

EXTENSIONNET

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Improving Extension Practice and Professionalism in QDPI

Janice Timms, Research and Extension Unit, DPI, Brisbane

Over the past 6 years in particular, QDPI has put in place a number of mechanisms to support improvements in extension practice and professionalism. No one of these mechanisms can achieve all the support necessary. They need to be looked at as components of a total system and environment which is about enabling Extension practitioners and others who contribute to the total DPI Extension effort, to do their jobs well. Below I have listed just a few of the range of mechanisms we have in place.

Rural Extension Centre (REC)

The Rural Extension Centre was one of the strategic components in the 1992 DPI Extension Strategy Statement. It was established in 1993 as a result of a Memorandum of Understanding between the University of Queensland and the Department of Primary Industries. Its primary task is to provide a vehicle to increase the level of skills and professionalism in extension staff (including formal extension qualifications) in Queensland and beyond, and to contribute to the development of effective extension methods, policy and management.

The REC operates 4 programs, which together contribute to supporting

extension practice and professionalism. The programs are:

- Extension Development
- Education and Professional Development
- Rural Community Development
- Communication Technology in Rural Development

Research and Extension Unit

In 1995 the Department established the Research and Extension Support Unit. This Unit has gone through some changes over the past few years and is now known as the Research and Extension Unit (R&EU). The overall role of the Unit is to provide leadership for the Department as a whole, in the development and delivery of excellent extension and research services. In general, staff of the Unit are involved in developing policies, formulating strategic directions and providing specialist support for the Department's roles and responsibilities in extension and research.

With regard to extension, some of the major initiatives the Unit is responsible for include implementation and updating of the DPI Extension Strategy, implementation of the DPI Client Information Services Statement



Janice Timms

and overseeing the Department's involvement in the Rural Extension Centre. The Unit also includes the DPI Extension Specialists and ensures the provision of specialist extension development support to all Business Groups and Institutes in the Department through several different strategies.

In addition to the support outlined above, R&EU supports Institutes and Business Groups to further develop their extension service capability and capacity by providing funds for staff to undertake formal extension training at the Rural Extension Centre. The strategy that R&EU is using to allocate the resources available, purposefully focuses support towards using funds to help DPI officers to complete the Certificate, Graduate Certificate, Post Graduate Diploma or Masters programs in extension at the REC.

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From the Editor

Elwin Turnbull

This edition has a geographical bias towards Queensland which is near the center of our Australasia Pacific region. For those who were at the conference in Albury there will be no surprise that a culture has emerged of improving and supporting extension activities in the Queensland Department of Primary Industries. I hope that those in other regions can find some new ideas and enthusiasm for improving the quality of their extension activities from the energy and thinking evident in Queensland. The articles in the next newsletter will be drawn from projects in the Asia Pacific part of our network.

The value of the articles in this newsletter depends on what you see as extension. The concept of a core business (so often mentioned by successful commercial organisations) is also relevant to extension. How often have you asked? **What is the Core Business of Extension??** and, how satisfied are you with your answer?

Reading about the 1973 radical transformation in the Brotherhood of St Laurence (an organisation which formed in 1933 in Fitzroy, Victoria) has helped me with this question about the core business of extension. In 1973 the Brotherhood changed to a multi disciplinary approach of development. In this new model they articulated their goal as **improving the socio economic functioning of the client group**. They aimed to do this through a process of empowerment in four human living domains, as follows.

To develop participative strategies to assist the clients develop power over:

- **Resources**
- **Relationships**
- **Information and**
- **Decision - making.**

In my view this model provides a solid foundation on which to base both:

- a future career for extension professionals, and
- a positive contribution to our communities.

The difficulties currently faced by farmers and rural communities are extreme, both in Australia and the Asia Pacific. It is incumbent on us, as the privileged professionals who work with farmers and rural communities, to have crystal clarity about our own contribution. This can be done through a core business concept of improving the socio economic functioning of the clients. The key performance indicators (KPI in the Queensland DPI current terminology) would be **client power** over resources, relationships, information and decision making.

