

SEARCH CRITERIA

Model	Model A: Empowerment Model
Industry	Agriculture, environment
Focus/Level	Industry
Outcomes	Building individual confidence, Building management skills, Building community
Special Interest Groups	Other

1. PROJECT TITLE:

Developing Social Capability Project

2. FUNDERS:

Department of Primary Industries Victoria

3. PROVIDERS:

Department of Primary Industries Victoria

4. KEY CONTACTS:

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5. INDUSTRY/ISSUE/GEOGRAPHY:

The DSC project is about finding ways to develop the capability of people involved in agriculture and the environment in Victoria to manage successfully in a changing world. The project aims to involve people in the analysis of the problems that affect them and in the design of potential solutions.

6. PROJECT CONTEXT:

The Developing Social Capability (DSC) Project is a research project aimed at assessing participative action research (PAR) as an approach to improving the efficiency of NRE's extension practice. The project team is employing a PAR itself to undertake the research, which means it is a hands-on, participative process, rather than an academic exercise.

It is a 2-year NRE Statewide project funded through the Science, Technology and Innovation Initiative. The project development stage has recently been successfully completed (June 2002) and has now moved into the implementation phase for the coming 12 months.

The project was developed in response to the difficulty in finding solutions to complex issues such as sustainable development, natural resource management and rural conflict resolution, by using traditional approaches to problem solving and extension.

7. PROJECT NICHE (SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES):**Goals and key targets of the Project**

- To further develop the capability of natural resource managers to anticipate and manage in a changing environment
- To develop a climate supportive of that change
- To create new knowledge of effective change management processes
- To develop new, innovative soft systems technologies to develop the capacity of natural resource managers to anticipate and manage in a changing environment

Higher level goals (SEEC)

- As a result of the above the adoption rate of new technologies and management practices will increase, contributing to positive outcomes for rural and regional Victoria.
- This will be demonstrated by more vibrant rural and regional communities, productivity gains and environmental improvements
- Natural resource managers will be more informed and resourceful

8. PHILOSOPHY/APPROACH:

The Developing Social Capability project is based on a systems approach and a principle of working with, rather than acting on communities, and no longer privileging science.

From that perspective, concentrating solely on the technical solutions to NRM issues will not be sufficient to deal with the complexity they involve. It recognises human beings make rational decisions about their natural resource management practices, based on their own values systems and sense of identity.

The DSC Project has been trialling and evaluating a participatory action research approach to problem solving and building the capability of people to manage and direct change.

The DSC approach is based on the Rapid Appraisal of Agricultural Knowledge Systems (RAAKS) methodology (Salomon and Engel, 1997).

The objectives in using this approach are to:

- Identify opportunities to improve a knowledge and information system ie to better the organisation, decision making and exchange of information among stakeholders with the aim of improving the potential for learning and innovation;
- Create awareness among relevant stakeholders about the opportunities and constraints that affect their ability to develop innovative solutions;
- Identify stakeholders and potential stakeholders who do or could act effectively to remove constraints and take advantage of opportunities to improve the ability to develop innovative solutions; and
- Encourage stakeholder commitment to change

The RAAKS approach is an approach that provides ways for a diverse range of people involved in such complex situations to begin to find answers for themselves.

It is useful in a situation where working together can be expected to promote positive change. It offers tools for gathering, organising and interpreting information in a participatory manner. The process develops a shared sense of purpose between stakeholders and a basis for developing and implementing innovative solutions.

The approach focuses on people's practice and knowledge. It builds relationships and understanding between stakeholders, which provides a platform for developing innovative solutions and practice change. It was specifically designed for use in the agricultural context, which is well suited to the work of DPI and CMA's.

