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Agriculture Lecturers' Perception of the Benefits of Professional Meetings in Nigeria

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Abstract

The study assessed Agriculture lecturer's perception of the benefits of professional meetings in Nigeria. The study was conducted in Southeast and southsouth geo political zone of Nigeria. Multistage sampling technique was used to select eighty agriculture lecturers for the study. Data were collected with the aid of structured questionnaire and analysed using frequency counts, percentages and mean. Of the eighty agriculture lecturers used for the study, 59% were male, 81% married and 55% had their doctorate degree. The mean age and working experience were 43yrs and 11yrs respectively. Majority (98.8%) had attended national professional meetings in the past five years while only 32.5% had attended international professional meetings in the past five years. Also, 77% attend at most two professional meetings in a year. Of the five professional meetings (conferences, workshop, trainings, symposiums and seminar) examined in this study, result show that agriculture lecturers attach so much value to conferences ($M = 3.78$). It was also shown that agriculture lecturers strongly perceive the benefits of professional meetings to be: connects one to relevant networking team ($M = 3.86$), exposes one to new arrears in agriculture ($M = 3.82$) and gives one the opportunity to contribute his/her quota to knowledge. Based on the results of the study, it was recommended the need to support agriculture lecturer's attendance to international conferences and other international professional meetings to enable them expand their networking and collaboration activities. This is by offering sponsorships and other incentives to lecturers whose papers are accepted for presentation in such meetings.

Key words: professional meetings, benefits.

Introduction

Professional meeting is one of the ways in which to build human capacity in any organization. It is an assembly of professionals in a particular discipline or several disciplines coming together to deliberate on issues related to their profession. Fischer and Zigmond (2012) noted that professional meetings are a gathering of individuals with

related professional interests, often from across the country and even around the world. Such meetings according to them may range from a few hundred participants to 30, 000 or more. Without doubt many academics have participated in one professional meeting or the other for several reasons ranging from promotion, to networking. Agricultural Society of Nigeria (2013) reported that the objects of the Society among others are to foster the pursuit and understanding of both basic and applied agricultural science in Nigeria, to disseminate agricultural knowledge by various publications. Adesope et al (2012) noted that it is widely accepted that human capacity building is one of the most important sources of knowledge generation and it occupies a critical position in promoting a nation's prosperity and its citizens' well-being in the knowledge –based era. Gibson (2014) noted four key benefits of attending conferences to include learning new techniques, technologies; develop a continuous improvement mentality, educational and networking opportunities; Face-to-Face time; Participation and engagement possibilities. The benefits of joining a professional association and attending a conference or two to include the following: you see “real” professionals in action. The more conference presentations you observe, the easier it will be to give your own presentation one day. You get a feel for what's current in your field; You can get ideas for projects, papers, and presentations you can use in your classes. You can network – this works especially well if you volunteer; it's amazing how many “doors open” when you are willing to help out. You get to see people in your field being excited about work

While criteria for attending specific events will vary, Friedman (2012) posited that there are 13 solid reasons why you should commit to attending one or more conferences related to sustainability as part of the career and professional development program: *learning about key issues in the industry as a whole (and your area of interest in particular) as articulated by practitioners; meeting people and organizations addressing these same key issues; meeting people with whom you've established a relationship on social media; initiating relationships with others that you can continue by social media and/or meetings in person; learning about job, internship, project and other work-based possibilities; learning about fellowship and grant opportunities relevant to your area(s) of interest; gaining insight into the experiences of others who face challenges similar to yours; learning about publications and other resources relevant to your area(s) of interest; generating ideas for articles, books, and/or other media that you might produce to address key issues in your field and in the process establish you as a valuable resource for others; forging partnerships with colleagues who address key common issues/concerns; identifying opportunities for service within the profession as a whole, and possibly through the professional association (if any) that is sponsoring the conference; demonstrating your commitment to the profession and organization sponsoring the conference, and becoming familiar with the city and/or culture where the conference is held.*

Attending professional meetings has been a significant activity in the life of an agricultural lecturer. This study examines Agriculture lecturers' perception of the benefits of professional meetings in Nigeria. The specific objectives of the study include to: describe the demographic characteristics of agricultural lecturers in Nigerian universities; determine how much value agricultural lecturers attach to professional meeting; identify the benefits of professional meeting

Methodology

This study was conducted in Southeast and South south geo political zone of Nigeria. Multistage sampling technique was employed to select sample for the study. From each geo-political zone for the study, two states were randomly selected giving a total of four states (namely; Imo, Abia, Rivers and Akwa-Ibom) used for the study. Each of these states has one Federal university which was used for the study. Twenty lecturers were randomly selected from the list of agricultural lecturers in the faculty of agriculture in each of the school to give 80 respondents. Data was collected with aid of structured questionnaire. Analysis of the data was done using descriptive statistics namely frequency counts, percentages and mean scores.

