



EXTENSIONNET

May - July
2000

Vol. 8 No. 1

Newsletter of the Australasia-Pacific Extension Network (Inc)

A0029919P

Contact: 61 2 6024 5349

Australia Post approved PP347637000014

Self-managing groups - what does it take?

by: Ruth Nettle, ILFR, University of Melbourne, and VCG Ltd.*, Peter Van Beek, SyTREC Pty, Ltd.**, Sandra Jefford, GippsDairy***



Ruth Nettle

*r.nettle@pgrad.unimelb.edu.au, and "The Virtual Consulting Group Pty Ltd" (www.virtualgroup.com.au)

**sytrece@gil.com.au

***GippsDairy: A Regional Development Program for the Gippsland dairy industry: s.jefford@landfood.unimelb.edu.au

INTRODUCTION

The use of groups in agricultural extension has been well established. Parallel to moving from individual contact to working with groups was a movement from giving advice - 'telling farmers how to do something new or better' - to encouraging them to understand the reasons for change and discover some solutions for themselves. The emphasis in operating styles (especially in groups) has been said to have changed from teaching to adult learning. This was assumed to require facilitated groups. Group facilitation has thus become 'a big industry' within extension. Yet there is a tendency for farmer groups to be highly

dependent on external input for their funding, content, management and organisation. Researchers and practitioners are interested in investigating the factors that encourage groups to become more self-managing. This article reports on one such project within the Victorian dairy industry.

The Victorian Dairy industry through GippsDairy*** commissioned a project to VCG Pty Ltd* to design and test a process aimed at increasing the capacity of dairy farmers to access, gather, interpret and apply information to their own situation through a "self-managing" group. The topic, content and management of the group was to be driven by group participants (dairy farmers), with the assistance of an administrator/coach.

(Continued on page 3)

Conference: Achieving change through improved knowledge systems - Palmerston North, New Zealand, 16-17 August 2000.

This conference was designed for professionals involved in technology transfer, innovation, improvement, change management, and compliance in the New Zealand land-based industries.

The conference provided an opportunity for the exchange of ideas between practitioners and researchers on a range of approaches to achieving change.

Presenters from a range of New Zealand and Australian organisations outlined

their experiences of coping with change, mainly through the use of case studies. The conference also provided an opportunity to introduce APEN to New Zealanders working in the field of achieving change.

Conference proceedings will be available for \$45 (incl. gst & P&P). For details contact John Stantiall: j.d.stantiall@massey.ac.nz Massey

IN THIS ISSUE

From the Chair p2

Budgeting Extension into the Program

APEN Forum p5

and ..The Doors to Peoples Minds

Stuart Morriss and others p6

Negotiating Environmental and Production Outcomes in Practice

Fionnuala Frostp10

Engaging Scientists in Community Action Programs

Coming events p12

APEN Contacts

APEN is pleased to acknowledge the support of:



Natural Resources and Environment

AGRICULTURE
RESOURCES
CONSERVATION
LAND MANAGEMENT



DAIRY RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

FROM THE CHAIR

Jane Fisher

APEN President

e-mail: Jane.Fisher@nre.vic.gov.au



Budgeting Extension into the Program

Reflecting on issues that confront people involved in extension is fascinating. One of the hot topics at the moment seems to be **developing a culture that allows for budgeting and planning for extension when designing research programs.**

At the Institute for Horticultural Development, we are engaged in working through the issues of effectively planning for extension and evaluation when submitting research proposals. The process is fascinating, and as challenging as working with a grower group.

It has posed some interesting questions: Are research scientists the most conservative of people? Which tools in the extension tool box are most suitable for convincing this highly educated and intelligent audience to change the way they think about research and extension? It has been easier to find the positives of adoption for growers than for scientists - "you will make more money" is usually the best. Research scientists have reacted to our ideas of

incorporating extension into research proposal with comments like "It is more work, and I don't have time for that".