Extension operators cannot afford to view themselves as merely communicators of scientific discovery. “Sleepers Wake” as Barry Jones would say! Metaphorically we are at a cross roads in APEN and our professional roles in rural development. It is time to lay to rest the myth that extension is just a group of marginal social scientists or an also ran gaggle of agricultural scientists working on the fringe agricultural research (with its core business - scientific discovery and technological innovation). If we choose to have commitment to the alternative concept of empowerment facilitator then we have a large, complex, worthwhile and interesting challenge. We also have an expanded corps of close colleagues. In addition to cooperating closely with our



Natural Resources and Environment

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Janice Timms article (Continued)**Extension Development Support**

Extension development support is provided to all Business Groups and Institutes through several different strategies, including:

- One strategy which involves support being provided by Extension Specialists who are attached to the Research and Extension Unit but are fulfilling specifically negotiated extension development roles for particular Institutes or Business Groups. This type of support is of particular benefit to Business Groups and Institutes for which the concepts of contemporary extension are fairly new and/or which have a relatively small extension work force;

- Another strategy has been developed for the Farming Systems Institute and Queensland Horticulture Institute since both these Institutes have larger extension work forces and some very experienced extension practitioners who can take on an extension development role. Research and Extension Unit is financially and professionally supporting three Principal Extension Officers in the Farming Systems Institute to jointly undertake the specialist extension development function.

R&EU is also financially and professionally supporting the Discipline Leader (Extension) in the Queensland Horticulture Institute to fulfil the specialist extension development role.

Extension Specialists and Discipline Leader (Extension) Roles

The type of expertise and support provided by the Extension Specialists and Discipline Leader (Extension) to enable improvements in extension practice and professionalism include:

- support and advice on the development, design and evaluation of extension programs, projects and activities;
- advanced adaptation of existing extension processes;
- conceptualisation of new extension processes;
- facilitating access to extension knowledge and experience;
- providing professional development advice and opportunities;
- providing and leading training programs in contemporary extension processes, management and evaluation;
- undertaking and supporting high level extension research; and
- creating and guiding professional extension networks.

Professional Progression Scheme

In 1997 DPI introduced the Professional Progression Scheme for professional research, extension, regulation and diagnostic staff. The Scheme is a state-wide process of internal promotion to recognise and reward outstanding achievement and performance of DPI's Professional staff regardless of their geographical location.

The Scheme is now into its second year and, while there are areas where improvements can be made to the process, it has been a mechanism through which DPI has recognised and rewarded Extension practitioners for outstanding achievements and professionalism.

Conclusion

DPI is committed to a continuous improvement approach to its extension services. If we are practice continuous improvement then we must continue to support extension development and learn from our experiences in the delivery of extension services. To me, the outlook for DPI extension is of a bright and dynamic profession that is well supported by the organisation. I look forward to being involved in that future.

▽

From the Editor (Continued)

traditional colleagues (in policy and the scientific community) people from agribusiness companies, rural stores, credit institutions, welfare services, local government will become key partners in our joint endeavours. The APEN committee of management is currently exploring forming new partnerships to this end with both:

- the traditional scientific discourse - through the journal committee, and
- agribusiness - through a survey and special sessions at the workshop in Adelaide.

Our hope is that we can get interest and commitment to become equal partners in an integrated endeavour to improve the socio economic functioning of rural communities in the Australasia Pacific region. If you have energy or resources to help in this transition of the role of extension in rural development please contact the APEN committee of management.