9. RESOURCES, MANAGEMENT AND STAFFING STRUCTURES:

10. PROCESS/METHODS USED:

The DSC project team has undertaken a series of activities including:

1. Commissioning a literature review (MRAP report). Our process has been developed according to the recommendations contained in that report.
2. Identification of issues, challenges and opportunities by people involved in agriculture and the environment. About 50 people were interviewed including farmers, private consultants, agribusiness, bankers, NRE (extension and policy), CMA staff and representatives from interest groups such as environment groups and Women in Agriculture.
3. Analysis of interviews, from which a number of themes emerged. (refer to attached paper)
4. Focused discussions held with groups of land managers and service providers to delve more deeply into these themes. The information from the focused discussions has been analysed and is being used to help develop the next phase of the project.

The implementation phase of the project involves the DSC team undertaking pilot activities that relate directly to the key themes that emerged through these earlier activities within three NRE extension projects over the next 12 months (TOPCROP, Fruit Cheque and the Environmental Best Management Practices Project).

11. IMPACTS TO DATE (AND EVALUATION APPROACHES USED):

To date, the DSC project team has undertaken a series of activities. These include:

- The identification of issues, challenges and opportunities by people involved in agriculture and the environment. About 50 people were interviewed including farmers, private consultants, agribusiness, bankers, NRE extension and policy people, catchment management authority staff and representatives from interest groups like environment groups and Women in Agriculture.
- The interviews were analysed and a number of themes emerged
- Focused discussions were held with groups of land managers and service providers to delve more deeply into these themes. The information from the focused discussions is being used to help develop the next phase of the project.
- The Developing Social Capability are now undertaking pilot activities that relate directly to the key themes that emerged through these earlier activities. We will pilot new approaches within three existing NRE extension projects operating in rural communities.

The analysis of the individual interviews highlighted people's understanding by the term "social capability". Central to the understanding of social capability was the concept of community. A community was seen to be linked to place, operate at a local rather than global level, and include a diversity of groups, skills and attitudes. Integral to the community are the complex web of relationships that are derived from within the community.

Individuals strongly associated social capability with 'having skills' or 'being able to do something'. It was also associated with the relationships between people or groups and the way they respond to change.

It was reported that three differing perspectives of social capability emerged from the interviews.

- In the first perspective, improving social capability is strongly related to individuals skills – improve the skills of an individual and you'll improve the way the community functions.
- The second perspective considers social capability as a cluster of skills, processes and attributes. It is about enabling the community to develop their capability to respond to change.
- The third perspective indicates social capability as change that is designed from within the community, and actions that are taken reflect the community's desires and values.

The analysis of the interviews also identified:

- the types of people involved in developing social capability in communities and the relationships between them,
- various approaches presently being used to involve people in cooperative approaches relating to enhancing social capability,
- various things that motivated people to be involved projects that build social capacity,
- how people presently act to enhance social capability,
- organisational dilemmas for the Department's involvement in developing social capability,

As well as the above, four main themes emerged from the interviews:

1. The relationships, networks and partnerships that lead to effective (or ineffective) information management
2. Relationships within the value chain, including the tighter demands for product specification including quality assurance and supermarket demands that impact on business.
3. Natural resource management issues: such as sustainable use of water resources within communities.
4. Community issues. For example issues related to labour and employment in agriculture.

Evaluation Design & Methods

The evaluation plan follows the outline developed by the NRE Evaluation Support Team as summarised below. The plan is a result of consultation within the DSC team and has been modified several times as a greater understanding of the project has emerged. The project employs a PAR approach and as such regular reflection on all aspects are part of the process

Steps used in the development of the DSC Evaluation Plan:

1. Clarify the outcome
2. Demonstrate the logic
3. Complete the schedule
4. Strategy for Management and Utilisation
5. Document the plan
6. Conduct the evaluation and document it
7. Review the evaluation

Key Evaluation Questions & Sub Questions

KEQ 1 To what extent was product development successful?

1. What were the opinions of the participants (and team) of the process?
 - ORID at the end of the workshops
 - Team debrief at the end (inviting participants to take part)
 - Observation
 - At the end of the product development phase select a couple of people from each focus group and ask them “What did you think of the findings? What did they think of the process? How did they feel about being asked to take part” etc
 - Were the participants effectively engaged? Provide interviewees with the analysis of the interviews – follow up with a phone call to see what their opinions are and to maintain contact (member checking)
 - Did the participants demonstrate ownership of the process and products?
2. To what extent were participants representative of the community in question?
 - Desk study and analysis of suggestions
3. Who wasn't included?
 - Do people understand the new methods?
 - How effective was communication?
 - What evidence is there that there is an increase on return on investment from the science?
 - How cost effective are the new tools?

