



## Full Length Research Article

# CAREER DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON PRODUCTIVITY LEVELS AMONG EXTENSION OFFICERS IN THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE IN KENYA

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### ABSTRACT

According to Barling and Cooper (2008), productivity refers to the quantity of outputs obtained from a given level of inputs, which is influenced by the variety of skills, characteristics and attitudes, including formal training and qualifications, motivation levels, initiative, team skills, attention to detail, judgment, multi-task abilities, communication skills, general attitudes and work ethos. Several measures can be taken to increase employee productivity, among them, provision of adequate breaks for the employees to recuperate and get more focused on the job, review of employee needs on a regular basis, profit sharing, effective rewards and recognition, a good work environment and employee career development strategies. Employees joining the ministry of agriculture as extension officers go through different stages in their career progression. After employment, an officer is expected to work for a period of not less than three years, after which he is qualified to apply for in-service training in any of the recognized government training institutions (Government of Kenya, 2004). On graduation, the officer is promoted to the next job group, in which he must serve for a given period of time (typically three years), before he can, again, qualify for promotion to the next job group (Government of Kenya, 2004). Unfortunately, this is the ideal situation, which is, rarely followed. The reality of the matter is that many officers are left disillusioned by the mostly dysfunctional career development strategy within the Ministry of Agriculture and the lack of competitiveness in the whole strategy. Consequently, a poor career development strategy can be cited as one of the likely factors negatively influencing productivity among extension officers in the Ministry of Agriculture. The purpose of this study was to determine how career development strategies have influenced productivity levels among extension officers working with the ministry of Agriculture in Kilifi district in the Kenyan coast province. This was a case study which sought to identify the effects of a career development strategy on employee productivity, with a special focus on extension officers in the Ministry of Agriculture, which was carried out with an aim of opening doors for further research on the same and recommend strategies for addressing the problems to ensure that the country becomes (once again) self sufficient in food production. At the time of the study, there were a total of 45 extension officers in Kilifi District. Due to the small number of officers, a census was done, where all the officers were given questionnaires and 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 career development strategies influence extension officers' productivity in the Ministry of Agriculture showed that the employees' academic attainment influenced their levels of satisfaction or dissatisfaction, with officers with Masters' degree exhibiting the highest level of dissatisfaction while those with Diplomas showing the least level of dissatisfaction.

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## INTRODUCTION

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).

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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). The high turnover has been a source of frustration to the Ministry of Agriculture and the government of Kenya at large. This is because, as LeCrone (2006) points out, high employee turnovers lead to a loss of productivity, diminished morale, strained communications between

management and the employees, and increased costs of hiring and training new employees. This has forced the ministry to review its rewards policies, and come up with perks like further education for its employees, promotion after every three years, and a faster processing of retirement benefits (Government of Kenya, 2004). This has unfortunately not served the intended purpose of motivating the workers, since the earnings (even after the salary increments) are not enough to cushion the workers against the changing economic times; and has left the extension workers disillusioned. This study thus sought to investigate the how the career development strategies influence employee productivity and come up with recommendations on strategies to mitigate the problem in the Ministry of Agriculture.

## Background

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 goal does not seem to have been achieved, mainly because there has been a steady decline in the overall productivity among extension officers, and one of the factors that can be cited is an unattractive career development strategy. Zunker (2002) defines career development as the total constellation of psychological, social, educational, physical, economic and chance factors that combine to influence the nature and significance of work in the total lifespan of any given individual. People joining the ministry of agriculture as extension officers go through different stages in career advancement, first, after appointment, an officer is expected to work for a period of not less than three years, after which he is qualified to apply for further in-service training in any of the recognized government training institutions (Government of Kenya, 2004). After training, an officer is promoted to the next job group, in which he must serve for a given period of time before he again qualifies for promotion to the next job group (Government of Kenya, 2004). Commenting on career development strategies in organizations, Dev (2007) argues that career development strategy and initiatives are one of the greatest motivators to keep employees happy and engaged. He further points out that from the employees' point of view, career development initiatives gives them a clear focus about their career track, the blind spots that they have to overcome and the final goal to be reached. This focused approach would ideally work to the advantage of the extension officers in both their everyday work and for long-term aspirations, and would

