

ALIENATION FROM WORK AMONG ENTREPRENEURS IN AGRICULTURE

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Introduction

A large part of interest in entrepreneurship stems from the fact that economic development is the outcome of purposeful human activity and hence promoting entrepreneurship is the key to it. Entrepreneurship in agriculture is not solely guided by profit and entrepreneurs in agriculture do not form a social class like the capitalists. Recent interest in agricultural development coupled with the problems of poverty and unemployment and opening of markets has brought the concept of rural entrepreneurship to the fore. It is not simply re-distributive justice alone but of increasing the productive capacities of the rural people, particularly the young ones and their participation in the development process which has become more important. With the change in the political philosophy of the country, entrepreneurs in agriculture are looked as supplementing the existing network to accelerate the process of technology transfer to agriculture and providing supplementary sources of input supply and services, for which by and large, farmers presently depend upon State Agencies.

However, in general, private entrepreneurs in agriculture are ridiculed, be they moneylenders, traders or commission agents for supplying services and inputs such as fertilizers, pesticides, seeds, custom hiring (for all the poor quality and sky rocketing prices), no matter how efficient any of them may be in their respective areas in providing the necessary services. They are often ignored, hated and regarded as superfluous middlemen (Karam Singh, 1990) who are exploiting the poor farmers. In one of the studies Jajoo et.al. (1994) have observed higher degree of dissatisfaction among women entrepreneurs in rural areas.

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Considering the higher degree of failure in agricultural enterprises and lack of interest towards this profession among the unemployed agricultural graduates, attention has to be focused on the concept of work alienation among the agricultural entrepreneurs. The concept of work alienation has its origin in the writings of Karl Marx. He argued that creative activity is a basic aspect of human nature and that this need was most satisfied in work (Marx,1963). It is a condition where the individual has lost control over the product of his labor, the immediate work process and hence the capacity to express himself in work. Most of the recent theoretical and empirical studies of alienation in general have been strongly influenced by the work of Melvin Seeman. In his initial article (1959), he attempted to clarify the meaning of the concept by identifying five dimensions of alienation; powerlessness; meaninglessness; normlessness; isolation; and self- estrangement. Of all the five dimensions, self-estrangement has been given the greatest attention in the literature on work alienation. Self-estrangement exists when workers feel their work is not self-fulfilling. That is, their task is not intrinsically rewarding in itself, but simply a means to something else (Mottaz, 1981). This was the crucial meaning for both Marx and Blauner (1964). Moreover, the literature suggests that the task conditions of powerlessness and meaninglessness are important determinants of self-estrangement in work.

Factors other than technology, structure and job codification may also account for variations in work related alienation. Several studies have considered demographic factors and found work alienation to be higher for certain groups of workers. Among the demographic factors found to be important are age, sex, education, total income, race, marital status and urban-rural background. This brief review of literature on work related alienation suggests that variations in technology and organizational structure lead to variations in working conditions and working conditions in turn interact with individual factors to produce different levels of self-estrangement in work. The intention of the present study is to explore the later portion of this model with entrepreneurs in agriculture.

Method

The basic data for this study have been collected from 50 agricultural entrepreneurs in a district situated in mid-west India. The area is char-

acterized by high value horticultural and agricultural crops. The respondents had their establishments in rural, semi-urban and urban areas and are selling inputs like seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, farm implements etc. However, they are not involved in marketing agricultural produce. Only the owners of these establishments have participated in this study. The data was obtained by personal interviews conducted during early 2002.

Concepts and measurement

Work alienation : Following Mottaz (1981), work alienation is defined here as a lack of intrinsic fulfillment in work. That is, work is an instrumental activity in the sense that it is not rewarding in itself but simply a means to some other end. Measures for work alienation were adopted from Mottaz (1981) with slight modification to suit the setting of agricultural entrepreneurs. Alienation from work was computed on the basis of response to seven questions. The response categories ranged along a four point continuum and consisted of strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree. The higher the score, the greater the perception of self-estranging conditions.

Risk taking ability: Risk taking ability has been defined as the degree to which an entrepreneur becomes involved in risk bearing and has courage to face new problems of uncertainty in the business which comes with the introduction of new products in the market. A six dimension scale was developed to measure the risk taking ability of farm entrepreneurs. The responses were recorded on a four point scale from Strongly agree (1) to Strongly disagree (4).

Age : Age is the respondents age measured in years. Respondents who are below 30 are scored (1), 31 to 40 are scored (2), 41 to 50 are scored (3), and 51 and above are scored (4).

Years in business: It is the number of years spent in running the business dealing with inputs and services required for agriculture. Those respondents who are in business for less than 5 years are scored (1), and more than 25 years are scored (6).

Investment : It the amount in rupees invested in this business from their own resources while starting the business. Those who have invested less than Rs.50,000/-were scored (1), and those who have invested Rs.10,00,000/ were scored (5).

Turnover: It the volume of business done in a year in terms of Rupees. Whose annual turnover is less than Rs.5,00,000/- are scored (1), and whose turnover is more than Rs.50,00,000/- are scored (5).