One way around the research-extension conundrum is to develop a recognition of extension as a profession. Perhaps we need to change the way we refer to ourselves - instead of "research scientist" and "extension officer", why not use "scientist - extension" and "scientist - research"? Other steps along the professional super-highway include **publishing the results of extension programs, participating in conferences and forums about extension.**

Which of you have planned and evaluated your extension programs, and discussed them in an open forum - in house, at an APEN forum, or in a journal? Have you nominated yourself or a colleague for the APEN Extension Award? Have you submitted an abstract for the posters at the "Creating a Climate for Change Forum"? Go on, it's easy - **just identify when you are going to do it, and go for it.**

FROM THE EDITOR: MARK PAINE



Welcome to the new format ExtensionNet! (Our plan however is for 8 pages every two months!). In this issue we have a number of articles that share a theme dealing with the special role performed by extension to cross professional boundaries.

Ruth Nettle discusses a group process that has set about the task of learning based on the principles of self empowerment. Ruth and **Peter van Beek** have tested the

idea that farmers are fully capable of mobilising their own knowledge and skills to form interest specific learning groups that are completely autonomous and that *invite* professional extension agents to their groups rather than *depend* on these professionals for the continuity of the group.

Stuart Morriss discusses experiences with groups in New Zealand that have a membership of Natural Resource Management, Farm Production, Science and Policy professionals. He describes an innovative approach to making each type of profession aware of their unique roles and their interdependences as they work on a common problem.

Fionnuala Frost raises the issue of knowledge systems and social learning in her article. Challenges have emerged from the areas of landscape and natural resource management that have accentuated the need for a more effective alignment between science and community action. This need for alignment raises some fairly fundamental questions about what we consider reliable knowledge (and what we mean by knowledge).

Peter Van Beek provides us with a metaphor for improving our ability to empathise and appreciating the understanding and experience of others with whom we work. His brief article is a salient reminder that as professionals with a particular interest in

learning and knowledge management we need to continually appraise our own attitudes to learning and change.

I hope you derive as much inspiration and pride in your profession as I have received while editing this issue - ours is a highly innovative discipline!

(As an editorial committee we are continually seeking feedback and suggestions for improvement, so please send me any comments, now matter how brief, and indicate whether you want your comments published).

m.paine@landfood.unimelb.edu.au

Self-managing groups - what does it take? *Continued from*

Page 1

PROJECT PROCESSES

The project consisted of *Inner circle* activities involving two farmer-groups, and *Outer circle* activities, involving the steering committee and others in setting up the project, assessing the worth of the project, and continuing beyond the duration of this project.

Inner circle activities

From April to June, 1999 two groups of 8 farmers came together (through personal contact with the steering committee and advertisements in local papers) in two specific-interest learning groups (Building a New Milk Harvesting System, Young Farmers Futures). External facilitation was provided to start the groups, train the farmers in functioning as learning groups, and to some degree *coach* them.

In designing the research process an analysis of some of the reasons behind current group dependence on facilitators was needed. In general it was determined that facilitators use but do not share with participants a set of skills in the areas of: learning processes, group processes and information processes. As part of the pilot some skills were acquired by group members in order for them to not only develop their capacity as learners, but also enable them to take control of group processes. Training to acquire these skills involved an individual learning style assessment, skills in using knowledge networks, asking questions and interviewing people, problem solving tools (McIntosh, 1997), meeting procedures and learning in groups. From the outset, the role of the coach was to focus on transferring skills in group and learning processes while avoiding providing technical input or directing the group towards particular outcomes.

Coaching also involved helping the group to determine and meet their agenda, and provide administrative support. The groups existed to complete defined tasks within a limited time, and both groups met four times.

Group members carried out a diversity of tasks between meetings and reported their findings at subsequent meetings.

Participants took over the running of the group as agreed at the first meeting and the role of the coach became one of providing administrative support, guidance and challenges to widen their thinking - rather than agenda setting, group control or organisation.

Both groups accepted some basic rules:

- The responsibility for success and failure of the group rested with the group, not the coach;
- The responsibility for all group processes were to be shared, even though they appointed a chair for the day; and
- All participants were to be encouraged to speak and contribute, and be given a 'fair slice' of the time available.