serve to increase their productivity. The only problem is that based on the interview with Ochieng' (2009), the career development strategy in place at the Ministry of Agriculture is not attractive enough to increase employee motivation and hence increase their productivity. This is because it is too narrow in terms of scope, concentrating mainly on annual salary increments (which many times delay or are not given at all), short courses (which apart from giving one a break from their regular duties, changes nothing in as far as earnings are concerned) and in-service training, which are aimed at widening an officers duties and responsibilities with very little change if any in earnings (Government of Kenya, 2004). Thus in the ministry of agriculture, career development prospects do not seem to include a broadening of tasks and responsibilities, increasing the extension officers' employability through skills and knowledge development, nor does it lead to promotion and status improvement.

## Literature Review

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. On the other hand, career development is defined as the progression through a sequence of jobs, involving continually more advanced or diverse activities and resulting in wider or improved skills, greater responsibility and prestige, and a higher income (Bnet, 2009). The International Labour organization points out that in many organizations, there exists a vicious cycle of inadequate education-poor training-low productivity, which can only be mitigated by training employees in the organization (International labour conference, 2008). This is because without the necessary skills, the employees become incapacitated to effectively fulfil their duties and responsibilities and this not only affects their productivity and that of the organization in general, but it also affects their confidence, which many times leads to job dissatisfaction. The international labour organization (2008) goes on to argue that when employees who have a positive track record are assigned greater responsibilities, their productivity increases. This is because a greater responsibility gives employees a feeling of worth, instills in them a feeling that they are trusted and valued by their employers and consequently, employees will go to great lengths not to betray this sense of trust (International labor organization, 2008). It is a known fact that most professionals leave their organizations due to stagnation in their career, also called career plateaus, defined as a period of stagnation in one's career which leads to low performance, sluggish promotion of the individual and frustration of the mind (Bnet, 2009). Dev (2001) argues that active career development initiatives by an organization are the key retention tools to keep the best talent within its fold since it is one of the greatest motivators to keep an employee happy and engaged. He goes on to point out that from the employees' point of view, career development initiatives give them a clear focus about their career track, which enables the employees to determine what needs to be done for them to achieve their goals in as far as their careers are concerned.

If the employees feel that what they need to achieve their career goals is offered in the organization, it motivates them to work even harder to achieve their goals even faster, and in the process leads to their increased productivity. On the other hand, it helps them to know what mistakes and blind spots they have to avoid if they are to reach their goals. This focussed approach works to their advantage from their everyday work to long-term aspirations.

Sheridan, Slocum and Buda (1997) point out that there are different career development strategies that an organization can adopt in ensuring that the interests of their employees are taken care of. These include: first, promotions, which can be defined as the advancement of an employee's rank or position in an organizational hierarchy system, and may be an employee's reward for good performance i.e. positive appraisal (Wikipedia, 2010). Secondly salary increments, which refer to an increment in the employee's earnings, and serves to increase extrinsic motivation, which in turn leads to increased productivity. Thirdly, there is professional training, which according to Duncker (2006), involves an expert working with learners to transfer to them certain areas of knowledge or skills to improve in their performance and bring them to another threshold of performance or to perform some new role or jobs in the future. He goes on to argue that professional training, first, leads to an improvement in the organization's bottom line, because trained employees end up performing their roles more accurately and efficiently. He points out that where training programs are effective, employee productivity can increase by up to 230%. Secondly, professional training leads to the retention of staff, this is because it serves to demonstrate to the staff that the organization cares for their welfare and this serves to increase their loyalty to the organization. He lastly points out that in some organizations, professional training has reduced staff turnover by 70 per cent and led to a return on investment of 7,000 per cent. Dearden, Howard and Van Reenen (2009) argue that there is a significant impact of training on productivity, pointing out that a 10 percentage

