

## CHAPTER 7

# CASE EVALUATION OF THE MSC MODEL AS IMPLEMENTED ACROSS THE TARGET 10 PROJECT

In this chapter the case evaluation is presented, comprising a description of the Target 10 Project and the implementation of a 12-month trial of the Most Significant Change model. The output of each step of the process is described and examples are provided to illustrate the points made. The output included 134 stories and feedback from the review of the stories during 15 project meetings. The output also included an analysis of the 134 stories, which formed part of the process itself. The problems and issues that arose while implementing the model are discussed and include issues concerned with competition, time, culture and ethics.

### 7.1 Introduction

The previous chapters established the need for new approaches for evaluating extension projects in Victoria, and that forms of PM&E practised in overseas development may offer promising approaches for adoption in Australia. Davies' (1996) Most Significant Change model (MSC), in particular, appears to have potential to meet these challenges. In this chapter the 12-month implementation of the MSC model across the Target 10 Dairy Extension Project is described. This case evaluation was conducted for two reasons: firstly to investigate the potential of the MSC model to bring about extension projects that can better meet needs; secondly, to determine what modifications are needed to adapt this approach to suit the context of Australian extension projects.

The chapter begins with a description of the Target 10 Dairy Extension Project and the historical background to the project. I then explain the process used in introducing the MSC model to the project and facilitating its implementation. I draw attention to the ways in which the application deviated from that of Davies, and the reasons for these modifications. The output of each step of the

process is described and examples are provided to illustrate the points made. Lastly, I discuss some of the problems that occurred during implementation concerning competition, time, issues of culture and ethics. In Chapters 8 and 9, an evaluation of the MSC model is described. This meta-evaluation attempts to determine the effectiveness of MSC model and its ability to address the challenges associated with the evaluation of the new genre of agricultural extension projects in Australia.

## **7.2 Description of the Project**

The Target 10 Project is one of the most established of the new genre of ‘mega’ projects that operate under the purchaser-provider model for publicly-funded extension in Victoria. It is largely outcome focused and has a productivity goal of increasing pasture utilisation by 10% (hence the name Target 10). It has a complex structure, and is funded by various federal, state and industry sources, as well as receiving money indirectly from levies on the sale of milk. It is seen by some as an example of how the mega-project structure can succeed. For example, the director of the Agriculture Division in NRE, Victoria pointed out that the ‘success of Target 10 was the precursor to the move to mega-projects’ (Kefford, B. pers. comm., 1999). Other industries are now adopting similar models.

### **Aim of Target 10 Project**

The Target 10 Dairy Extension Project was initiated in 1992, with the aim of enhancing the viability of the dairy industry through programs that profitably increase consumption of pasture by cows. It operates across four regions of the State of Victoria in Australia. In 1996 the project focus was broadened to include other areas that were of high priority to the industry. Information about these areas (grazing management, business, dairy cow nutrition, soils and fertilisers and natural resource management) is extended to farmers through courses, discussion groups, newsletters, comparative analysis, field days, focus farms and demonstrations and other media. Target 10 is a collaborative industry project that aims to deliver a customer-focused change program in a coordinated and timely manner and with community ownership. The project has a documented conceptual framework for the delivery of the project components (see Figure 13).



*Figure 1 The service delivery model of the Target 10 Dairy Extension Project (Boomsma et. al., 1996)*

Figure 13 depicts individuals involved in the project participating in a learning process, surrounded by a peer group and a community supportive of change. The model recognises that, in the adoption process, the creation of the environment for change is as important as providing the technical information upon which the change is based (Boomsma et al., 1996). The framework involves interaction at three levels:

- At a community level, the project provides opportunities for stakeholders to participate in the development, organisation, and delivery of project elements, as well as in communication strategies and collaborative alliances at state and regional levels.
- At a farmer peer group level, the project provides opportunities for creating awareness of the issues being addressed, together with structured opportunities for peer group support and for new learning.

- At an individual farmer level, the project provides opportunities to adapt management practices to suit individual circumstances by integrating management changes into the whole farm business and providing ongoing reinforcement for practice change.

The model represents a move away from the notion of extension being simply a technology transfer activity, to one of industry development involving the management of both the technical information and the participatory environment of the project. This movement is characteristic of many newer extension projects in general and is discussed in Section 2.3. An internal Target 10 report stated that:

Combining educational components (courses) with on-farm adoption (discussion groups and visits), follow-up (newsletters and evaluation) provides a potentially greater impact than any of these activities in isolation or partial combination (DRDC, 1994).

## **Historical development of the Target 10 Project**

Target 10 was originally conceived as a regional project, focusing on the benefits to dairy farmers of maximising the utilisation of pasture grown on their farms. In 1990 Agriculture Victoria prepared a submission to the DRDC to establish a statewide extension project based on grazing management. In 1991 a meeting of industry representatives supported the concept and established an executive committee to guide the implementation of the project. This meeting comprised representatives of Agriculture Victoria, milk manufacturers, and processors, Victoria College of Agriculture and Horticulture, Herd Improvement Organisation of Victoria, United Dairy Farmers of Victoria and farm management consultants. In 1992 agreement on resourcing was reached between the key financial backers, Agriculture Victoria and DRDC, and the project was initiated (Boomsma et al., 1996).

It was anticipated that increases in production and productivity worth \$50 million a year after five years would flow to farmers and hence to the state economy and all sectors of the dairy industry as a result of the project (Boomsma et al., 1996). In the 1980s, farm gate prices for manufacturing milk had been static in real terms and the manufacturing sector had entered a period of declining export prices. Domestic support for the manufacturing milk process was expected to decrease further as the sector continued to experience increased exposure to fluctuations in the international market place. Industry agreed that the best opportunity to increase farm profitability was through

improved consumption of pasture. O'Brien and Hepworth (1993) showed that pasture consumption could be substantially improved through improved management practices.

The project that evolved proposed to extend results of pasture research and farmer experience in grazing management. The aim was to achieve a substantial improvement in pasture consumption and it was estimated that a 10% increase in pasture consumption on a typical farm could increase gross returns in the order of \$16,000 (Boomsma et al, 1996).

## **Project architecture and complexity**

The organisational structure under which the Target 10 Project operates is complex. The project has a 'mega-project' structure, considerable collaboration and co-delivery of programs, and is operating under the new environment of the purchaser-provider model. It is also a large project with over 50 staff and an annual budget of over \$1,000,000. Several purchasers and co-providers interact in a dynamic project environment (McDonald and Kefford, 1998).

## **Farmer ownership**

From the onset, emphasis was placed on ownership of the project by the dairy farmers that it was designed to benefit. An internal Target 10 report states that:

Target 10 was developed as a regionalised project, bringing the development, management, and implementation and evaluation processes closer to farmers through regional committees (Boomsma et al, 1996).

From the beginning it was envisaged that evaluation procedures would be regionalised and involve farmers as much as possible.

Marsh and Panel (1997) point out that that a uniquely Australian situation exists in the Research and Development Corporations: whereby Australian farmers contribute through industry-levied funding to agricultural research, development and extension, and so have expectations of a degree of control. The co-funding of the Target 10 Project by the DRDC with the Agriculture Division of NRE was designed to encourage farmer participation.

## Outcome focus

Critics of the Target 10 extension project suggest that it is overly focused on production at the expense of community, environmental, and social issues (e.g. Beilin, 1998). An external review of the project in 1998 recommended that it become more 'learner-focused' (The Virtual Consulting Group, 1999). As described in Section 3.3, the Target 10 Project combines seemingly contradictory aspects of both 'outcome-focus' and 'learner-focused extension'. As well as having a mandate to increase production, it attempts to be highly participatory in planning, delivery, and evaluation.

## The contract to implement the MSC process within the Target 10 Project

Between May 1998 and May 1999 I introduced the Target 10 Dairy Extension staff to the MSC process, which was then implemented, as far as I know, for the first time in Australia. The MSC model became referred to as the 'Story Approach' by project stakeholders. Through implementation of this approach the project hoped to fulfil two purposes:

- to supplement other evaluation approaches by collecting qualitative data about the impact of the project as a whole
- to promote organisational learning within the project team and between the myriad of stakeholders.

The audience of the evaluation comprised project staff, purchasers and committee members (who represented farmer clients and other collaborators from the university and dairy industry).