Changes in role from facilitator to coach

By the second meeting, the farmers had "warmed" to the idea of "controlling their own outcomes". Notes from my learning journal: "*I sensed a real 'baton change' - of input, control, ideas, planning - from me to them. I was part of the group, the group asked me for guidance if they got stuck on 'where to from here', but otherwise - I had to ask if I could add something.*"

The facilitator is a learning coach: That is, they help the learning process in any way by challenging, questioning, clarifying how the group is going according to their goals, have they sought out and used the knowledge system fully? Have they challenged their own assumptions about the topic? Have they sought out opposing views have they reflected on their actions? The way this is done is by clarification of the facilitators role by the group in question. The learning coach doesn't organise events or speakers or determine the direction the group should go in, or draw conclusions.

(Continued Page 4)

From the APEN Secretariat

Membership Renewals

There has been a good response to the first invoice for subscription renewals. A reminder invoice will go out early in September to those who have not yet paid.

Remember, the amount that goes to each Chapter from membership subscriptions will be based on the number of financial members at 31st October 2000.

At present there are 484 on the membership database, 185 are financial - so keep those subscriptions coming in folks!

Chapter Round Ups

Unfortunately we did not have any information for this ExtensionNet about activities in and around the Chapters. In the future issues of ExtensionNet we would like to include **more "People Information"**, so please let us know any tit-bits you would like to share - new job, award received, a good joke etc. I will be emailing the Chapter Contacts every couple of months to remind them to send the information in - so either go through your Chapter Contact, or email me direct on rcurrie@albury.net.au

APEN 2000 National Forum

Keep the **25th and 26th October 2000** free for this important event at the Melbourne Exhibition and Convention Centre. Registration details are within this newsletter.

3rd Australia Pacific Extension Conference

Monday 10th to Wednesday 12th September 2001. The conference is to be held at Coolumb on the Sunshine Coast in Queensland. The steering committee is in the process of firming details for the theme and streams for papers etc. We'll keep you posted with more information.

(Continued from page 3)

Farmer comments during their involvement included:

"We set each other tasks - each one was accountable."

"You must come with a common goal, there must be a specific topic of 'burning need'."

"What makes it successful is to achieve a result."

"Help is needed in administration - and to coordinate, but the group must be controlled / organised by farmers."

At the concluding meeting both Ruth Nettle and Peter Van Beek attended as part of the internal evaluation for the project. At this meeting participants reported their findings (deciding to make these available for publication), commented on the processes used, documented changes in their own information gathering practices, and prepared an evaluation report of their project for presentation to the GippsDairy Skills subcommittee.

Outer circle activities

These consisted of two half-day workshops with the GippsDairy steering committee, representatives from both learning groups, and from the Victorian Department of Natural Resources and Environment (DNRE).

External Evaluation

Those who participated as part of the farmer groups said that the project achieved its purpose of determining if self-organised groups were a viable option to current group work in the region. All participants considered the group learning skills they either acquired (or recognised) were being applied in a wide range of situations.

Learning groups build on an inherent capacity of participants in the local community to self organise and realise their opportunities for change. The group exists to make progress on specifically

defined tasks and not for the continuity of the group. Devolution of the group is a critical stage in the life cycle. Participants reiterated the need for groups to be "short, sharp, focussed on a job of high need to everyone involved". More focus is provided early in the life of the group when one or more participants are currently working on an actual case (e.g. building of a farm dairy). Several farmers referred to the networking benefits of the approach. Networking means connecting farmers, professionals and others who were previously unaware of the skills and experiences that each possessed in relation to the task area. This is a critical role for GippsDairy to co-ordinate.

GippsDairy believed that this alternative model to the current style of farmer groups offered them an opportunity to improve the development of human resources in the region, and build on their research and development investment. This development is accompanied with a risk. After all, in the highly pragmatic world of farming, participants in many traditional groups often do no more than judge which bits of information provided by technical specialists are relevant to their needs. It is difficult to communicate the concepts used in learning groups that underpin the development of self organisation and promote reflection on routine activities. GippsDairy intends to continue the development and use of learning groups because they feel these groups create a capacity for change in the region, they are focussed on actions towards goal attainment (ie purposeful), and they encourage more effective use of professionals (knowledge system networks) (Van Beek, 1992).