The fourth aspect involves job rotation, which is a horizontal loading approach, which increases an employee's task variety by periodically shifting them among jobs involving different tasks of similar difficulty (Schermerhorn, Hunt and Osborn (2003). This helps the employees to be multi-skilled, which is useful in any organization since it makes sure that should anything happen to employees who are specialised in handling certain tasks, there is always someone to replace them. Alagse (2009) argues that Job rotation is the surest way of keeping the employee away from complacency and boredom of routine. They go on to point out that it is difficult for an employee to sustain his interest in a given job for any substantial length of time as humans have the tendency of outgrowing their jobs through the learning and experience that they gain over a period of time. They conclude by opining that stimulating human mind through different tasks is a sure way to bring to forefront its creative instincts and in taking the individual and organizational performance to a higher plane. This argument shows that job rotations help an organization to achieve increased productivity. Job enlargement is the fifth strategy which can be used to increase an employee's motivation through addition of responsibilities and roles. Schermerhorn, Hunt and Osborn (2003) define job enlargement as the increase in the task variety allocated to an employee by combining in to

one job two or more tasks that were previously assigned separate workers. They go on to argue that this increases job breath by having workers perform more and different tasks, but all at the same level of responsibility and challenge. Stern (2009) points out that job enlargement helps to increase employee motivation, job satisfaction, self-worth, and ultimately increase the overall employee productivity within the organization. He goes on to argue that job enlargement helps to deal with boredom, lack of autonomy and a general dissatisfaction which would interfere with the employee's performance and in the long run the organizational productivity.

Another strategy which can be employed and which serves to increase employee productivity is succession planning and mentoring. This is where an employee is groomed to take over certain senior positions within the organization. This serves to increase productivity by reducing the costs which would have been used in recruitment, selection and orientation of a new employee in to the organization. It not only serves to increase the motivation among the employees in the organization, but McDonald (2008) argues that it serves as a retention tool for employees in organizations, and can also be used for attracting and retaining talents. As seen above, many organizations use employee advancement strategies, like promotions, trainings, job rotations, job enhancements, succession planning, mentoring (Dev, 2001), to motivate and retain employees in their organizations. Unfortunately, the ministry of agriculture only uses two of these strategies-promotions and trainings and this has greatly worked to its disadvantage as an employer of choice in the job market.

Many times organizations rely on promotions to fill management positions when they fall vacant. This is because the employees know the organization well and take a very short time to adjust to their new jobs unlike totally new recruits. Sheridan *et al.* (1997) points out that promotion also provides a direct economic and psychological reinforcement for employees who are promoted. Ochieng' (2009) argues that in the Ministry of Agriculture, though promotions are there as part of the rewards and recognition strategies, many times they do not appear to be done on merit and even when officers get promoted, the benefits accrued are not commensurate to the changing economic times. This works to demoralise extension officers a great deal. It then means that although promotions should be viewed with anticipation and excitement past experience leaves extension officers viewing promotions with contempt because they merely result in an increase in responsibilities with very few resultant benefits. While promotion is one of the strategies to improve employees' productivity, another strategy is training. The Ministry of Agriculture has an employee training program which includes short courses, ranging from a few weeks to several months and long training (also called in service trainings, which range from diploma to Doctorate level (Government of Kenya, 2004). Although this approach has not been fully developed, it is an important step because as Smith (2009) points out, every employee finds training critical for career advancement and also in as far as contributing to the organizational goals and objectives is concerned. He goes on to argue that Well-trained employees are more capable to do their jobs, and need less supervision, which frees the management for other tasks. He argues further that the employees are more professional in their

handling of customers, which in the long run works to build better customer loyalty. He concludes by pointing out that employees who understand the business complain less, are more satisfied, and more motivated. All this leads to better management-employee relationships. In conclusion, a study conducted on several organizations showed that on average, where there was a 10 percent increase in workforce education level, there was 8.6 percent gain in total productivity, while a 10 percent increase in the value of equipment increased productivity by just 3.4 percent (Smith 2009). It then means that an increase in the level of education is one of the key strategies in increasing the productivity levels among employees and this could work well among extension officers in the Ministry of Agriculture.

