

SOURCES OF ORGANIZATIONAL STRESS IN AGRICULTURAL OFFICERS AND THEIR COPING STRATEGIES

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Results revealed the major organizational sources of stress were absence of clear-cut policies and procedures in the organization followed by lack of coordination with Agriculture related departments. Working together for a common goal and prioritizing jobs are the coping strategies followed by the agricultural officers. The research findings are discussed in the context of improving extension services for furthering agricultural advancement.

With the wake of changes occurring in farming worldwide, and with emphasis on "low-cost and high quality" produce, the extension service needs to be more competent and focussed. In this connection, Agricultural officers of the State Department of Agriculture play a key role in transfer of technology to farmers and provide feed back from farmers back to researchers.

Schabracq and Cooper (2000) reported that stress related complaints could be indicators of underlying factors that may negatively affect other organizational goals as well. Lakshmi (1997) reported that majority of the Agricultural officers had experienced moderate to high level of organizational stressors. In view of this importance, Agricultural officers were selected for the study.

1. To determine the sources of organizational stress as experienced by agricultural officers.
2. To identify the various coping strategies adopted by agricultural officers to overcome organizational stress.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Visakhapatnam and East Godavari districts of Andhra Pradesh with 27 and 30 mandals selected respectively through random selection procedure. 120 respondents (Agricultural officers) were randomly selected. An open-ended questionnaire was used for data collection. The questionnaire was administered to the officers personally to gather first hand

information and to get best attention possible. Frequencies, percentage were used to draw useful inferences.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

(1) Sources of organizational stress—From Table 1, the major sources of organizational stress as experienced by agricultural officers are ranked from one to nine. Absence of clear-cut policies and procedures in the organization was ranked one, which was followed by lack of coordination with Agriculture related departments, work overload and tight schedule.

Table 1. Sources of organizational stress as experienced by the agricultural officers

(N=120)

S. No	Organizational source of stress	Frequency	%	Rank
1.	Poor quality of supervision.	72	60.00	6
2.	Absence of clear cut policies and procedures, seed village programmes.	99	82.50	1
3.	Limited and untimely supply of inputs for organizing demonstrations, seed village programmes etc.	76	63.34	5
4.	Insufficient resources.	38	31.67	10
5.	Controversial instructions from Higher authorities coupled with misunderstanding.	64	53.34	7
6.	Change in responsibilities at Work and in working hours.	88	73.34	4
7.	Work overload and tight schedule.	92	76.67	3
8.	Inadequate authority.	58	48.34	8
9.	Lack of participation in decision making.	41	34.17	9
10.	Role ambiguity.	24	20.00	11
11.	Role conflict.	20	16.67	12
12.	Lack of coordination with Agriculture related departments.	96	80.00	2

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The reasons reported by the agricultural officers for these sources of stress are as follows :

1. Absence of clear-cut policies and procedures in the organization was a source, since the agricultural officers were subjected to frequent confusion.
2. Lack of coordination with Agriculture related depts. like Horticulture, Sericulture etc. because the Agricultural officers might not be in a position to give correct information to the farmers.
3. Work overload occurs due to lack of personnel in departments such as Panchayat Raj and the agricultural officers were asked to look after the duties of Mandal Development Officers (MDOs).
4. Change in responsibilities at work and in working hours happen because of additional revenue programs like state sponsored "Janmabhoomi" adding to the regular duties as specified under job chart for them. Bonita (1995) identified long work hours as one of the organizational factors contributing to increased stress levels.
5. Limited and untimely supply of inputs for organizing demonstrations was listed as a source because Agriculture is a time bound activity and will be disturbed if inputs were not received in time.
6. Poor quality of supervision results in stress since people at bottom level fail to get properly instructed and guided.
7. Controversial instructions from higher authorities coupled with misunderstanding were due to lack of clarity and diction.

For example, one agricultural officer reported that he got instructions first to select plots for IPM Demonstrations and then the instruction was changed to select plots for on farm extension trials. Later, he was instructed to select plots under general category, which was then changed to select under SC category.