CONCLUSIONS

Interest-specific and self-managing farmer learning fits a defined need in agricultural extension. This project has demonstrated that:

a) groups can be brought to a high degree of self management with minimal training and input;

b) participants value the experience enough to want to initiate and use such groups when appropriate; and

c) self-managing groups thus have a place in a continuum of group management styles and purposes.

Completely self-organising groups were never piloted in this project - the challenge becomes "how do you adopt a hands-off approach?" This will be followed up through the second phase of the learning group development.

Paolo Freire (1974) believed the role of teachers is to stimulate the learning process rather than just teach facts. He suggested that the teacher "must break down the barrier between teacher and taught", and should start from where the learners are - encouraging learning and exploration from the learners' experiences - such is the place and role of self-managing farmer learning groups.

POSTSCRIPT

Since the pilot project was completed, funding has been secured for the second phase - the training of community learning coaches and assistance in the establishment of interest-specific learning groups based on farmer defined topics. As at the beginning of July, eleven learning coaches have been trained and are ready to begin supporting farmer groups. These coaches expect to be involved with 22 groups over the next six months. For more information contact Sandra Jefford at GippsDairy.***

REFERENCES

- Freire, P. (1974). **Extension or communication.** In: *Education for critical consciousness.* Sheed and Ward, London.
- McIntosh, F. (1997). **Working towards group self reliance,** Training Series QE 97002 Brisbane, Queensland Department of Primary Industries.
- Van Beek, P. G. H. (1992). Agricultural Knowledge Systems, *Agricultural Science*, 5 (5), pp 22-25.



APEN NATIONAL FORUM

Creating a Climate for Change: Extension in Australasia

The 2000 APEN National Forum *Creating a Climate for Change: Extension in Australasia* will be held on 26th and 27th October 2000 at the Melbourne Convention Centre, Victoria, Australia.

Highlights of the Forum will include:

- A range of guest speakers from across the geographic spectrum, featuring Dr. Elske Van de Fliert from the International Potato Center in Bogor, Indonesia.

- Extension funding bodies panel discussions including Andrew Campbell, Land & Water Research Development Corporation and Dr. Roslyn Prinsley, Rural Industry Research Development Corporation and Les Baxter, Horticultural Research Development Corporation.

- A biennial award to a young extension professional.

- A prize for posters related to issues in extension, policy, evaluation, rural sociology and community development.

- An optional two day trip to the Western District, Victoria following the Forum.

Through its theme, *Creating a Climate for Change*, the forum will recognise the untold extension possibilities awaiting us in the global village of the 21st century.

The Forum will provide an opportunity for the display and discussion of existing and 'state of the art' extension practices through both geographic and industry level up-date sessions. As such it offers an opportunity for government agencies, corporations, private industry and service providers to create a mutual platform of understanding and information.

Attending the Forum will be extension professionals and related disciplines involved in the daily challenge of connecting research and practice, using information and creating change in community knowledge, attitudes and behaviour. The National APEN President, Ms Jane Fisher, expects more than 150 people at the Forum to discuss extension in Australia and the Pacific.

Ms Fisher said "The Forum *Creating a Climate for Change* will explore planning, evaluation and the outcomes expected from extension programs and challenge participants to think about change in extension methodology".

For more information and registration details please contact the APEN Secretariat Rosemary Currie 02 6024 5349 or visit the APEN website:

<http://life.csu.edu.au/apen/>

The Doors to People's Minds Open Outwards

By Peter Van Beek,
SyTREC@gil.com.au

I believe that images we carry in our heads are important. Images trigger comparisons and words, and words guide actions and choices. At the 1999 APEN Forum in Perth, I heard many remarks that made me shudder: 'Getting people to change their minds', 'Making them uncomfortable enough to do so', 'Giving them Information', 'Using better presentations to get information through', 'Packaging, marketing, promoting it better', 'Targeting it better', 'Using more forceful methods'.

My question to you is: 'What image do you see in your own mind when you hear or use the words 'People's Minds'? Do you see a full bottle or an empty one, a blank whiteboard on which you can write your messages, a box with dials for you to change settings, a software disc you can overwrite, a wide eyed person waiting for 'Manna from heaven'? I am fair dinkum, what is your image? If you have none, just listen for a moment to your own words and hear what they tell you about your image.