Since its inception in 1992, Target 10 had been experimenting with evaluation. Around 1992 an evaluation consultant introduced the project team to Bennett's Hierarchy of (Bennett, 1975). A specialist in evaluation was appointed to the project team who had a background in marketing and as a result considerable work was done on developing evaluation plans at the program level. However, in 1997 the project management still felt that certain areas of evaluation needed to be developed. Firstly, they wished to learn how to evaluate the overall non-economic impact of the various initiatives and activities, ie. *was Target 10 more than the sum of its parts?* They sought to understand the unexpected impacts. Messages and questions of help were placed on Evaltalk<sup>1</sup> and

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<sup>1</sup> EVALTALK' is an international e-mail discussion group that is affiliated with the American Evaluation Association and has over 1,500 subscribers.

considerable research was done. Many evaluation experts seemed to come up with different answers, but non-of these answers seemed appropriate (McDonald, B. pers. comm., 1996).

Secondly, the project funders and stakeholders alike wanted more information about the impact that the program was having on individual farmers' lives. In 1992 extensive benefit-cost analysis had been completed and individual programs had been evaluated against their objectives. However, in 1998 the project manager informed me that there was still a feeling that some of the project impact and outcomes were not being captured. He explained that when the economic analysis came back with a figure of \$62 million net economic benefit to the dairy industry (Appleyard, 1996a) a typical stakeholder response was 'well that's great, but I want to know who has got that money, and what effect this is having!'

Around about the same time, I was searching for an extension project with which to carry out a case study. I was interested in the Target 10 Project, as it was a well-established mega-project that already had culture of evaluation. After discussing the evaluation needs of the project with the management I proposed to trial Davies' approach to participatory monitoring and evaluation (PM&E). The Project Manager gave provisional agreement on the condition that all four regional committee meetings and the state executive committee endorse the approach. I attended all these committee meetings over the next three months, presented the approach, and gained the endorsement from all the committees. In May 1998 an agreement was made that the MSC model would be implemented across the whole Target 10 Project for a period of 12 months.

The MSC process was to be an internal, formative process of monitoring and evaluation. It formed one part on an overall evaluation strategy that included other forms of evaluation. The Target 10 Project is conducting evaluation in the following five areas:

- internally conducted evaluation of the 'logic' of the five core programs using Bennett's Hierarchy and subsequent refinement of the valued outcomes for each core program
- internally conducted evaluation of each of the five core programs against valued outcomes
- externally conducted economic impact analysis of the whole project
- internally conducted reporting against predetermined milestones
- internally conducted evaluation of the overall non-economic impact of the project.

This MSC process addressed only the evaluation of overall non-economic impact of the project.

While the idea of implementing the MSC process was mandated by the project management, the project funders had previously stipulated that this sort of evaluation should occur. Internal documents from the Agriculture Division's purchasing group suggest that formative evaluation occur mainly under the proviso of continuous improvement and assessment of unanticipated outcomes (NRE, 1997).

## 7.3 Implementation of the Approach

Chapter 5 provides a description of the MSC model according to Davies (1996). While parts of the MSC model remained unchanged, the implementation in this case evaluation did involve some modification of the process to fit the context of the Target 10 Project. However, Davies (1996) main three steps remained central in the process:

- establish domains of change
- set in place a process to collect and review stories of change within the organisational hierarchy
- hold an annual round table meeting with the project funders.

In the Target 10 case, three additional steps were added. Firstly, as staff were unsure of the sort of stories required, an additional process referred to as the 'taste test' was developed prior to establishing the domains of change. Secondly, for the approach to evolve to meet the regional requirements a reference group was established consisting of myself and the 'regional champions'. Thirdly, the Target 10 management also requested a secondary analysis of the stories *en masse*, which appears to be absent from the Davies case in Bangladesh. Thus a final step was added which involved a secondary analysis of the stories. The resulting steps were:

1. 'Taste test' and become familiar with the approach.
2. Establish four domains of change.
3. Establish a learning set, that includes 'champions' from each region.
4. Set in place a process to collect and review stories of change within the organisational hierarchy.
5. Hold an annual round table meeting for the project funders to review the stories.
6. Conduct a secondary analysis of the stories *en masse*.

In the following sections, each of the above steps, as implemented in case evaluation, are described.

I describe how the process differed from the Bangladesh case, including the output at each stage and provide some examples of the output to illustrate the main points.

## **Step 1 - 'Taste testing' the process**

After the Target 10 regional committees had endorsed the trial, I had the task of catalysing the implementation of the process. Davies (1996) provides no concrete guidance on how the approach should be initiated nor gives detail as to how the first stories were collected. He explains that MSC model was built upon previous systems of monitoring, and developed in consultation with many of the project staff. In the Target 10 Project there was no history of monitoring or participatory evaluation, although considerable evaluation work had been completed. Part of Davies lack of prescription can be explained by the ethos of the approach. He suggests that the MSC process should evolve organically to meet the needs of the organisation, and thus deliberately avoids providing a normative framework (Davies, R., J. pers. comm., 1999).

During early attempts to initiate the process, it became apparent that staff and committee members were not sure what sort of stories were required and asked for guidance on the length of the story, the subject matter and the form it should take. In line with the evolutionary ethos of the approach, I felt that the project stakeholders themselves should determine these things. Staff were understandably nervous about putting pen to paper with so little guidance, and my initial attempts to collect stories failed. Staff explained to me that they had no idea what was expected, and thus were reluctant to attempt relating a story. On the recommendation of several staff, I developed a proforma (see Figure 14) to help collect the stories, and then held a pre-trial workshop in which we 'taste tested' the approach with the whole project team, which consisted of over 50 extension staff and managers.

To develop the proforma I asked three staff to help me generate a sample of stories. They agreed that I could tape this conversation. In line with the process that Davies described (1996), I asked the staff the following question:

*'During the last month, in your opinion, what do you think was the most significant change that took place as a result of project activities?'*

After they had described the event, I asked the following two questions:

*Why do you think the change was the most significant?*

*What difference has it made, or will it make in the future?*

I then transcribed their responses from the audio recording, and thus generated the first three stories. On the basis of these stories, I developed a provisional proforma along the lines of the above questions, but including some questions concerning things such as who was involved, where did it occur (see Figure 14). Davies suggests that enough information should be collected so that the actors in the story could be located and that the events could be verified. This transparency proved important in terms of credibility of the stories, but posed ethical issues (discussed in Section 7.4). The process of developing a proforma was iterative and was conducted in conjunction with the reference group (see below).

Story title:	‘.....’
Domain:	<input type="radio"/> changes in decision-making skills <input type="radio"/> changes in on-farm practice <input type="radio"/> changes in profitability/ productivity <input type="radio"/> other significant changes
Name of person recording story:	.....
Region:	.....
Date of narration:	... /... /.....
Where did this happen?	.....
When did it happen?	.....
*****	
What happened?	
Why do you think this is a significant change?	
What difference did it make already/ will it make in the future?	

***Figure 2 Items contained in the proforma for collection of stories (normally more space is allocated for responses)***

In May 1998, I held a workshop at which all the project staff were present. During this workshop, I asked everyone to submit one story about the most significant change that they knew about, that occurred as a result of project activity. They were all given the blank proforma. About 30 stories were collected (hand written). These stories were placed on a wall and every staff member was

asked to select three stories that they considered to represent the most significant change. They did this by placing sticky labels next to the favoured stories.

I then read aloud the highest scoring stories to the whole group. This was followed by a facilitated discussion concerning why they had selected certain stories over the others. This discussion was audio-recorded, summarised, and sent to all staff as a memory jogger. This process was used to get the ball rolling. In this taste test I did not include the domains, but left it entirely up to the staff what sort of stories they wanted to record. However, during the discussion, staff explained that it was very difficult to select one story over another as they were about such entirely different things. At this stage I re-introduced the concept of domains of change, which the participants recognised as an important addition to the process.

## **Step 2 - Establishing the domains of change**

‘Domains of change’ are loose categories that are used to distinguish different types of stories. For example, one of the four domains used in Bangladesh was ‘Changes in People’s Participation’. Davies suggests that, unlike performance indicators, the domains of change are not precisely defined but are left deliberately fuzzy; and it was initially up to field staff to interpret what they felt was a change belonging to any one of these categories. Davies (1998: 279) explains that the term ‘domain’ was borrowed from Spradly’s (1979) *The Ethnographic Interview*. Davies borrowed the concept of fuzzy from the mathematical term ‘fuzzy sets’.