KEQ 2 What are people doing differently? (doing/thinking/saying differently)

- What are extension agents doing differently as a result of piloting new methods?

- To what extent have NRE's extension networks changed?
- What has been the change in capacity building in endusers? In Extension practitioners?
- In what way are participants of these projects different?
- What are other "actors" doing differently?
- What worked for whom? In what situations?
- How many people were involved in the virtual campus?

KEQ3 How good are the ideas which have been generated?

1. What benefits are anticipated?
 - Expert opinions sought immediately after workshops from people such as: (rough brainstormed list – these people have not been contacted for this purpose). Mark Paine, Jan and Cornelia Flora, REC, Yoland Wadsworth, Bob Dick, Bob Williams, John Petheram, Neils Roling, USDA, Paul Engel
2. What are reactions to new products?
 - Are people interested in using them?
3. How do new products differ from the old?
 - How is the process different from what existed before?
4. What are expert's opinions of the new products?

KEQ4 What was learned?

1. What would we do differently next time?
 - Revisit learning journals
 - Possibly ask for monthly learning highlights from each team member (most significant learning story)
2. What did we do differently as a result of continuous improvement?
3. What can we take with us?

KEQ5 To what extent was the research rigorous and ethical?

- Comments from "Critical friends"
- Explanation of process against process (codes of ethics)
- Identification of ethical issues of concern for this type of research
- Send evaluation to critical friends

12. EFFECTIVENESS:

The process used in the DSC project was developed and then tested within DPI during 2001 – 2003. The project team initially developed an understanding of what people within the food, agriculture and natural resource management sectors see to be the issues and opportunities for developing social capability. These findings have implications for how extension is conducted – for example, in relation to information management, it became clear that the problem for many stakeholders is not a lack of information, but a difficulty to make sense of the myriad of often conflicting information that is available.

In testing the process used in the first stage of the project, a number of different methods and tools were used with differing results within three existing DPI extension projects – TOPCROP, the Environmental Best Management Practices Project and FarmBis. Each pilot project used PAR approaches, however the method and tools used varied depending on the needs and requirements of individual extension projects.

13. PROJECT DOCUMENTATION AVAILABLE:

May. A, 2003, The Developing Social Capability Project, *Nomination for an APEN Award 2003 - Excellence in Extension*, NSW

Other project documentation including: The DSC project approach to Participatory Action Research, Draft Evaluation Plan for Developing Social Capability, Project Update - August 2002.

14. ISSUES:

During the project it became evident that larger, more complicated systems and issues require more work and resources and that gaining an understanding of the range and depth of views of the problematic situation takes time. Traditional extension approaches tend to assume this knowledge, or to discount it in deference to scientific understanding. The risk of doing this is to miss out on identifying many of the pathways that could contribute to improving the situation. For example, in the TOPCROP pilot networks were developed within the grains industry as part of the PAR process in addition to the technical solutions identified.

Each of the pilots explored three very different issues within their extension projects and introduced PAR approaches within these projects. Confidence in and acceptance of the fact that the methods and tools used can not be used in a standard 'recipe' format was crucial to the success of the PAR approach used. The DSC project enabled the extension projects involved to develop a richer picture of the problematic situation identified, develop the skills and capability of their teams, and to broaden their view of who is has an interest in the issues.

15. COMMENTS/CONCLUSIONS:

This is a positive step toward more effective pathways for development and innovation and has contributed to social capability. It has also provided an opportunity for extension projects to explore the possibility for using these approaches within their projects, and has provided a strong base of skills, knowledge and learning within the Victorian Departments of Primary Industries and Sustainability and Environment to support and further develop these approaches.

16. REVIEW METHODS:

- Document analysis and review