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**Please Respond to the letter from Peter Davies which is an insert with this issue.
By August 6th if possible.**

AVAILABLE AT THE APEN Secretariat

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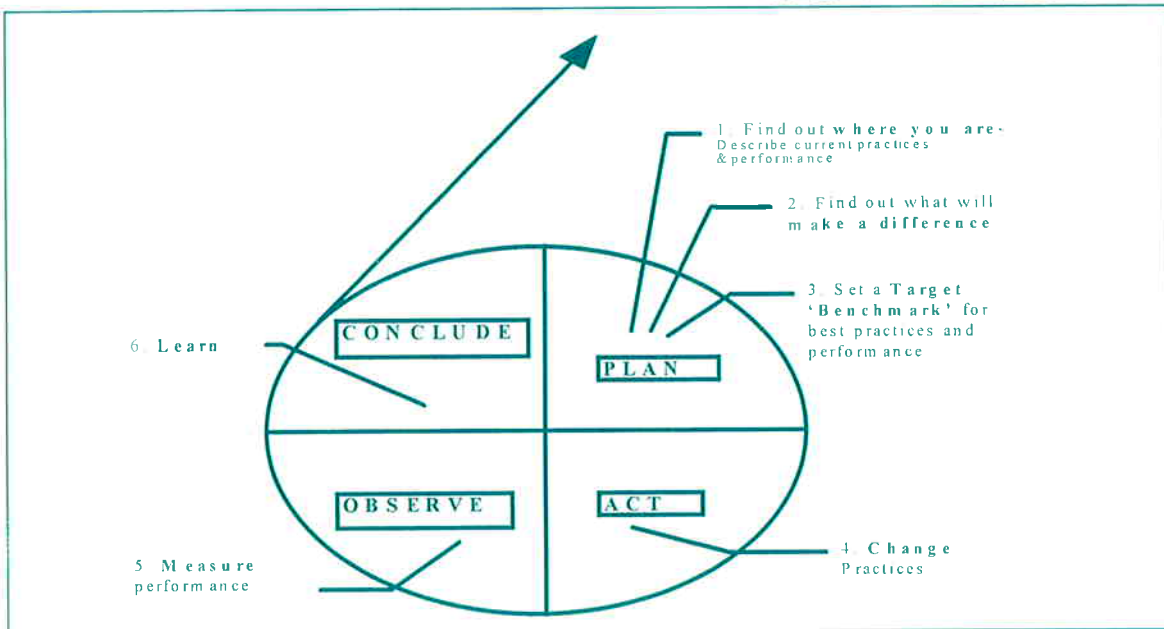
BEST BEEF - Focusing on Making a Difference

Emma Robinson, Program Extension Officer, Emerald

The Best Practices process of extension that I have been using with producers in central Queensland, is a structured six-step process that targets **learning** as the principle outcome.

The Best Practices process **enables ALL participants to continuously improve Key Performance Indicators**. The 6 steps of the process (shown in the following diagram) have key features which ensure:

1. Continual and conscious learning
2. A focus on practices that make a real difference to performance.
3. Formation of interdependent learning partnerships



The Best Practices Process

The Best Practices process has been applied in the BEST BEEF project, with the goal of focusing on what makes a difference to beef enterprise performance. Using the Best Practices process as a 'road map' participants can apply/access tools at each of the six steps to achieve an objective understanding of the impact of different practices on their beef enterprise performance. One of the key tools used to 'focus' group participants

is Key Performance Indicators. Participants agree what are the key performance indicators of a beef enterprise. Models of herd production and economic performance are then used to determine the impact on these indicators according to the number of different management practices that are operating or being considered. These management practices can then be ranked according to their positive impact

on the performance of the present beef enterprise.

Some Outcomes

I've had numerous learning's through my participation in the BEST BEEF project.... I'd like to share some of them with you!

- When using a new process greater time needs to be spent on establishing participants

understanding and support for the process.