In Bangladesh, the domains were established by a group of project managers. In the case of the Target 10 Project, the domains were established using the Delphi technique (see Section 6.4), and involving over 100 stakeholders of the project. Delphi is a form of interactive (postal) surveying that utilises an iterative questionnaire and feedback and provides participants with an opportunity to revise earlier views based on the response of other participants, until some desired level of consensus is reached (Cary and Salmon, 1976). Part of my rationale for using the Delphi approach was concerned with balancing the need to have ownership of evaluation by those participating in the process.

When evaluation questions are not established in a participatory manner, insufficient attention may be paid to addressing projects’ felt-information needs (Leviton, 1994). During wide consultation with the project staff, it was put to me that developing the domains of change in an analytical

manner, without widespread consultation could have led to a lack of ownership and the feeling that the evaluation was being *done to them*, rather than *being done by them*. In the Target 10 case it was extremely important for the project stakeholders to have the say about what sort of changes should get measured. Feedback from the process indicated that stakeholders were keen to be involved in establishing the domains.

An open-ended questionnaire was sent to 150 stakeholders asking what sort of things they felt were important to monitor (see Appendix 5). The results of the preliminary survey are presented in Appendix 6. In the second iteration of the questionnaire, participants were asked to rank the domains of change in terms of relative importance (Appendix 7). Table 4 illustrates the results of the second round of the Delphi survey. In the first round of the process, 104 replies were received (70% response rate) and in the second round 76 replies were received (50% response rate).

**Table 1 Results of the Delphi process used to establish domains of change**

Domain of Change	Number of Votes
Changes in on-farm practice	60
Changes in profitability	57
Changes in productivity	24
Changes in decision-making skills	16
Changes in participants' skills	15
Changes in participants' ability to deal with changing industry conditions	15
Changes in quality of life	14
Changes in goals and aspirations	8
Changes in on-farm environmental conditions	6
Changes in farmer confidence	5
Changes to the industry in general	2
Changes in attitudes towards Target 10	2

Because several respondents pointed out that productivity is a part of profitability and none of the respondents selected both 'productivity' and 'profitability', it was decided to select 'changes in profitability' and 'changes in decision-making skills' (the fourth highest ranking) rather than both 'profitability' and 'productivity'. During the last round, several people pointed out that all 12 domains of change offered were important to monitor. For this reason, the fourth domain of change has been left 'open' to allow stories that concern issues or events that are not covered by the first three specific domains. Davies (1996) also used an open domain in Bangladesh.

The domains of change chosen for monitoring are listed below, followed by discussion of the reasons for choosing these domains:

1. Changes in on-farm practice (received a total of 60 votes).
2. Changes in profitability (57 votes).
3. Changes in decision-making skills (16 votes).
4. Any other significant types of change.

As we used the selected domains, we came to realise that their logical order was ‘changes in decision-making skills’, ‘changes in on-farm practice’, and ‘changes in profitability’. Thus, the domains were usually presented in this logical order rather than in the order given above. At every Central Executive Committee meeting over the 12 months, each region was encouraged to submit four stories, one for each domain of change.

### **Step 3 - Establishing a reference group**

A reference group was established to capture learning, to encourage the adaptation of the process to local conditions and to co-ordinate the process. While Davies describes a project member who acted as his counterpart and states that each region developed their own process; he does not refer to having such a reference group. After consultation with the project management it was agreed to appoint regional monitoring ‘champions’. During the first three months of the trial, I facilitated the collection and selection of the stories at the regional level, after which, these regional monitoring champions took over the process. However, I continued to facilitate the selection process at all five of the state executive meetings during the 12-month trial.

The monitoring champions volunteered for the role of co-ordinating the story collection and selection in their region and formed the basis of a reference group for the implementation of the process across the project. The group met on three occasions during the 12-month trial and I communicated with them frequently on an individual basis. Modifications to the process were discussed and decided upon during communication with these individuals. In some cases, we decided to test an idea in one region, before recommending the practice to the other regions. A formal learning set appeared to be an important addition to the MSC process, and is congruent with the ‘Action Learning’ approach that characterises Davies’ work with evolutionary theory. In the

following sections when I use *we* I am referring to this group of people.

However, there were difficulties in getting the group to meet regularly due to their disparate geographic locations. In addition there was flux in the membership of the group as people changed roles within the project. I am of the opinion that this group could have played a much stronger and important role in the process if it had been more stable and accessible.

## **Step 4 - Collecting and reviewing the stories of change**

### ***Collection of stories***

In June 1997, all staff and committee members were supplied with blank proformas and were encouraged to generate stories of significant change. We intended that these initial stories would be shared at the staff meetings at each of the four regions. However, as very few stories were generated using this method, we encouraged staff to share the stories verbally during the meetings. These impromptu stories were later recorded and transcribed. For some people, this was their preferred form of storytelling; thus each regional champions elected to purchase a tape recorder and to record stories at staff meetings. However, some participants continued to write the stories onto the blank proformas (see Figure 14) and the mode of initial recording was left up to personal choice.

### ***Use of the domains***

Initially we asked the storytellers to classify their story according to the four domains of change. The domains were placed on the top of the proforma, the idea being that the storyteller would tick the appropriate box (see Figure 14). We had envisaged that the domains would guide the story collection process. In practice this did not occur; and the domains were not seen to be helpful in terms of collecting the stories. However, we found that when the stories were 'shared' at the staff or committee meetings, the group could categorise the stories by domains. This enabled the voting process to run much more smoothly. Nominating domains also encouraged the story reviewers to consider the story in some depth, and this appeared to be a useful process.

### ***Structure of the review process***

We decided at an early stage of the implementation that the MSC process should ride on the back of the pre-existing project structure. This was considered important, as stakeholders did not want to schedule any additional meetings. My initial proposal for the story selection design was a copy of

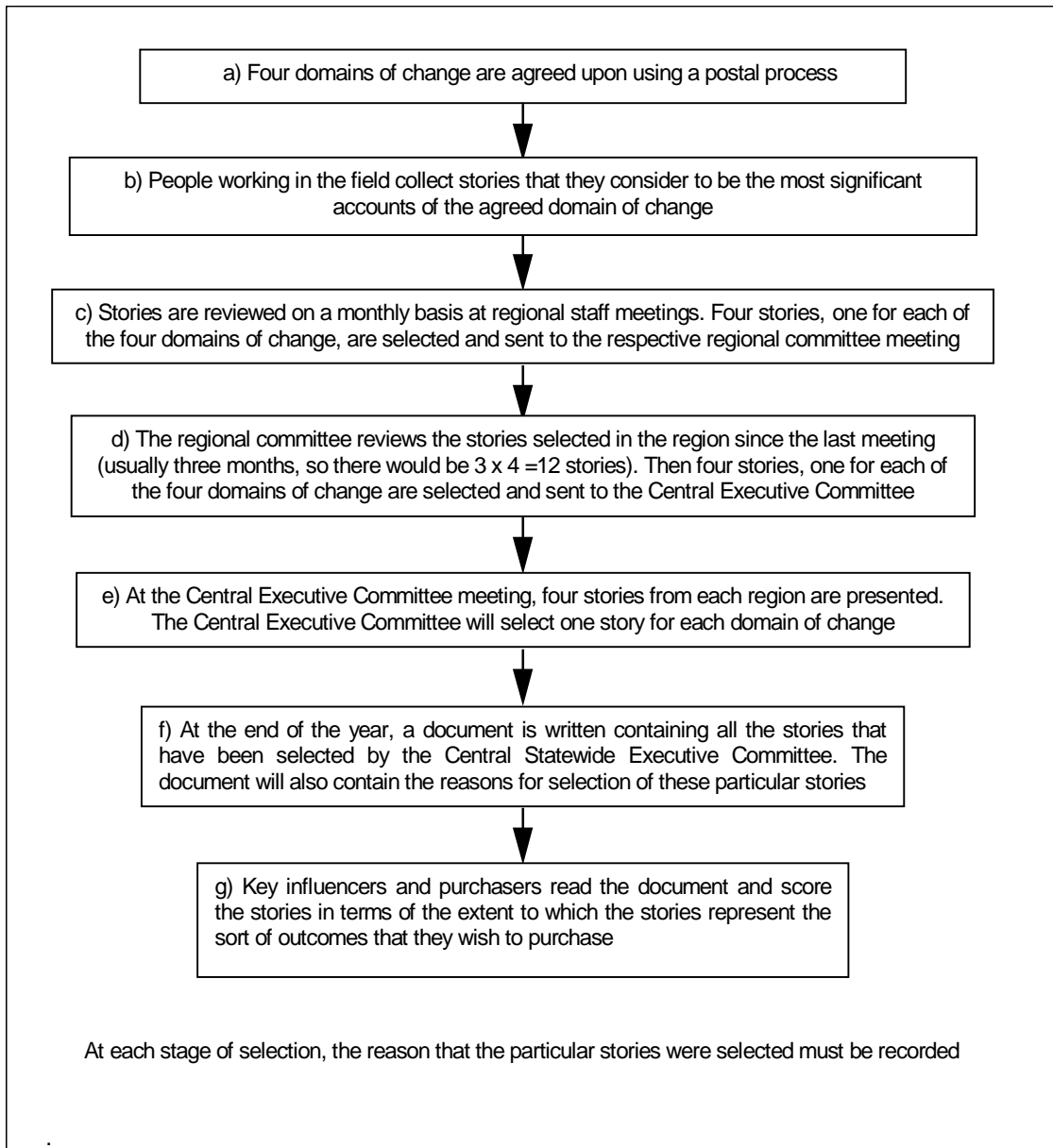
the Bangladesh structure, within the limitations posed by the pre-existing Target 10 hierarchy. I proposed that selection would occur at four hierarchical levels (staff meetings, regional committee meetings, state executive meetings, and purchaser meetings) and that stories were to be reported on a monthly basis. In the Bangladesh case, the approach was implemented at four hierarchical levels, on a monthly basis.