Azmi, Ahmad and Zainuddin (2009) go on to give three categories of competencies which are key in the promotion of employees. These are: core, professional and functional competencies. They go on to point out that core competencies are behavioural traits and attitudes that are needed for all types of occupations, such as integrity, or the concept of what is right or wrong and sticking by it; self confidence, which refers to a person having a high self-efficacy, which is an individual's belief about the likelihood of successfully completing a specific task (Schermerhorn, Hunt and Osborn, 2003) and accountability, which all work to ensure that the employees do what is expected of them by the organization, and in the process enhance productivity within the organization. There are also professional competencies such as knowledge, skills and professional attributes needed by any public servants they include leadership, interpersonal communication skills and abilities in problem solving and decision making. These skills are essential in the definition of the organizational goals and objectives, and they help in the implementation of organizational goals and objectives, leading to increased productivity. Functional competencies include knowledge and skills needed to carry out tasks and specific responsibilities such as the head of departments and others (MalekandLiew, 2002).

It is generally recognized that job performance is a key factor in determining which employees are selected for promotions and when those promotions occur. Prior research indicates that besides performance, the employee's educational attainments, on-the-job training and demographic characteristics also affect upward mobility (Sheridan, Slocum and Buda, 1997), a thought supported by the human capital theory which argues that an employee's education increases his or her skills which in turn enhances future job performances (Strober, 1990). This unfortunately has not worked well in the Ministry of Agriculture, where it is a common thing to see an officer who has worked for well over 20 years in the same job group, which is very demoralizing and has seen many extension officers leaving the ministry to seek better terms elsewhere (Ochieng', 2009). On the other hand, many organizations resolve to rotate jobs to improve the performance of employees. This is because job rotations are an ideal tool in inspiring workers to achieve higher performance, allowing continuous growth at work, extended knowledge and skill, leading to an increase in the quality of services provided (Ho, Chang, Shih and Liang, 2009). Many scholars propose that job rotation may help employees to acquire multiple capabilities and expand vision, and that it can be an approach to reduce job burnout (Jorgensen,

Davis, Kotowski, Aedla and Dunning, 2005; Jaturanonda, Nanthavanji and Chongphaisal, 2006). The definition of job rotation here refers to a professional job cross training plan that helps employees expand their job territory while broadening their working experience and skills, stimulating their working spirit and cultivating their interpersonal relationships by shifting them to different departments or units of the same department (Ho et al 2009). This basically refers to the situation where an employee is moved from one job to go and work for some time in another job, to gain the necessary skills and experience. This works to ensure that the employee is multi-skilled and can work in any given capacity to ensure that there is continuity in the organization should another employee be absent for one reason or the other, which then leads to increased productivity among the employees and consequently in the organization. Unfortunately, this is one technique that is not used by the Ministry of Agriculture, where one's job is determined squarely by one's academic or professional qualifications. This is sad because Job rotation, also called cross-training; enables an employee from one unit or department to learn diversified job skills during a specific period of time (Ho et al 2009). It is also regarded as a practical approach to enrich and expand job assignments (Seibert, Kraimer and Laiden, 2001). Also, job rotation can also be used as a planned on-the-job training for cultivating future candidates of management by transferring a management trainee from one department to another to increase his or her understanding and credentials in all aspects (Jaturanonda et al, 2006).