- People bring different skills, perceptions and agenda's to groups - consciously discuss these differences and manage them so they enable group development. Disagreement can be of value to a working team, if it is managed for positive outcomes!
- The Best Practice process is the projects core, don't get bogged down on deciding which tools do the best job! If they meet your needs use them.
- The Best Practices process challenges the way people currently learn - its essential that service agent participants apply this process in partnership with producer participants.
- Producer participants are generally open to new ways of learning often its the team that are closed to new ideas.
- Answers come with age, a new project won't have all the answers but it will enable lots of questions.
- New ideas require greater outcome based promotion.

The Bottom Line

With each new Best Beef experience, the more developed the project is becoming. The Best Beef project doesn't pretend to have all the answers, but it does set the direction of extension for the future, providing an extension relationship based on a partnership of interdependent learning.



**APEN Membership
Renewals OUT SOON.
Please pay promptly!**

A Vote of Confidence in APEN

The secretariat recently received this letter from Keith Jones. Thanks Keith for the feedback, and congratulations to all of those at the national level and in the Tasmanian Chapter for a job well done - and it is only the beginning!! Keith, I hope your retirement does give you more time to be involved in extension and that you enjoy being a mentor to young extension professionals in a new and rewarding way for yourself.

Dear Rosemary

May 1998

Fairly shortly I will be retiring from my profession in agriculture being nearly 65. Although not looking forward to retiring I suppose I must accept facts and be tipped over the cliff with the other brain-dead.

As a founding member of APEN in Tasmania I must congratulate the organisation in attaining a substantial voice in Australasian - Pacific agriculture. When Terry Makin first talked to us in 1994 I did wonder whether we could form a viable unit in Tasmania. From our inaugural meeting in July 1994 the organisation has gained strength.

We functioned as an Interim Committee for the first year. This consisted mainly of young women and older, some quite old, men. Much of the success in Tasmania has been the combination of youthful enthusiasm tempered with experience. It has not only been a success it has been a learning and enlightening experience and fun.

Many people may find it odd that a full-time research scientist should be so involved with an organisation such as APEN. My reply to this is that much research is seriously discounted as there is no obvious or effective method of communication to the user. Fitting scientists into extension delivery is not always easy, as many may prefer to hide in their laboratories away from practical agriculture. This is changing and has got to change more.

In particular electronic communication can alter transfer of information. But it was T.S. Elliott who issued the warning of confused interpretations:

***“Where is the life we have lost in living?
Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?
Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?”***

Now that my scientific career is nearing an end the only function that I will consider is my retirement is extension, both in Australia and overseas. In this I will rely heavily on what I have learnt in APEN in the four short years of it's life.

Thank you all for your Help for all the benefits a strong organisation has bestowed.

*Yours sincerely
Keith Jones
Senior Principal Scientist
Tasmanian Institute of Agricultural Research*

A Framework for Designing, Managing and Evaluating Extension Processes and Projects

Or How Six Months Can Seem Like A Lifetime

Janice Timms, *Research and Extension Unit, DPI, BRISBANE*
Richard Clark, *Rural Extension Centre, GATTON*

At the conference in November, we presented a framework for designing, managing and evaluating extension processes and projects. If we had been numbering each version of the framework as it has evolved since our initial concept in 1994, we would probably have been up to about Version 10 or 11 at the conference. At this point in time, 2.14pm, 23 April 1998 AD, it feels like we are probably up to about Version 55 and we are learning more about the practical use of the concept every day. And we're not just thinking about the framework - at least once a fortnight we are making, what we feel, are important adaptations and improvements to the framework and how we use it.

We hope this paper can provide some insight into our learnings and the ways we have changed the framework. If you are interested in discussing the concept further we would be pleased to hear from you. We have included our contact numbers in the by-line.

Key Points from the Presentation
(Remember, the presentation was about V.10 not V.55!)

These key points are a combination of explanations about the framework and explanations about some of our beliefs which influence why we developed the framework and how we use it:

- We believe the purpose of Extension is to enable meaningful change. For people to improve a situation requires that certain individuals (key practitioners) need to change their practices. To enable key practitioners to change their practices it can be necessary to change 7 key "people attributes", i.e. awareness, understanding,

skills, attitudes and aspirations, and "people enabling attributes", i.e. resources and technology.