However, fairly early in the implementation process modifications were made to suit the local context, particularly issues of logistics, participation, and timing. My initial proposal was for the stories to be collected primarily by staff, based on their own experience, or second hand from farmers and other stakeholders. The storytellers were to nominate the appropriate domain for their story. At staff meetings, participants were to review all the stories collected over the month and to select four, one for each domain, that represented the most significant change from their perspective. The four selected stories were then to be sent to the corresponding regional committee meeting. As these committee meetings were held every three months, the idea was that 12 stories (four from each of the three monthly meetings) would be sent to the respective regional committee meeting. Each of the four project regional committees, was then to select four stories (one from each domain) to send to the central executive committee (CEC) meeting. They in turn would select a further four stories at each executive meeting, that would be sent to an annual round table meeting with the purchasers of the project. This proposal is illustrated in Figure 3.

In practice we found that the first level of selection; monthly staff meetings, was problematic in that:

- not all regions had monthly staff meetings, and the committee structure varied considerably
- project staff were keen to include stories directly from the committee members
- collecting stories at every monthly staff meeting was too frequent
- some felt that the stories should be selected by the regional committee members, rather than at 'staff only' meetings.

As a result, in most cases the selection process began at the regional committee, and thus occurred at three, rather than four hierarchical levels. Each region developed its own system of selecting and collecting stories, depending on the existing committee structure. The only condition was that the three large regions should submit four stories to each state-executive meeting and that they should document how they had selected these stories.



*Figure 3 Proposed main steps for implementation of MSC process with Target 10 Project*

In the North East, which is a particularly small region, committee meetings are held every six months. Only two staff work in this region, so the story selection and collection process was only conducted at the regional committee level on two occasions over the 12-month period. However, the two staff did submit at least two stories to every State Executive Committee, even though these stories had not always been reviewed by all of the committee.

In the Northern Irrigation Region, the process stayed fairly faithful to the original proposal. The only change was that stories were shared, but not selected, at the staff meetings. In the first two staff meetings, staff tried to vote on what were effectively each other's stories. Some felt that this competitive element was not helpful. This point is further discussed in Section 5. After discussion with the reference group, the system was changed so that only the regional committee level actually reviewed and selected stories. Regional committee members were also encouraged to submit stories directly to the regional committee. After successfully piloting this modification we agreed that the process would be adopted in all regions.

In the region of Gippsland, the project structure is quite distinct from other regions in that it has three sub-regional committees. These sub-regional committees became the main collection points for the stories. The stories were not shared at staff meetings, but were reviewed and selected solely at committee meetings dominated by farmers.

In the South West, the committee structure is again different. They favour large (over 40 members) regional committee meetings which all the staff attend, in addition to other farmers and representatives. These meetings are held every two to three months. As all the staff are present, it would have involved considerable duplication to share the stories at the staff meeting. Thus the stories were collected and reviewed at the regional committee level, and no activity occurred at the staff meeting.

### ***Selection process***

The process by which the stories were actually selected is not detailed in Davies' publications. In this case we developed a facilitated process. Firstly, if the stories had not all been allocated domains, which often happened at the regional level, each story was read out aloud and immediately allocated a domain. The titles of the stories were written on a white board under the

respective domains. When all the stories had been read out, all the stories within one domain would be considered together. The facilitator would then ask a series of questions to prompt discussion (see Appendix 8), before moving on to a vote by hands. Each committee member was given one vote for each domain. When the vote was done, if there was no consensus, then further discussion was facilitated until an agreement had been reached as to which story should be selected. Occasionally no agreement could be reached, therefore either two stories were selected, or no story was found to be suitable. The idea was to come to an agreement as a group. As well as selecting a story, the committee members were also asked to state why the story had been selected above the others. Much of the discussion revolved around explanations of why they thought one story was particularly valuable or particularly misleading (see Text box 1 for an example of discussion). Similar discussion was held about each story prior to selections being made. This discussion was recorded on tape, or by a note taker. The intention was that these notes would be promptly summarised and circulated to all stakeholders in the region.

*(Background: The story concerned a farmer who had started using a project recommended practice but then reverted to his original practice. The discussion was held at a regional committee meeting at which five farmers, one dairy representative, three staff members and the facilitator were present.)*

**G:** *It's a story in reverse, an actual thing that happened. It's a really important story and we need to think about the implications of this.*

**Facilitator:** *What are the implications of what happened in this story?*

**G:** *But.... It is not a feel good story, that's what I am saying*

**C:** *The whole point of evaluation is that we should hear stories like this – both positive things and negative things.*

**M:** *Yes, I think this is a really valid story, I think that we need more stories like this.*

**Facilitator:** *But I need you to think about what are the implications of a story like this?*

**F:** *For the farmer or us?*

**Facilitator:** *For both*

**S:** *Target 10 pushed him too far..*

**G:** *No no no no no, he's got to be confident to carry it out. [all talk at once]*

**C:** *He believes it enough in the first place, but he had a lack of confidence to carry on*

**G:** *He couldn't get over the first hurdle – he had a brick wall in front of him – he didn't have the confidence to stay with it.*

**C:** *Its not just confidence – it's the back up and the skills.*

**G:** *Oh No – but he's got the skills there – cause he did it for the first 2 months, then he had a shower of rain or a flood or something and he couldn't get over that next hurdle.*

**C:** *But if he had had a 1:1 visit from an extension officer, perhaps a week before, the decision to go back?*

**G:** *But how are you going to know to do that?*

**C:** *He needed support to do it.*

**G:** *You have got to find out, he may have had an inability to speak within a discussion group as well, and that would probably be the area that he needed to get support from.*

**C:** *Or a mentor of some form.*

**S:** *Or he may not have had the ability or even realise to say...*

**G:** *I've heard that same thing more than once, I suppose that everyone else has heard it too: when things get hard, people give up.*

**C:** *When it gets hard you often go back to what you did before, I think this is why this is an important story.*

**G:** *I think people should know that these stories should be written, as they need to be heard. I don't think people do know.*

**D:** *Jessica said at the start that the stories could be negative or positive.*

**CM:** *But they are not necessarily negative stories – like it is bad for the farmer for the individual farmer maybe.*

**F:** *I think that some of the farmers read these stories and think that these are about me...[laughs]*

**C:** *this is what I always thought about Target 10 – works in spring but not in summer.*

*Source: Transcript from the MSC process at a regional committee meeting*

### ***Text box 1 Segment of discussion at a regional committee meeting during story selection***

The process of selection was similar at the CEC. However, at this forum the process tended to be more formal and the stories were typed, titled, and had been allocated a domain. The stories were circulated with the agenda before the meeting, along with a voting form (Appendix 9) to allow participants to jot their comments down before coming to the meeting. Despite the fact that most

people had read the stories before the meeting, the committee still favoured the process of reading the stories out aloud, in fact this became almost a ritual that people did not want to give up.

