues underlying the Privatization and Commercialization of agricultural extension services. Recommendations of the study include that farmers should be educated through seminars and workshops organized by appropriate extension service agency to promote their understanding of issues in P and C of agricultural extension services.

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