- To put together good extension processes and projects we need to be clear about the purpose, be clear about appropriate guiding principles, and have a good understanding of the characteristics of the processes and techniques available.
- We have designed a framework that helps us to clarify our purpose, clarify appropriate principles, understand the characteristics of available techniques and therefore design better processes. The framework helps us to assess current processes and projects; and design, manage and evaluate new processes and projects.
- The framework has 10 elements: Context; Purpose; Objectives; Principles; Processes; Planning; Management; Evaluation; Advantages; and Disadvantages. For good process, it is important that there is "congruency" between these different elements. For example, the processes you choose must be relevant to the context of the situation and be able to achieve your purpose and fit well with your principles.
- To use the framework you go through 2 stages. In each stage you go through 6 steps. Stage 1 involves applying the 6 steps to the whole project. Stage 2 involves applying the 6 steps to component activities within the project such as processes.

The six steps are:

1. Assess the context;
2. Assess the purpose;
3. Identify principles;
4. Identify appropriate techniques;
5. Plan, manage and evaluate; and
6. Critical assessment.

Key Comments, Questions and Suggestions Made by the Audience

Our experiences at the conference re-confirmed our belief in the importance of sharing concepts and ideas. In general, we found participants at the conference were a very "giving" lot. If you were willing to share ideas, they were more than willing to listen to you and help you think and build on concepts. We value all the questions and suggestions made but have chosen to share just two specific contributions that we rate as real "gems".

- One suggestion was made by Vince Edmondston (DPI, Charleville) that the framework could be used as a diagnostic tool to check weak points in existing projects or processes and to work out ways to strengthen these weak areas. We think this is an excellent and very practical use for the framework.
- Another participant pointed out that while we talked about making sure there was "congruency" between the different elements of the framework (eg purpose, context, processes), one also needs to check for congruency between the different levels (eg project, process and other sub-project levels) assessed in the framework. This was one of those situations where once somebody actually mentioned this, it seemed so important and obvious to us that we couldn't believe we hadn't realised it before.

Key Learnings and Changes Since the Presentation

To try to synthesise the key learnings from what has been happening since the conference has

been quite a challenge. *For us, a learning isn't a learning unless it has led to some practice change.* Sometimes when you try to represent to others the practice changes that have resulted from key learnings the changes can look very small and very insignificant - but for the practitioner they can be hugely significant. So, first up we would like to show you the latest version of the framework table (see attached). It may look fairly similar to the version presented in the conference paper, but we would ask you to look for the changes because we have only made them if and when they were needed and really made a difference to the practical use of the Framework.

In addition to this updated table we have also developed a series of questions that help us and others to go through the framework process. We have not included these questions but you are welcome to contact us for a copy.

It has become apparent to us that it is important to keep separate the stages of deciding on the broad purpose/outcome for a process or project and deciding on the objectives. Both stages are important, but to be able to select relevant processes and techniques you need to be able to focus in on -

- *What will really make a difference? and*
- *How you will know it has made a difference?*

In other words you need to be able to specify what "people attributes" you are actually going to impact on so as to achieve the broader change outcome and these translate into the objectives.

It is important to emphasise the need to go through **all 10 steps** in the framework at least once. Many people acknowledge a tendency to jump to solutions or things to "do" without adequately considering the context, purpose, objectives and principles. It is great to see that the Framework can help people to consider these aspects because they form the basis of a well designed and effective project. But, one needs to make sure that the great work from the initial steps flows through to the selection of process and techniques, planning, management and evaluation. Seeing the whole project laid out in the Framework helps to check that it all fits together and that there aren't any major problems. This can really give you a boost of confidence as to the rigour, worth and potential of the project.