### ***Feedback process***

The various committees were required to document which stories they selected and what criteria they used. The idea was that this information would be fed back to the project stakeholders on a regular basis so that they could learn from the previous round of stories and interpretations. It was intended that the monitoring system should take the form of a slow but extensive dialogue up and down the project hierarchy each month (Davies 1996). It was unclear in Davies' thesis how this feedback process had occurred in Bangladesh, so again the process was arrived at through experiential learning.

In the first three months I tape-recorded the entire story review session held at each of the regional committee meetings. The discussion was then transcribed, and the reasons for selecting particular stories were summarised and circulated in the minutes of the meeting. The idea was that the criteria for selection of the stories would be appended to the story itself, so that the state executive committee could consider the RC member's interpretation of story, in addition to the story itself and the storytellers' interpretation. However, when the regional champions took over this process, they found it to be too time consuming to tape and transcribe the whole meeting, so the main points were jotted down and included in the minutes in bullet point form. Due to timing issues, it was frequently not possible to attach this feedback to the selected stories that were sent to the state executive committee meeting. However, feedback concerning the reason for selecting the stories was generally verbally relayed by the respective regional co-ordinators who attended the CEC meeting. We felt that this was an acceptable trade off.

However, at the CEC the feedback was much more systematic. The review session was tape recorded at all five CEC over the 18-month period. The details of the selected stories and the criteria by which they were chosen were systematically reported to all project staff and stakeholders. This was conducted largely by means of an email list-serve immediately after the meeting. In addition, the booklet *Target 10 Evaluation Stories* (Dart, 1999c) was produced containing all the stories that had been selected by the CEC over the period of the year. Each story was accompanied by the interpretation of the storyteller, comments from the CEC, and comments from the purchasers. Thus the reader of the document could make a judgement on the story, and also have access to information about how the project committees valued it, and the purchasers of

the project. The booklet also detailed an outline of the MSC process, and the findings of the secondary analysis of the stories. Approximately 250 copies of the booklet were distributed to project stakeholders.

### **Step 5 - Annual round table meeting**

At the end of the 12-month trial period a round-table meeting was held with eight participants who were considered to be 'purchasers' or 'key influencers' of the Target 10 Project. These participants represented the Dairy Research and Development Cooperation (DRDC), NRE, the University of Melbourne and the DRDC regional development boards. The round-table meeting took the form of a facilitated group discussion in which all participants were asked to give their reaction, in general, to the stories. They were then asked to nominate certain stories as being the most representative of the sort of outcomes that they were interested in purchasing.

### **Step 6 - Secondary analysis of the stories**

In total 134 stories were collected, transcribed and entered onto a database. On request of the project, I conducted an additional step of analysing the stories *en masse*, the findings of which were included in the booklet *Target 10 Evaluation Stories* (Dart, 1999c) and circulated to all stakeholders. This analysis was done by examining the origin of the stories, the main themes, and differences between the stories that were selected and those that were not. These findings are detailed in the following section concerning the process outputs.

## **7.4 Analysis of Outputs**

The 134 stories collected between May 1998 and May 1999 originated from all of the four regions of Victoria where the project operates. These stories were written by staff from the Department of Natural Resources and Environment (NRE), farmers, industry representatives and educators. Twenty-four stories from the total were selected on the basis that they were considered by the Central Executive Committee to be the most significant accounts of change in the specified domains.

The story collection process was monitored and the stories were examined for overall trends in content and origin. Firstly, the total group of 134 stories was considered. Secondly, the 24 stories that were selected by the Central Executive Committee over the year along and the criteria with

which they were selected, were examined. Table 2 lists the questions that were used to structure the following section and to describe the ‘results’ of monitoring the Story Process.

*Table 2 Questions asked to help describe the stories*

Data sets	Qualitative questions	Quantitative questions
<p><b>Total 134 stories</b> that were collected across the state over the 12-month period.</p> <p><b>24 stories</b> selected from the total set by the Central Executive Committee, and scored by a group of purchasers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What were the stories about?</li> <li>• What unexpected farmer outcomes are described in the stories?</li> <li>• Did issues covered in the negative event stories get acted upon?</li> <li>• What is different about the 24 stories that were selected and those that were not?</li> <li>• What criteria did the project team use to select the stories? What does this tell us about what the project team values?</li> <li>• What criteria did the purchasers use to judge the stories? What does this tell us about what the purchasers' values?</li> <li>• Did these stories change over the year as a result of the feedback ie? Was there evidence of learning?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How many stories were collected and when?</li> <li>• Who were the storytellers?</li> <li>• Which programs were mentioned in the stories?</li> <li>• Which domains of change were covered?</li> <li>• What percentage of stories concerned negative news?</li> <li>• To which level of Bennett's Hierarchy do the stories correspond?</li> </ul>

## A description of the stories

### *Number of collected during the process*

Over the year, 134 stories were recorded and documented. The story review process has occurred at five Target 10 Central Executive Committee meetings and over 10 regional committee meetings. Table 6 presents the number of stories collected in each round. One round represents the time span between two consecutive Central Executive Committee meetings. There is no clear increasing or decreasing trend and in each round of the process between 22 and 32 stories were collected.

*Table 3 Number of stories collected each round*

<b>Detail</b>	<b>Total number of stories</b>
Round 1 – May to July 1998	29
Round 2 – July to September 1998	26
Round 3 – September to November 1998	22
Round 4 – November 1998 to February 1999	25
Round 5 – February to May 1999	32
<b>Total for 12 months</b>	<b>134</b>

### ***Origin of the stories***

The three larger regions of the project all contributed approximately the same number of stories to the process (see Table 4). The reason for the smaller number of stories originating from the North East Region, is due to the fact that this region has very few staff. When the mean number of stories per team member for each region is considered, it becomes apparent that there is little difference between the four regions.

*Table 4 Distribution of stories per region*

<b>Region from which the stories originated:</b>	<b>Number of stories collected (n=124)</b>	<b>Mean number of Stories per staff</b>
• The Northern Irrigation	38	3.5
• The South West	39	3.9
• Gippsland	46	3.8
• The North East	9	4.5

The majority of the stories were written by staff from NRE (who were mostly Target 10 extension staff). However, of the selected stories, a higher percentage were written by farmers than in the total group (see Table 8). Feedback from the Central Executive Committee explains that farmer stories were perceived to be more powerful than stories written in the third person. It is also interesting to note that three out of the five stories scored most highly by the purchasers were also written by farmers. Clearly, stories told directly by farmers are valued by many of the project stakeholders. This is reflected in the proportionally higher number of stories about farmers who have attended multiple programs.

**Table 5 Distribution of the story tellers**

Detail	Percent of total	Percent of selected
<b>Written by:</b>		
• NRE staff	77%	62%
• Farmers	13%	30%
• Other collaborators	10%	8%

***Project programs covered in the stories***

The stories cover all the programs, and 10% concern farmers who had attended multiple programs (Table 9). However, there is a higher proportion of stories about farmers who had attended multiple programs in the selected stories than from the total group. Feedback from the Central Executive Committee suggested that stories that were about consolidating learning from the various different programs were especially valued.

**Table 6 Project ‘programs’ mentioned in the story**

Detail	Percent of total	Percent of selected
<b>Target 10 Program Involved:</b>		
More than one program	10%	20%
Discussion groups	15%	08%
Grazing Management Program	18%	17%
Nutrition Program	17%	13%
Dairy Business Focus Program	16%	21%
Soils and Fertilisers Program	15%	08%
Dairy Farm Performance Analysis	09%	13%

***Subject material of the stories***

*En masse* the stories present a picture of many farmers implementing part or all of the Target 10 message, and of farmers gaining from the programs in unexpected ways. Some of the common themes running through the stories are issues such as feeling more in control of the business, feeling empowered to challenge the consultant, gaining increased family communication after the identification of mutual goals. There were also multiple stories about the far reaching benefits those

new farmers to the area or industry can gain through the Target 10 activities and networks. Table 7 lists some of the themes that have been the subject of more than two stories. The most frequent theme described in the stories (11%) concerns how farmers experienced an increase in production after adopting Target 10 practice.