Above finding confirm with reports that say that employees are torn between conflicting demands and differences in opinions from supervisors. (<http://www.southwestern.edu/~rittmaya/fob2.html>)

8. Inadequate authority was a source because the officers are only implementing authority and have no control over decision-making.
9. Lack of participation in decision making because senior officials decide sanctions and pass rules without consent from Agricultural officers. Bonita (1995) reported that many studies found heavy job demand, and low control, or decreased decision latitude lead to job dissatisfaction, mental strain, and cardiovascular disease.
10. Insufficient resources because of improper distribution and planning in resources like budgeting, conveyance etc.
11. Role ambiguity results due to lack of clarity about procedures, norms etc., and role conflict because of dual control and egoistic attitudes. Stress due to role ambiguity results where there is lack of clarity regarding expectations on the job, which leads to misinformation and misunderstanding.

Role conflict was particularly observed under quality control powers delegated to agricultural officers. Above finding is in conformity with reports, which say that every individual plays different roles, at different times, in different situations. This leads to organizational stress by role conflict, generated by different significant persons about the same role and the role occupant becomes ambivalent as to whom to please (<http://www.topeducation.com/management/stresseffects.asp>)

Hendrix, Steel and Schultz (1987) reported that many employees are stressed due to intra-organizational factors, which include work overload, work autonomy and control, supervision and support, and role ambiguity and role conflict.

(2) **Coping strategies**—The respondents were asked to give the coping strategies they were following to overcome organizational stress. Percentage analysis was followed. From Table 2, the major coping strategies are working together for a common goal followed by prioritizing jobs, active involvement in work, overload avoidance, flexible work schedules, improved training techniques, effective communication, time management, finishing unfinished tasks, participation in decision making, and role clarification in that order of magnitude.

It has been reported that organization-based approaches to stress include reduction in workload and increased participation in decision-making, which support above finding.

(<http://www.southwestern.edu/~rittmaya/fob2.html>)

Table 2. Coping Strategies followed by agricultural officers against organizational stress (N=120)

S. No	Organizational Coping Strategies	Frequency	%	Rank
1.	Work together for a Common goal	99	82.50	1
2.	Effective communication	54	45.00	7
3.	Improved training Techniques.	61	50.84	6
4.	Overload avoidance.	78	65.00	4
5.	Prioritizing jobs	95	79.17	2
6.	Finishing unfinished tasks	33	27.50	9
7.	Participation in decision making	28	23.34	10
8.	Flexible work schedules	63	52.50	5
9.	Role clarification	20	16.67	11
10.	Active involvement in work	87	72.50	3
11.	Time management	48	40.00	8

Besides, these strategies several agricultural officers opined the following suggestions for improving the effectiveness of the organization, for which they were working :

1. Change in organizational set up to make Department of Agriculture more powerful in aspects concerning Agriculture.

E.g. : Agricultural officers should do (a) Fertilizer distribution under hikes but not by Revenue officers

(b) Figures reported by Agriculture department personnel should be taken into confidence as final rather than by Revenue dept. for crop damage enumeration under Heavy rains/floods.

Sutherland (1993) reported the results of a stress audit conducted among personnel working in the offshore oil and gas industry. It emphasizes that a program, which seeks to eliminate sources of stress through change to the organization, is required, in addition to stress management training, which helps the individual to cope with the pressures of a job, which can be changed or eliminated.

2. Establishment of permanent buildings as offices at Mandal level throughout the state.
3. Benefits to the farmer must be reached through the agricultural officers.
4. Farmers should purchase fertilizers, pesticides and seeds from dealers only after prior sanction by the agricultural officers to avoid indiscriminate use of the same and to stop spurious sales.
5. Establishment of a strong union in the dept. to remove disparities in pays scales and promotions of the officers. Separate identity and recognition required for Agriculture Department.
6. Stopping subordination and ill treatment of officers.
7. Single line of control necessary to have only one Asst. Director of Agriculture at divisional level.
8. Curbing misadministration at all levels in the dept.

CONCLUSION

The findings of the present study reveal that Agricultural officers are experiencing Organizational stress through a number of sources. In order to work effectively, a proper microclimate is the basic tenet in any organization. Hence organizations like State Dept. of Agriculture should evolve such changes in policy, administration and structure such that a congenial work environment prevails for officers to operate effectively. Necessary changes in the job chart of agricultural officers along with emphasis on Human Resource Development are the need of the hour. Megranahan (1990) reported that the Employee Advisory Resource has a nine-year track record of application and shows how the availability of counseling through an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) can reduce individual and organizational stresses. Of course, the changes should necessarily include those voiced by the majority and be realistic.

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