In addition, job rotation is also regarded as a method of job design that, on top of allowing employees to learn job skills from different departments, eliminates employee fatigue and boredom and many times works to improve employee morale, leading to increased output (Jorgensen et al, 2005; Triggs and King, 2000). This would especially work for the extension officers, because the nature of extension work requires the extension officer to operate in large areas, many times without appropriate transport means, meaning then that many times the officers experience fatigue and burn out. Another step which could be used for career development and improvement among extension workers would be job enhancement (also called job enrichment), which is a type of job re-design intended to reverse the effects of tasks that are repetitive requiring little autonomy (Mione, 2009). This is because most extension officers complain of boredom, in their jobs, due to the rigid way of doing things that the ministry uses. According to Wikipedia (2009), boredom is an emotional state experienced during periods lacking in activity or when individuals are uninterested in the activities presented to them. Boredom in the work place can range from a basic dislike of tasks, to coping with monotony, insufficient stimulation and challenge; a dull work environment, hyper-vigilant monitoring of mood, to existential boredom where there is dissatisfaction and a lack of meaning with life generally (Cernigoj (2008). This is a state which can adversely affect the organization by leading to unproductive employees.

Leach and Wall (2004) list some of the causes for employee job dissatisfaction as boredom and lack of flexibility. These are qualities typical of extension officers in the Ministry of Agriculture (Ochieng', 2009). The underlying principle behind job enhancement is to expand the scope of the job with a

greater variety of tasks (vertical in nature) that require self-sufficiency, the goal being to give the individuals an exposure to tasks normally reserved for differently focused or higher positions (Mione, 2009).

In order for a job enrichment program to produce positive results, the needs of the workers and the organization must be analyzed and acted upon. According to Cunningham and Eberle (1990:3), before a job enrichment program is begun, the employer should establish whether the employees need jobs that involve responsibility, variety, feedback, challenge, accountability, significance and opportunities to learn. It is also important to ascertain the techniques that can be implemented without changing the job classification plan. Although job enhancement is a strategy which has not been used in the Ministry of Agriculture, its benefits would justify its adoption for improvement of productivity among the extension officers. Another key step in career development for the extension officers would be succession planning, which is defined as the systematic steps or design that allows for one to follow another in time or place (Wolfe, 1996). On the other hand, Wikipedia (2009) defines succession planning "the process of identifying and preparing suitable employees through mentoring, training and job rotation, to replace key players) within an organization as their terms expire". Succession planning is a paramount task if an organization wants to continue being relevant in its area of operation. Reilly (2007) points out that succession planning (which he also calls prior planning) works to prevent poor performance. This is because, without a proper succession plan in an organization, the corporation can be sent into panic hiring, which can not only lead to unnecessary expenses, but can also lead to a failure in the implementation of strategic plans following the loss or unavailability of key personnel due to one reason or another. This can badly affect organizational productivity. Succession plans would work as a way of rewarding hard working extension officers, by identifying and developing potential leaders. This unfortunately is not the case in the Ministry of Agriculture, where it is a common thing for an officer to remain in the same position for the entire duration of their working life. This fails to take advantage of succession plans which as Wolfe (1996), points out, have the benefits of helping to preserve the excellent performance of organizations, identify important leadership positions and strengthen individual career advancement and have the right leaders prepared for the right positions at the needed time, which works to not only maintain the status quo, but also give the employees a room to exercise their creative and innovative skills, and make use of their potentials to the maximum. This works to enhance the organizational production.

The last step that an organization can take to ensure that its workers enjoy a sound career development is through mentoring of employees in the organization. This is something that does not happen among extension officers in the Ministry of Agriculture. Lomel (2001) defines mentoring as the process in which successful individuals go out of their way to help others establish goals and develop the skills to reach them. This is because while many employees join organizations immediately after graduation from colleges and universities, others come in without any skills. Many of these new employees are young and inexperienced in the jobs they get into. It thus goes without saying that these employees require someone to guide them in their formative years in the

organization. Lomel, (2001) argues that an employee's first days in an organization has an impact on not only the number of days they end up staying with the organization, but also on the impact they end up having on the organization. He goes on to argue that the idea behind mentoring is to help the new employee feel more closely identified with their professional environment, help them through difficult situations, build their confidence (which is very importance in the employees effectiveness in their roles), establish clear open two-way communication channel to discuss problems and compensate for the new employees lack of experience and skills. Lastly, Burgess (2006) states that the mentor is a source of information and encouragement for the new employee, providing career guidance and helping the new employee develop creative and independent thinking in the new employee. If these strategies were to be adopted, they would work to increase the motivation among extension workers, and would lead to increased productivity for the organization.