*Table 7 Description of themes that have been the subject of multiple stories*

Main theme	%
Change to Target 10 practice leads to increased productivity (pasture growth/utilisation, milk production or condition score)	11
Positive reaction to the Target 10 Project (useful information, unbiased information or meeting farmer needs)	9
The importance of discussion groups and sharing information	6
Change to Target 10 practice leads to saving money	6
A change of practice after making systematic decisions about operational issues rather than using rule of thumb	5
Empowered to make a strategic long-term decision	5
Identification of operational problem using skills acquired on program	5
Systematic operational decisions lead to feeling more in control of business	5
Empowered to deal with external experts through skill acquisition	5
Evidence of farmers taking up on-farm practices that were recommended by the project	5
Overcoming negative attitudes toward the project or project messages	4
New farmers to the industry gain valuable network through the project activities	3
Gaining a new understanding of the importance of the basic principles of the pasture management	3
The importance of learning to think rather than following a recipe approach	3

It is also clear from the stories that the storytellers value the concept of empowerment and of farmers thinking for themselves rather than using a recipe book approach. In total, 34% of the stories make some mention of increased control, independence, or empowerment.

## Levels of Bennett's Hierarchy to which the stories correspond

The stories cover a whole range of topics and subjects. To gain a picture of the spread, the stories have been categorised into broad themes and arranged using Bennett's Hierarchy of outcomes<sup>2</sup> see Table 9. However, it should be pointed out that each story may contain several themes, so the stories have been categorised by the theme that rates highest in the hierarchy of outcomes. For example, a story categorised as practice change will generally also contain themes such as changes in knowledge and attitude which rank lower in Bennett's Hierarchy of outcomes.

It is clear from Table 8 that stories that are situated higher in Bennett's Hierarchy of outcomes are more likely to be selected by the Central Executive Committee. The purchaser group also allocated high scores to stories that contained themes relating to the higher levels of the hierarchy (Level 7 or 6). Thus, it can be inferred that most stakeholders of the project value the stories that are about behaviour change and consequences of this change.

*Table 8 Level of Bennett's Hierarchy*

<b>Bennett's level</b>	<b>Percent of total</b>	<b>Percent of selected</b>
7 – Consequences	27%	50%
6 – Behaviour change	14%	21%
5 – KASA changes	35%	17%
4 – Reactions	15%	4%

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<sup>2</sup> Bennett describes a chain of events assumed to characterise most programs in extension (Bennett 1977). He uses this chain of events to depict a hierarchy of objectives and evidence for program evaluation. Bennett lists seven levels of goals in extension and claims that it becomes more difficult to evaluate at higher levels of the hierarchy, as it becomes more difficult to show that changes at these levels are the result of extension activity and not of other factors.

**Table 9 Grouping of stories by theme using Bennett's Hierarchy**

Level of Hierarchy - Description of theme and number of stories belonging to each category (N=128)							total
Level 7 Consequences of change	Quality of life increases		Goals achieved in career steps		New farmers to the industry gain valuable network		35 (12)
	1 (1 selected)		3 (2 selected)		4		
	Improved pasture growth/consumption	Increased milk Production	Production maintained in harsh conditions	Increased condition score of herd	Money is saved		
	7 (1 selected)	6 (2 selected)	1	3 (1 selected)	8 (5 selected)		
Level 6 Change behaviour	Evidence of farmers taking up T10 recommended on-farm operational practices		Empowered to make a strategic business decision		Changed practice in terms of communication within family		18 (5)
	5		7 (2 selected)		2 (1 selected)		
	Changed operational practice after systematic analysis of figures rather than rule of thumb		5 (2 selected)				
Level 5 –KASA Skills and empowerment	Identifying operational problem through acquisition of new skills	Calculations done independently	Calculations based on accurate figures rather than approximation – lead to breakthroughs	Empowered to deal with external experts through skills acquisition	Systematic operational decisions made lead to feeling more in control of business	Women gaining more recognition in family through skill acquisition	27 (3)
	6	3 (1 selected)	4	6 (1 selected)	6 (1 selected)	2	
Knowledge and awareness	New Knowledge Becomes incorporated into the prevalent culture		Gained a new understanding of importance pasture management		Gained deeper technical knowledge of operational process		13 (1)
	2 (1 selected)		4		1		
	Gained deeper understanding strategic thinking and business planning		Importance of learning how to think rather than following recipe		4		
	2						
Attitude	Overcoming negative attitudes toward the program			Attitude towards an element of the Target 10 message			5
	2			3			

Level 4 Reactions	Project provides useful, good information 4	Project provides unbiased advice 2	Project is meeting farmers needs 2	Importance of team work 2	Importance of on-farm days 2	Importance of discussion groups 7- (1 selected)	19 (1)
Lessons learned	Farmer Ownership 1	Confidentiality 1	Limits of the program 1	Needing figures to solve problem 1	What can happen with only partial understanding 1	Coming unstuck in harsh seasonal conditions- 2	The need for one to one support 1 8 (2)
Other	Evidence of the spread of Target 10 messages and practices to non-Target 10 participants 3						3

### ***Level 7 Consequences for the target group – 26% of stories***

In total, 26% of the stories concerned Bennett's higher level consequences. The largest proportion of these stories concerned increases in production after adopting Target 10 practices. This was expressed in terms of increased milk production, improved pasture growth, improved pasture utilisation, or increases in the condition score of the herd. Several stories told of how farmers had made financial savings after putting into practice knowledge that had been gained during Target 10 programs.

In addition to issues of productivity and profitability, there were some stories that related to overall improvement in family quality of life, and the achievement of life or career goals. Another unexpected consequence told in three stories was that the project had provided an invaluable social and business network for farmers new to the industry or geographical area.

### ***Level 6 Behavioural changes in the target group – 14% of stories***

Stories categorised into Level 6 concerned behaviour change, but did not explicitly mention the consequences of these changes. The changes described in this category ranged from operational changes to long-term strategic changes based on considerable planning. There were also stories of changed practice with regard to communication between family members.

### ***Level 5 Changes in: knowledge, attitude, skills, motivation and group norms – 34% of stories***

The most frequent themes in this category referred to issues such as empowerment and feeling more in control of the farm business as a result of increased knowledge and skills. There were also several stories which demonstrated skill acquisition in terms of how farmers had been able to solve technical problems using skills that they had gained from attending Target 10 programs. Several stories were about farmers gaining a much deeper understanding of why certain basic operational practices (especially pasture management) are so important.

### ***Level 4 The farmer's opinion about extension activities - 14% of the stories***

Stories that were not specifically about change, but concerned farmers' positive opinions of project activities fall into this category. It is striking that seven of these stories were independently written on the importance of discussion groups – discussion groups are clearly a most valued event.

### ***Other 9% of the stories***

Some of the stories did not fit easily within the framework that was adapted from Bennett's Hierarchy. This was especially true of some of the stories about lessons learned. Three of the main messages that came out of these stories were that:

- farmers may need more support in implementing new practices during difficult seasonal conditions
- farmers with only partial knowledge of the Target 10 practices can run into serious problems
- farmers should be consulted before major changes to the programs are made.

### **Characteristics of stories selected by Central Executive Committee**

The most frequent theme in the stories selected by the Central Executive Committee was that of money being saved after a farmer adopts a recommended Target 10 practice (see Table 13). This is reflected in the feedback that was given from the committee to the storytellers – that stories could be improved by including some element of the 'bottom line' and should contain some tangible outcome. The stories did change over the year and the regions obviously tried to take note of the feedback given by the Executive Committee. After about six months, feedback indicated that novel stories were more likely to be selected than stories that contained themes that had been heard before. Again, this is illustrated by the fact that stories that had a unique theme, such as new knowledge becoming incorporated into the prevalent culture, were selected despite the fact that they represent lower level outcomes. Another factor that affected selection was that stories were more likely to be selected if they clearly showed evidence that directly connected the occurrence of change to a Target 10 activity.