Results and Discussion

Table 1 shows that the average age of respondents was 43 years and they were mostly males and were married, with average working experience of 11 years. Majority of the respondents involved in the study had PhD and had attended national professional meetings in the past 5 years. However, majority of the respondents had not attended international professional meetings in the past 5 years. It was also found that respondents attended 1 to 2 international conferences in the past 5 years. A previous survey by Adesope et al (2012) found that most agricultural lecturers attended an average of 5 conferences in the last 5 years.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of agricultural lecturers in the study area

Variable	Percentage	Mean
Age (years)		43
< 30	11	
31 – 40	39	
41 – 50	36	
> 50	14	
Gender		
Male	59	
Female	41	
Marital status		
Single	19	
Married	81	
Working experience (years)		11
< 10	59	
11 – 20	31	
21 – 30	10	
Highest degree obtained		
B.Sc	9	
M.Sc	36	
Ph.D	55	
Attended national professional meetings in the past five years		
Yes	98.8	
No	1.2	
Those that have attended international professional meetings in the past five years		
Yes	32.5	
No	67.5	
Frequency of attendance to international professional meeting		
1 – 2	77	
3 – 4	15	
5 and above	8	

Source: Field survey data 2013

How much value agriculture lecturers attach to professional meetings

Findings revealed that agricultural lecturers attach much value to the following kind of professional meetings: conferences (M= 3.78), Workshops (M= 3.44), Trainings (M= 3.53), Symposiums (M= 3.15), Seminars (M= 3.59). There is no gainsaying the fact that professional meetings helps to build the capacity of agricultural lecturers. Results show that agriculture lecturers attach so much value to conferences. This is true because of the immense benefits which according to Fischer and Zigmond (2012) may include gaining new information, experiences, and greatly facilitate the development of your network.

Table 2: Value agriculture lecturers attach to professional meetings

S/N	Professional meetings	Mean (max =5)
1	Conferences	3.78*
2	Workshops	3.44*
3	Trainings	3.53*
4	Symposiums	3.15*
5	Seminars	3.59*

***Mean score ≥ 2.50 suggests much value**

Benefits of professional meetings

Findings revealed that respondents perceived benefits of professional meetings to include connecting one to relevant networking teams. This is obviously possible since there is a lot of social interaction involved in the meetings which can easily help to build network of researchers. Respondents also indicated that professional meetings expose them to new areas in their field. They also noted that professional meetings expose them to better tools/technologies to do research. In the same vein, they learn better research methodology. This is because in some instances workshops on research methodology are provided to help update and equip participants. For instance at the Agricultural Extension Society of Nigeria conference held at the Obafemi Awolowo University, Il-Ife in 2011 and also at University of Nigeria, Nsukka in 2012, workshops were held on research methodology. Professional meetings give agricultural lecturers the opportunity to compare competing research tools. Similarly, professional meetings help agricultural lecturers acquire training especially in areas that benefit their career. professional meetings also prepares respondents for future challenges and the meetings help them get vendor contracts especially those with relevant tools and skills in their fields.

Table 3: Perceived benefits of professional meetings

S/N	Statement	Mean
1	Connects one to relevant networking teams	3.86*
2	It exposes me to new arrears in my field	3.82*
3	It exposes me to better tools/technologies to do my research.	3.62*
4	Learn better research methodology.	3.56*
5	It gives me the opportunity to compare competing research tools.	3.56*
6	Acquire training especially in areas that benefit my career.	3.61*
7	It prepares me for future challenges	3.57*
8	I get vendor contracts especially those with relevant tools and skills in my field.	3.23*
9	It gives me the opportunity to explore ideas	3.53*
10	It gives me the opportunity to contribute my own quota to knowledge	3.76*
11	It enables me develop my profile for promotion purposes .	3.56*
12	It supports collaboration with colleagues in other fields/areas.	3.62*

***Mean score ≥ 2.50 suggests Agreement**

Respondents indicated that professional meetings give them the opportunity to explore ideas and also the opportunity to contribute their own quota to knowledge. It enables

them develop their profile for promotion purposes, as well as support collaboration with colleagues in other fields/areas.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study has shown that agriculture lecturers strongly perceive the benefits of professional meetings to be connecting one to relevant networking team, exposing one to new arrears in agriculture and giving one the opportunity to contribute his/her quota to knowledge. Based on the results of the study, it was recommended that the government in collaboration with the academic institutions should encourage agriculture lecturers' attendance to international conferences and other international professional meetings to enable them expand their networking and collaboration activities. This could be done through offering sponsorships and other incentives to lecturers whose papers are accepted for presentation in such meetings.

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