Several strategies can however be employed to ensure that the career development strategies for extension officers is not only sufficient, but also attractive enough to persuade them to stay in the organization. This includes career development paths, which are the different hierarchical levels one has to go through as they advance in seniority within the organization. Like in any other career, officers joining the Ministry of Agriculture as extension officers do not expect to stagnate, but rather, they expect to go through the ranks and reach a level where they can attain satisfaction by meeting their career dreams in terms of improved earnings and status both in the civil service and earnings. This can be achieved through promotions. Several strategies have been adopted at the Ministry of Agriculture to make sure this happens. The strategies are in-service training and promotions. The assumption here is that that after taking the necessary courses in agriculture, the officers' levels of competence increase, making them more able to provide quality services to the public, and hence merit promotions (Azmi *et al*, 2009). Unfortunately, even though many go to those colleges, the recognition for the qualifications attained and resultant awards in terms of salary increments takes very long to be implemented. For example, the first group of frontline extension officers was upgraded in their training 20 years ago, but has never received any salary increments up to date, because the scheme of service for diploma holders has never been approved (Ochieng' 2009). This is very demoralizing. From the above review, it is clear that it is important for an organization to have attractive career development strategies as a way of attracting and retaining talented workers, within the organization. This is mainly because an attractive career development strategy works to create a feeling of security and leads to increased loyalty among the employees in any given organization and this reassurance can only work for the good of the organization by increasing employee productivity.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This was a causal research in nature, since it sought to determine the influence of career development strategies 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 Bahari district (annexed from the former Kilifi District), they were 45 in number. This study was thus 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.

## RESULTS

This study sought to determine the influence of career development strategies on productivity levels among extension officers in the Ministry of Agriculture. Here, Bar charts, pie charts, and tables were used in the presentation have been used in the presentation. When asked about their perceived promotion potential versus changes in salary, 2 (5%) of the total respondents, were somehow satisfied with their potentials, 10 (23%) were satisfied, while 31 (72%) of the total number of respondents were not satisfied at all with the perceived promotion potential. These feelings were corroborated by the focus group discussion held soon after the questionnaires were filled and collected, the majority of respondents indicated that the changes experienced in their income as a result of their promotion was so minor as to defeat the purpose of the whole process. A small number of the respondents felt the changes accompanying their promotion were worth the wait. When asked about their promotion potential, that is the dates when they are due for promotion and when it happens, the reactions were different. 4 (9.3%) of the respondents were somewhat satisfied with the way the promotions were carried out in relation to their potentials. 7 (16.3%) of the respondents were satisfied with both their promotion potential and when they came and 32 (74.4%) of the respondents were totally unsatisfied with not only their promotion potentials, but also with the way the promotions were done in the Ministry of Agriculture.

During the focus group discussion, there was a general feeling of disillusionment with the whole promotions process, with the majority of the respondents feeling that promotions were not based on merit, but rather on favoritism and the relationship between the extension officer and their supervisor. During the focus group discussion, half of the respondents felt that they had only received their promotions because they had travelled to the headquarters, Kilimo house, (in Nairobi) and had parted with some cash to induce the officers at the headquarters to process their promotions. One of the respondents pointed out that *"if you don't give something to the people at Kilimo house to process your promotion, you will remain in one job-group until you retire!"* On The other hand, a few of the respondents felt that they had only been promoted because they were on good terms with their supervisors, while a very small number of the respondents felt that they had received their promotions because they had merited it. The information sought to establish the levels of satisfaction among respondents in the different cadres. This was done by grouping the respondents by their levels of education. It emerged that respondents in possession of a masters' degree exhibited high levels of dissatisfaction-the only respondent 1 (100%) declared that he was very dissatisfied, followed by the certificate holders, where 6 (65%) of the respondents declared that they were very dissatisfied. Bachelor's degree holders were next where 5 (57%) of the respondents felt dissatisfied with the organisation