My image of 'People's Minds' is of castles with fortified doors, guarded to keep unwanted intruders out. The doors to these castles open outwards. Trying to batter them in with 'Information' only forces them shut more tightly, and the doors wear the scars of many such efforts.

In my image, the way into these castles is through genuine questions, posed to the guardians with humility and respect. Most guardians will then open the doors and come out to answer my questions. Once satisfied

that I respect them and understand what they mean, they normally invite me into their castle by asking me questions in return.

Those quotes at the APEN Forum came from men and women, including some facilitators. To me, they imply conquests, a sense of superiority, and the use of aggressive tools. I wondered how many extension projects are really about improved battering rams, however they were disguised. And if you and I were to bet on their effectiveness against the battle-hardened veterans guarding of the doors, what odds that the new battering rams will fail, just as the old ones did?

My experience is that the two most powerful extension tools are humility and questions, genuine ones! What is more, I am increasingly convinced from listening to hundreds of farmers during the last five years, that the guardians of the doors are very well connected. When a message obtained from me is relevant, timely and worthwhile, it spreads faster than I can move. When I fail to honour my own beliefs and try to ram a message home, news about me also spreads fast. And it is not good news, not for me anyway! I shuddered at the Forum when thinking about how many dollars, but more importantly how many opportunities, we are wasting by not realising the images we use.

So what images do you see when you hear or use the words 'People's Minds' and 'Information'? And what are the consequences of those images for the words you use and the actions you choose?

THE AUTHORS

Stuart Morriss¹, Terry
Parminter², Mark Paine³, Gavin
Sheath², Roger Wilkinson⁴



Negotiating Environmental and Production Outcomes In Practice

INTRODUCTION

In the subject domain of political science, policy agents seek to achieve policy outcomes by influencing the behaviour of people with a range of policy instruments (MAF, 1996). In the subject domain of extension science, extension agents often seek to achieve particular industry outcomes with a range of extension tools. In both subject domains, understanding the motives, incentives and relative importance of factors influencing human behaviour, and those factors influencing individual and community change, while fundamental, is sometimes overlooked.

The purpose of this paper is to draw attention to work underway in New Zealand at this interface of extension science and political science. Its aim is to develop improved technological learning processes that will be effective in managing change in a range of policy, industry and business contexts. Work discussed in this paper focuses on the subject domain of sustainable land management, but is also underway in other areas of technological learning. Research is considering both individual competency and institutional contributions to technological learning and change.

POLICY CONTEXT IN NEW ZEALAND

New Zealand's political economy is characterised by a single tier parliamentary system, public sector agencies set up around sector-based portfolios, and local government dealing with regional and territorial (district and city) issues. In both agricultural and environmental areas, policy processes involving discussion documents, proposed policies, submissions, hearings and appeals through the courts are familiar to us. But whether these processes are leading to effective policy, that is policy that will deliver sustainable outcomes in economic, social as well as environmental terms, has been questioned, particularly by land managers.

More often than not, policy development processes are characterised by confrontation. In fact, New Zealand's political economy is constructed in such a way as to encourage it. In resource management policy, confrontation often develops between sector groups that purport to represent the interests of their stakeholders. While land managers have both agricultural production and environmental protection interests, confrontation is often most prevalent between the farming and environmental lobby.

Confrontation also develops between policy agencies. New Zealand's central government bureaucracy is constructed with portfolio-based departments. Separate departments have responsibility for agriculture and forestry, economic development, research science and technology, the environment, and for conservation. They often have competing interests in the management of land, whereas a land manager will have interests that span all these areas.

Achieving sustainable management of land resources is complex, involves a multiplicity of disciplines, and requires that they be integrated in practice. Clearly, policy for sustainable land management, and the actions of policy agencies, should support this. But while the structure of policy institutions, and the nature of their relationships and responsibilities, can be a constraint to this occurring, structural solutions can have their own problems (Hawke, 1988). Furthermore, they can only ever address inter-government agency issues. They do nothing for those structural impediments that involve non-government agencies and organisations (or lack of them) that are also a key part of the policy system. The alternative being suggested with this work is to address problems caused by structure with process solutions.