Income : It is the gross annual profit in Rupees obtained in the business. The income of less than Rs.50,000 was scored as (1), and More than Rs. 10,00,000/- was scored as (6)

Loan: It is the debt in Rupees outstanding at present against the money borrowed from various sources. Those who have outstanding loan of less than Rs.50,000/- are scored (1), and more than Rs.10,00,000/- are scored (5).

Results and Discussion

The data reveals that 46 per cent of entrepreneurs in agriculture are in the age group of 31 to 40 years. However, on educational front, things are not that encouraging. Twenty four percent are not even graduates, 42 per cent do not have a science degree. Only 6 per cent are agricultural graduates and 12 percent are post-graduate in agriculture. Majority of entrepreneurs (54%) have completed less than 10 years in the business. The initial investment of less than one lakh rupees was made by majority (66%) of the respondents. The annual turnover for 48% entrepreneurs is between 5 to 25 lack of rupees and 60% respondents have annual gross income of Rs.50,000/- to Rs.2.5 lack. However, 38% reported that their income is just enough to meet all needs comfortably and 44% respondents said the income is just enough to barely get by on. For 14% entrepreneurs, their income is not enough to live on. Seventy nine per cent of entrepreneurs in agriculture are have outstanding loans to the tune of Rs.50,000/- to Rs.5 lakh and a majority of them (62%) are very concerned about repaying the loan but 76 per cent have reported that current financial condition of their family is not a problem. The data also reveal that 46 per cent entrepreneurs have financially very resourceful parents but not many of them are having politically influential parents or in-laws.

The correlations among all the indices of work alienation are presented in Table 1. The pattern of relationships indicates that those entrepreneurs having higher income also have higher turnover ($r = .77$) and higher amount of outstanding loan ($r = .62$). The relationships are positive, quite strong and significant. Entrepreneurs having higher turnover are also likely to take higher risk ($r = .35$). The relation is significant. Correlation matrix also reveal that younger entrepreneurs are associated with higher degree of alienation. Simi-

larly, entrepreneurs with lower income have higher degree of work alienation. Those with lower investment have higher alienation. Data also indicates that as the turnover increases, alienation decreases and as the loan amount increase, work alienation also increases. The relationship between risk taking ability and work alienations seems to be positive (.08) but not significant.

Table 1 : Zero order Correlations between age, income, investment, turnover, loan, years in business risk taking ability and alienation from work.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1 Age							
2 Income	.29*						
3 Investment	-.10	-.05					
4 Turnover	.23	.77**	-.01				
5 Loan	.22	.62**	.23	.58**			
6 Years	.37**	.23	-.13	.26	.24		
7 Risk	.18	.23	-.01	-.35*	.11	.02	
8 Alienation	-.10	-.10	-.02	-.24	-.06	.08	.03

* p< .05, ** p< .01

The bivariate relationships dictated the strategy for multivariate analysis. The model was tested to explain the effects of independent variable on work related alienation among entrepreneurs in agriculture. The structure of regression model conforms to the classical fixed effects, least-squares configuration. The model assumes that the effects are linear and makes no explicit provision for interaction.

Table 2: Standardized partial regression coefficient of independent variables on alienation from work.

Variables	Beta	T
Age	-.17	-1.06
Income	-.23*	-.92
Investment	-.01	-.07
Turnover	-.54**	-2.22
Loan	.07	.35
Years	.22*	1.35
Risk	.18	1.17
Multiple R		.38*
R Square		.15

*p<.05 **p<.01

The multivariate analysis also yields consistent relationship for age, income, investment, and turnover as all the Beta are negative. This supports our hypothesis that these variables inversely contribute to the explanation of work related alienation among entrepreneurs in agriculture. The contribution of income and turnover looks quite strong and significant. Number of years in business and risk taking ability also yields consistent relationship in terms of positive Beta. Number of years in the business also emerges as a strong predictor of alienation from work. The overall model is significant (Multiple R .38), and 15 per cent of the variance in work related alienation among the entrepreneurs in agriculture is explained by this model. Among all the variables in the model Annual turnover emerge as the very strong predictor for alienation.

The outcome confirms a notion suggested earlier that work alienation is a very complex phenomenon. Financial factors which are consistently neglected in previous alienation studies seem to interact with the work situation to produce different levels of work alienation. In this study, the volume of annual turnover seems to make a significant difference in alienation from work. Younger entrepreneurs, appear to be more alienated than older entrepreneurs indicating that younger entrepreneurs react more strongly to alienating job conditions.

The findings of this study may have implications for the development of entrepreneurship in agriculture. With the diversification and modernization of agricultural practices, there is a need to augment and support extension services for agriculture. For this purpose, several Agriclincs and Agribusiness Centers are being set up by the agriculture graduates with the sponsorship of NABARD. They will strengthen transfer of technology, extension services and also provide self-employment opportunities to technically trained persons. No doubt, the role of entrepreneurs in agriculture will be crucial in changed economic environment. The entrepreneurs who are motivated by the desire to excel in achievements can conquer new horizons in providing services to the majority of farmers. But, those who are alienated from their work will be thrown out of business by dynamic market forces and the investment made in them by the society may not yield the returns. Such entrepreneurs need to be identified, counseled and properly trained.

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