Since the conference we and others have used the framework for a

number of different purposes, but all of these purposes have one thing in common - they are about designing, managing and evaluating processes or projects that enable change of some kind. Just two examples are:

- We have used the framework to develop a course about ideas for improving change processes. And just to confuse the issue, not only did we use the framework to design the course (which itself was a change process), we also used the framework within the course as a mechanism for participants to plan a change process in which they were involved. So these people have been using the framework to design change processes for a whole range of different situations.
- We are currently using the framework as the basis for planning a new Masters program about the contribution of research to rural innovation and change.

Thanks for this new opportunity to share our thoughts. We look forward to more questions and suggestions.

(See Framework – Page 9) ▽

“Managing change – building knowledge and skills”
2nd Australasia Pacific Extension Conference, 18 to 21 November, 1997,
Albury Convention Centre, Albury

A limited number of the **Proceedings** of this conference are available through the APEN Secretariat. The cost is \$65 for members, \$70 for non-members, postage and handling included.

These two volumes hold the state of the art of extension in 1997

If you are not personally interested in purchasing these Proceedings, perhaps your library may be.

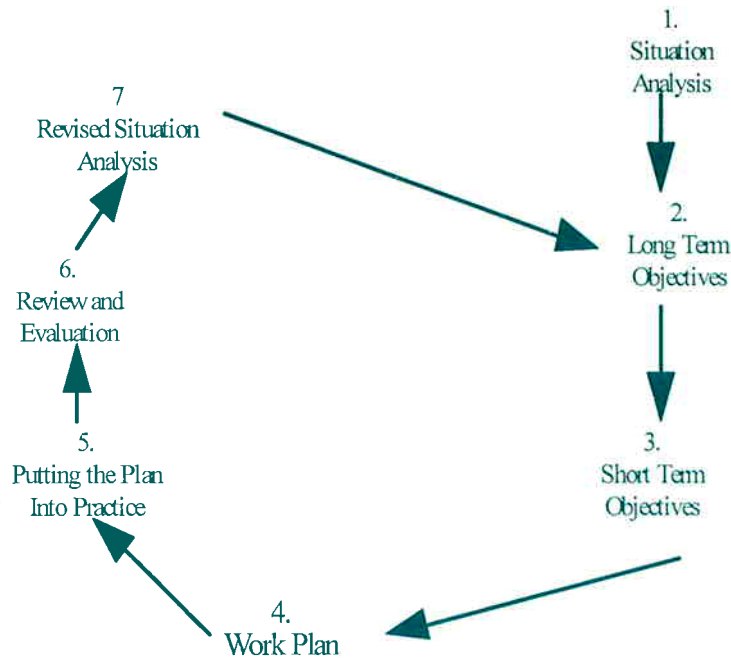
Walking the Talk

Rowland Holmes, DPI, Ayr



Background

Program planning is nothing new. As an Extension Officer, I encourage my growers to plan and record their activities. There are many ideas on how to apply it to a number of situations for example those of Mortiss (1993).



The Planning Process

But Now To Do It

In my role as the Mango Commodity Champion, I have recently been involved with the development of a RD&E plan. This also involved the formation of a Commodity Team to aid in its development and implementation. At the start of this process, I felt my knowledge of planning was limited to the dictionary definition. I wasn't sure how to develop a work plan that had transparency even though I had experience in helping farmers to develop plans. Then I "discovered" the Program

Planning process shown above for myself and used it in the project.

The importance of this "discovery" accentuates that my own learning style and preferences have to be taken into account. I am a person who likes to get on with things. I have always found it difficult to be actively involved in planning until it comes down to the "nuts and bolts". The planning process helped me to apply some structure to the mango RD&E planning which I was involved in.

This is highlighted by my thoughts from a recent planning meeting.

"Developing a mango RD&E plan was not easy because there were very few models to help guide our thought processes. This meant that it took a lot of time for very small gains. In the past I would have quietened down and withdrawn from the conversation, resulting in my unacceptance of others views."