**Table 10 Characteristics of stories selected by the Central Executive Committee (n=24)**

Theme	Level of Bennett's Hierarchy	Number of stories selected	Percent selected from sub-group
Quality of life increases	7	1	100%
Goals achieved in career steps	7	2	67%
Change to Target 10 practice leads to saving money	7	5	63%
Change to Target 10 practice leads to increased productivity (pasture growth/utilisation, milk production or condition score)	7	4	27%
Changed practice in terms of communication within family	6	1	50%
A change of practice after making systematic decisions about operational issues rather than using rule of thumb	6	2	29%
Empowered to make a strategic long-term decision	6	2	28%
New Knowledge Becomes incorporated into the prevalent culture	5	1	50%
Calculations done Independently	5	1	33%
Systematic operational decisions made lead to feeling more in control of business	5	1	17%
Empowered to deal with external experts through skills acquisition	5	1	17%
The importance of discussion groups	4	1	13%
Lessons learned	Other	2	22%

### **Feedback given by purchasers**

Prior to the round table meeting, the purchasers were asked to score the stories individually (out of 10). When the scores for all 24 stories were examined, it became apparent that the purchasers-respondents had very different reactions to the stories. Two stories were allocated the lowest score by one purchaser, and the highest score by another! The purchaser group did not have a unified vision as to what is desirable when given a choice of these stories. It was also apparent that most of the stories were considered to have merit by at least one of the participants. This finding supports the concept that evaluation is conducted in a value-pluralistic context; that the various stakeholders hold differing values. Thus, negotiation and dialogue between the various evaluation stakeholders (including between the purchaser and the provider) is essential.

There was general consensus at the meeting that overall the stories demonstrated:

- Technical skill improvement after attending Target 10 programs.

- An array of unexpected positive outcomes achieved by the project and specifically with regard to changes in attitude, achievement of personal goals, and changes in the farm business and family situation.

Statements by two of the purchasers are provided in Text box 2 as examples of these comments.

*I was taken by those stories that tended to indicate that not only had the program delivered the technical outcomes that are being sought by the industry, but also that, for a number of participants, it had brought about a change in attitude and achievement of personal goals as well.*

*Some of the description of the logic that flowed through stories (the technical logic) was very, very good and showed that these farmers in question had really grabbed this technology by the throat and were really milking it. The other sort of stories that got to me were the life-changing ones. And those two types of stories really got to me.*

*Source: Transcript from Round table meeting*

***Text box 2 Examples of comments from the purchasers concerning the stories***

***Why specific stories were valued highly by the purchasers***

The discussion held at the round table meeting revealed that specific stories were highly valued by particular participants when:

- the change described in the story was clearly attributable to the project
- the participants could relate to the story from their own experience
- the change described showed a diversity of learning
- the story demonstrated project reflection on negative events and subsequent learning
- the change described in the story demonstrated teamwork in action.

In most of the cases, there were considerable differences in interpretation of the stories; however, a full consensus was achieved that the story ‘knowledge is power’ presented the most significant account of change (see Text box 3). Because of this, considerable time was spent discussing why this story was considered to be so significant. Comments from the meeting included that the story represented the sort of outcomes that they were looking for from the project because:

- the event described in the story was the combination of the farmer having an articulated need and the training program being available at the right time
- the program provided a stepping stone to another job and also into further education
- it shows a congruence of personal goals and business goals

- this story illustrates an example of how the program provided a springboard for farmers to go on to what they want to do without prescribing a single pathway
- the farmer in this story has the right attitude
- how can we harness the learning from this story to learn how to encourage other young farmers to have similar success?

## **The stories themselves**

Texts boxes 3, 4, 5 and 6 provide four stories to illustrate points that have been made in the discussion. The purchasers of the project gave Story 1 the highest score. The first story entitled *knowledge is power*, was categorised as being concerned with ‘goal achieved in career steps’, an outcome relating to Bennett’s level 7. This story concerned a farmer who had attended several programs of the project. The feedback notes from the selection process often stated that the stories written by farmers were more powerful, as they were first-hand accounts of farmer experience.

The second story entitled *I’ll not be milking cows when I’m 55*, was categorised as a story concerning changes to the ‘quality of life’, an outcome relating to Bennett’s level 7. This story has the characteristic conversational tone that was often present in stories that were recorded orally, and were valued for this characteristic. It is notable that Stories 1 and 2 were written by farmers, and were concerned with the highest level of Bennett’s Hierarchy, and that both were valued highly by all the committees and staff.

However, the majority of stories in the process were written by staff, and were written in the second person. Story 3, *empowered*, was written by a member of staff. Several stories with this theme of ‘empowerment’ were collected over the year, and this outcome was categorised as a Bennett’s level 6 outcome. This particular story generated lengthy discussion when it was reviewed. The outcome of ‘empowerment’ is not highly related to the overarching production goal of the project – this is the sort of story that ‘surprised’ some of the purchasers.

Story 4 entitled *Saved me \$2,000* is a concise story written by an extension officer and details short-term savings gained from Target 10 activities. This story was particularly valued by the project as it was a short story with tangible profit-based outcomes. Few stories were collected that concerned long-term profitability or productivity increases, and stories collected under the domain of ‘changes in profitability and productivity’ were generally short term in nature.

**Selected at the round-table meeting as the most significant story**

<b>Story 1 Title</b>	<b>Knowledge is Power</b>
<b>Name of person recording story:</b>	<b>MJ, Dairy farm employee</b>
<b>Region:</b>	<b>Gippsland</b>
<b>Date of narration:</b>	<b>Round 5 – 15 March 1999</b>
<b>Where did this happen:</b>	<b>XXX</b>
<b>When did it happen:</b>	<b>1996</b>

**What happened?** In 1996, I was working on a 500-cow dairy farm and had no input to the day-to-day running. But I wanted to have more input. I decided to do something about it, so I attended the Target 10 Grazing Management Program followed by the Nutrition Program. After completing these courses, I had enough knowledge to start making decisions, such as measuring growth rates and adjusting rotation lengths. Gaining this knowledge led me to start a new job on a 550-cow dairy farm where I am presently managing all feed requirements.

I have been able to maximise pasture consumption to 10 t/ha; and, with 1 to 2 tonnes of grain fed, this will achieve a production of 1,000 kg of solids /ha on 850 mm of rainfall per year. I walk the farm weekly to measure growth rates, allowing me to adjust the rotation to suit the growth rate. I fill the gap with grain so as not to waste pasture. When harvest comes, I can use this method to cut maximum fodder without sacrificing the cows' pasture.

**Why do you think this is a significant change?** These changes, which I have been able to apply to the day-to-day running of the farm, have made the farm more efficient. I am also a more efficient employee now, and I have seen what I can achieve by furthering my studies. Last year I completed a Diploma of Agriculture (dairy farm management), and this year I'm studying an Advanced Diploma (dairy farm management). My future plan is to manage the whole day-to-day running of a larger scale dairy farm in every aspect.

**Feedback from the Central Executive Committee:**

- This story is a good example of one person going on to do more learning and expand his horizons.
- It is good, as it is written by a farmer.
- It is about building confidence, and the story even got down to changes in productivity.
- It really shows the full picture.

**Feedback from the Round-table Meeting:**

- Good positive story about practical learning.
- Real change directly related to having done Target 10 programs (they look good in the resume) with measurable results as well.
- Substantial behaviour change as a result of the Target 10 program. But the profit/productivity impact is not so clear.
- Great story. Self-improvement outcomes, the subject has strong commitment to the industry and the desire to achieve. These are the people that will make the industry move forward.
- To me it is raw efficiency; that's what really gets me. It is almost the most you would expect to get from a program. The guy is really ready to roll and he has got the right attitude.