and lastly, the diploma holders, where 14 (57%) of the respondents felt dissatisfied with the organisation. Consequently, these levels of dissatisfaction can be said to be negatively affecting the respondents' performance in the dispensation of their day-to-day duties and responsibilities. This section sought to gather information about the respondents' career so as to establish their feelings in as far as the achievement of their career goals and career progression were concerned. This was important because most people join organizations expecting to establish themselves in the chosen career and grow in it as they give their service to the given organization. According to Donaldson (2010) "lack of a career progression is the main reason people decide to change jobs, followed by a lack of new challenges, dissatisfaction with pay levels and not enough training or development opportunities". When asked whether they felt that the decision making process was inclusive, 2 (4.6%) of the respondents did not give a response, 32 (74.4%) of the respondents either strongly disagreed or just disagreed with the suggestion, while 9 (20.9%) of the respondents either felt that the decision making process was inclusive.

When asked about their feelings on whether there were career advancement opportunities for extension officers, 1 (2.3%) did not answer, 35 (81.3%) of them either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the suggestion that there were sufficient career advancement opportunities, while 7 (16.2%) of the respondents felt that there were sufficient career advancement opportunities for extension officers. 7(63.5%) of the females respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that the decision making process in the Ministry of Agriculture was inclusive and that career development opportunities exist in the ministry, while 4(36.3%) felt that sufficient career development opportunities did not exist and that decision making was not inclusive in the Ministry of Agriculture. On the other hand, an overwhelming majority of the male respondents interviewed 28(97.5%) felt that decision making was not inclusive and that there was no career development opportunities in the Ministry of Agriculture, while 4 (12.5%) of the respondents felt that there were sufficient career development opportunities in the Ministry of Agriculture and that decision making was inclusive. It could not be immediately established why there was this disparity in feelings, but it can be safely concluded that being few in number (there were only 11(25.5%) females out of the total 43 respondents), it was only fair to include them in any decision making process. This could explain their positive feelings in as far as the decision making process is/was concerned.

When asked whether they felt they had enough skills to do their jobs efficiently, 30 (70%) of the respondents either strongly agreed or just agreed that they had enough skills to do their job sufficiently. On the other hand, 13(30%) of the respondents either disagreed or just disagreed with the suggestion. However, during the focus group discussion it emerged that half of the respondents felt they did not have enough skills to perform their duties efficiently while the rest felt that the skills they had were more than enough to deal with the challenges the farmers were experiencing in their day to day farming activities. When asked whether their present job made good use of their skills and abilities, 30 (69.7%) of the respondents strongly disagreed, 5 (11.6%) disagreed, while 8 (18.57%) either agreed or strongly agreed.

When asked whether they found joy and satisfaction in their daily work, 6 (13.9%) of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed, while 37(86%) either disagreed or strongly disagreed. It then means that the majority of respondents do not find joy and satisfaction in their daily work. When asked why they felt dissatisfied with their job during the focused group discussion, the respondents gave lack of sufficient career development opportunities, lack of regular training to update them on the emerging trends in the agricultural sector and poor career development strategies as some of the reasons for low satisfaction levels. These could be some of the reasons for the falling levels of productivity among extension officers in the Ministry of Agriculture.

When asked whether they felt they had a clear advancement path, 5 (11.6%) of the respondents strongly disagreed, 3 (6.9%) of them disagreed, while 35 (81.3%) either agreed or strongly agreed that they had a clear career advancement path. This was a bit baffling and so during the focus group discussion, it emerged that the career advancement path was clear to the respondents but they felt that different factors like corruption, inefficiency on the part of their supervisors and poor implementation of policies led to many respondents not advancing in their careers. This is another factor which could be attributed to the low motivation levels among the extension officers in the Ministry of Agriculture. When asked whether they were involved in the decision making process, 35(81.7%) of the respondents either disagreed or strongly disagreed, while 8(18.5%) of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed. It then meant that the majority of the respondents did not feel involved in the decision making process.