1 Massey University,
PALMERSTON NORTH, NEW
ZEALAND

2 AgResearch, HAMILTON,
NEW ZEALAND

3 The University of Mel-
bourne, Melbourne, AUSTRALIA

4 Landcare Research,
CHRISTCHURCH, NEW ZEA-
LAND

Improving Technological Learning and Policy Processes

A research project was undertaken with the dairy industry in the Manawatu and Waikato regions of New Zealand during 1998/99 (Parminter *et al*, 1999). The project involved a case study looking at factors influencing dairy farmers' use of farm dairy effluent management practices. Within the project, methods for negotiated environmental and production outcomes using an organisational change model were evaluated. Both qualitative and quantitative techniques were used.

The organisational model used in the project was the Practice Interplay model. In this model, the term "practice" is used in a specialised sense to describe a group of people with a similar way of doing things (Gremmen 1993).

These behaviours are underpinned by a similar set of values, ethics, and ways of communicating that determine competency. Often the distinguishing features of each practice are taken for granted by the practitioners. They only become apparent when conflicts arise between practices, or when a new entrant to a practice has to discover them in order to become accepted as being "one of us" (Parminter, *et al*, 2000).

The value of Practice Theory, when applied in the policy context, is that it provides a way of reconsidering the structure of the policy system and the way in which participants in the policy process work together. Returning to Stone's definition of public policy, being communities trying to achieve things as communities, and the problem of community

identification, this model enables the community to be clustered in a completely different way to that which is the norm in policy development processes. It enables recognition that within-organisational differences in preferred policy positions can be greater than that between like-minded individuals in different organisations. In policy organisations this can occur, for example, between disciplinary groups such as economists and scientists, and those in head office and those in the regions.

To illustrate how it differs from the norm, an example using a simplistic situation where a policy system comprising only two clearly defined organisations is presented in Figures 1 and 2. The traditional policy process would have the two parties coming together, bringing their respective (internally agreed) policy positions with them, and through some form of negotiation process, get to a policy decision (Figure 1). Applying the alternate model would have the views of individuals from both organisations, but practitioners of the same Practice (e.g. policy analysis, science, and advisory), coming together with those of the other practices, and again through a negotiation, getting to a policy decision (Figure 2).

In both cases, the policy development process, involves the interaction, or interplay, of the practices involved. In the traditional model of policy development, these groupings are usually lobby groups representing sector interests (farming, environment, recreation) and policy agencies (sector portfolio-based government departments). As indicated earlier, their interplay in the policy process is often confrontational.

Figure 1: Traditional Institutional-based Policy Development Process

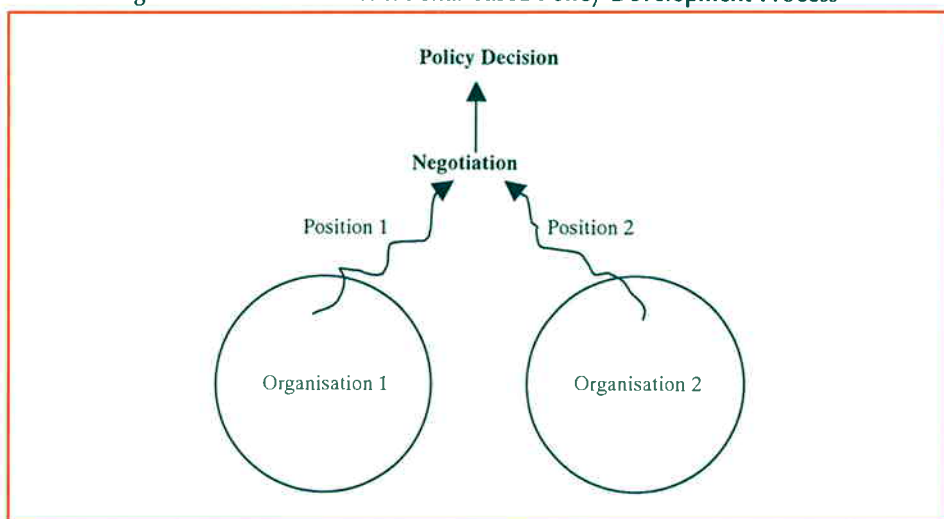


Figure 2: Practice-based Policy Development Process