When asked how they felt in as far as their organizations sensitivity and response to important issues, 40 (92.9% ) of the respondents either disagreed or strongly disagreed, while 3 (6.9%) of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed, meaning that the majority of the respondents felt that issues affecting them were not being addressed. This could also be one of the reasons for poor productivity among extension officers in the Ministry of Agriculture. When asked whether they had the support and authority they needed to make the necessary for accomplishing the assigned tasks, 20(46.5%) of the respondents strongly disagreed, 10 (23.3%) of them disagreed while 13 (30.2%) of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed. This means that extension officers in the Ministry of Agriculture do not have enough support from their supervisors in dealing with the challenges experienced in their day-to-day roles. This could be one of the factors negatively affecting their productivity levels.

When asked whether they had regular access to trainings and seminars, 35(81.3%) of the respondents strongly disagreed, 5 (11.6%) of the respondents disagreed, while 3 (6.9%) of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed. During the focus group discussion, the majority of the respondents said they had not attended either training or seminar in the last 5 years, citing lack of funding as the main reason given for lack of regular training and seminars. This lack of trainings and seminars could be one of the reasons for low productivity among extension officers in the ministry of Agriculture. When asked about the variety of tasks required by their position, 28 (65%) of the respondents felt that the requirements were not enough, 10(23.2%) felt that the requirements were enough, while 3

(6.9%) of the respondents either felt that the tasks were many or too many.

### **The influence of Career development strategies on productivity**

The study revealed high levels of dissatisfaction among extension officers. Some of the reasons given included insufficient and inequitable career development strategies, favoritism and poor promotion policies, and a failure to include the officers feelings and views in the decision making process. For example, the study revealed that most agents believed that their promotions were related to years of service rather than individual performance. According to the Government of Kenya (2005), officers are promoted to the next job group automatically after serving for three years in the same job group. While this sounds good, it takes long for any promotions to be effected on one hand, killing any motivation and on the other hand, only works to deflate any motivation for hard work because there is a general feeling among extension officers that hard work is not recognized and does not contribute to their promotions in any way. This frustration had the effect of lowering their levels of satisfaction. There general levels of dissatisfaction varied between the cadres and levels of academic attainments. For example, extension workers with masters' degrees exhibited the highest levels of dissatisfaction, followed by those with certificates, then those with degrees and lastly by those with diplomas.

On the other hand, there was a general feeling that the decision making process was not inclusive. The level of agreement with this argument however, differed between the genders, with females feeling that the process was inclusive while the male extension workers felt that the process was not inclusive. This can lead to serious problems because if a worker feels excluded in a decision making process there are chances of them not owning the decisions made and refusing to cooperate or sabotaging the whole process.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

An effective career development strategy works in ensuring that the employees are motivated to give their best in their day to day roles and responsibilities, but also as a retention tool in any given organization. The Ministry of Agriculture should revise its career development strategy/policy for extension officers to make it attractive enough attractive enough to trained personnel. Secondly, the human resource development officer in the Ministry of Agriculture should ensure that the promotion and selection of officers for further training/s is pegged on performance and merit and not on favoritism. Also, performance appraisals should be objective to promote a feeling of equity among extension officers. Lastly, the ministry should organize regular workshops and seminars to train staff and allow them to learn and grow with new technologies.

### **Recommendations for Further studies**

The present study concentrated on the factors influencing productivity levels among extension officers in the Ministry of Agriculture. However, the Ministry of Agriculture is composed of workers with different academic and professional qualifications and who individually and collectively contribute towards the achievement of the organizational goals and

objectives. This study therefore recommends further study on the impact of the different departments in the Ministry of Agriculture on the ministry's effectiveness.

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