**Text box 3 Story example 1**

<b>Title of story 2</b>	<b>I'll Not Be Milking Cows When I Am 55</b>
<b>Name of person recording story:</b>	<b>MS, dairy farmer</b>
<b>Region</b>	<b>Gippsland</b>
<b>Date of narration:</b>	<b>Round 2 – 21 August 1998</b>
<b>Who was involved:</b>	<b>Farmer and family</b>

**What happened?** *We did the pilot Dairy Business Focus Program in March; and for the first time, my wife came along to something. We were able to look at our farm as a business, not just as a farm. As a consequence of doing the program, we did a few sums and made a few decisions. We worked out that we can afford to have her on the farm, and she has left her job at the bank. We will generate enough income on the farm to make it more profitable for her to be here. The kids will benefit from seeing her a lot more, and they won't be in day care. So far this year, this has made the calving so much easier, we have a joint input, and it has been such a turn around in my lifestyle. It has been so good.*

*We actually went to the accountant yesterday to get some financial advice on how we should be investing off-farm. He was amazed that what we are doing is treating the farm as a business. I said: 'Now everything that we earn on this farm is going to be put away so that I am not milking cows when I am 55 years old!'*

*We have got a debt-reduction program running for the next 12 months, but after that the money will be channelled to off-farm investment. I want to retire young enough to enjoy what we have been working towards for the last 20 or 30 years. My boss is 77 and is still working on the farm. If I am that fit when I am his age, I want to be touring around the world.*

*It has opened up our lives. We are now looking at off-farm investment, as capital investment on-farm is not that great. We are not going to invest in new machinery but are going to invest in contractors to do any work we can't do. There is no point buying new machinery, as it depreciates. Instead, we will buy shares and invest off the farm. This proves that you can farm on 120 cows, you don't have to get big, and you don't have to milk a lot of cows. It just depends what you do with your money. If only we could educate the younger farmers to think ahead instead buying the largest SS Commodore or the latest dual cab. I followed the same track for a few years until we sat down and worked out where we were going and where we could be. We made a few mistakes in the past, but the past is the past.*

**Feedback from the Central Executive Committee:**

- *This story generated lots of discussion. But is it really about profitability or quality of life or changes in farm practice?*
- *The general consensus was that there needed to be more detail in the story for it to be about profitability.*
- *It is a really powerful story that shows considerable change.*

**Feedback from the Round-table Meeting:**

- *The story showed strong evidence of attitudinal change, leading to self-improvement and goal setting. These people will be high achievers and reap the rewards. They will be good role models for others who desire similar rewards.*
- *This approach is okay, but it isn't necessarily a prescription for others.*
- *It has some good messages, but it hasn't got all the answers.*
- *This is a very good example of achieving the goal of the DBF Program: i.e., getting strategic thinking/planning followed by farmer action.*
- *I liked this story as it highlights the diversity in personal goals and ways to get there.*

**Text box 4 Story example 2**

<b>Title of story 3:</b>	<b>Empowered</b>
<b>Name of person recording story:</b>	<b>Julie Williams, Target 10 extension officer</b>
<b>Region:</b>	<b>Gippsland</b>
<b>Date of narration:</b>	<b>Round 5 – 1 April 1999</b>
<b>When did it happen:</b>	<b>Between September and March 1999</b>

**What happened?** *At a review day of the Dairy Business Focus Program to share how people had gone with their planning, one of the participants, Barb, was very pleased with herself and feels that she is now more 'empowered'. She has employed a consultant to help with decisions and bring new information into the family. Her husband grew up on a dairy farm and feels he knows best. The third person (the consultant) has helped her introduce new efficiencies and ideas.*

*She has recently organised her own holiday, something she's never done before, and she's making decisions for herself. Her husband has not supported her before, but now she believes she can do it. There is information available that she now has access to and is now confident to get on with it. She is also keen to do the DFPA Program, with a bit of help, to help with analysis of the farm costs and to help with decision-making.*

**Why do you think this is a significant change?** *The interaction with the DBF group and the awareness the program created has empowered this woman to seek out assistance to be more proactive in her decision-making.*

**What difference will it make in the future?** *It will help her make more effective decisions in her farming business and her life generally.*

**Additional note from Gippsland Regional Committee:**

- *I should add that Barb actually went on holiday on her own, but this is not a story about the family breaking up. She got a lot out of the program and is now actively getting out and following some of the plans that she made during the DBF Program.*

**Feedback from Central Executive Committee:**

- *This story shows a considerable degree of change has occurred due to the program. She was left empowered to do things that she could not do previously.*
- *I chose this story because of the magnitude of change.*
- *Before it seems that the husband made most of the decisions; now there are more people making decisions in the family. That's a huge change.*

**Text box 5 Story example 3**

<b>Title of story 4:</b>	<b>Saved Me \$2,000!</b>
<b>Name of person recording story:</b>	<b>Frank Mickan, Target 10 extension officer</b>
<b>Region:</b>	<b>South West</b>
<b>Date of narration:</b>	<b>Round 1 – 10 June 1998</b>
<b>Who was involved:</b>	<b>A farmer in the Soils and Fertilisers Program</b>
<b>Where did this happen:</b>	<b>Heywood</b>
<b>When did it happen:</b>	<b>April 1998</b>

**What happened?** A pilot Soils and Fertilisers Program was presented at Heywood in South-West Victoria. Some calculations were done on day two; and by day three, a very 'switched-on' farmer had gone home and calculated the costs of nutrients that he had calculated that he needed for his farm. He had quotes from at least two fertiliser companies, and he calculated that a blend (from his own figures) would save him \$2,000.

**Why do you think this is a significant change?** This man had obviously grasped the concepts of the calculations, shown by his ability to calculate the costing and levels of nutrients in the fertiliser blend.

**What difference has it made already or will it make in the future?** After two days of the program, this farmer had already saved himself \$2,000 and will continue to do so in the future (although the amounts may vary). He can now check on the consultant's recommendations.

**Feedback from the Central Executive Committee:**

- I like it as it shows how a farmer applied what he had learned in a program to save him money.
- It shows that the information that is given in the programs does work.
- There is also an issue here about how the programs can improve the confidence of farmers and so help them to help themselves (empowerment).
- This story also illustrated how the farmer changed his behavior.

*Text box 6 Story example 4*

**What the stories revealed in terms of evaluative information: my observations and analysis**

*En masse* the stories present a picture of many farmers implementing part or all of the Target 10 message, and of farmers gaining from the programs in unexpected ways. The most frequent theme for a story (and also the most frequently theme of selected stories) concern farmers who have changed to Target 10 recommended practices and gained an increase in production. The second most common theme for a story concerned farmers who had adopted of Target 10 practices and as a result experienced short-term financial gains. These findings are consistent with the aims of the project, and support the other evaluation findings (Target 10 Evaluation report 1999), that the Target 10 activities do have an impact on increased production and short term profitability.

However, in addition to stories concerning production and profit outcomes, many stories concerning other types of change were collected and subsequently selected by the Target 10 committees. The major themes running through these stories were that farmers, after involvement Target 10 programs, felt:

- more in control of their business
- empowered to challenge the consultant
- that they had gained increased family communication after the identification of mutual goals
- empowered to make strategic long-term decisions
- able to make systematic decisions about operational issues rather than using rule of thumb
- able to achieve goals in career steps.

As the process progressed, we noted that the stories had improved and that the authors of the stories were getting more skilled at knowing how to present the stories and what sorts of themes should be presented in the stories. After six months, the stories seemed to be more ‘finished’ and to be more closely related to change in the specified domains. The implication from this is that not only was the project learning to run the process, but also the committee members (farmers, educators, industry representatives, and NRE staff) were getting better at conceptualising impact.

The process of collecting and analysing stories has seen farmers, collaborators, and NRE staff sitting together at committee meetings discussing and interpreting qualitative data, casting evaluative judgements and negotiating about what constitutes a significant change. Feedback from the central executive committee suggests that learning has also occurred in terms of increased skill in conceptualising and capturing impact; over the year the storytellers became better at capturing impact and responding to the suggestions that were provided in the feedback from the story review process.

In total, 26% of the total stories collected deal with outcomes, both intended and unintended, that can be classified as ‘the consequences of change’ (Bennett’s Level 7), which are typically found to be hard to measure and difficult to attribute to project intervention though conventional evaluation methods.

## 7.5 Problems During the Implementation

### Competition

Early in the trial, one of the regional champions brought our attention to the fact that competition amongst storytellers was becoming an issue in her region. At this stage staff were voting for stories at the staff meeting. A situation occurred whereby three stories were selected by the staff team to go to the regional committee, but by accident four stories were sent. The regional committee gave the story that had slipped in by mistake the highest vote. This story also went on to be voted by the CEC. Many people commented that it was a very good story and could not understand why it had not been selected at the staff meeting. It turned out that certain people started voting for their friends' stories, at the expense of others. Things had become quite competitive, and people began to feel pressured. Because of this, voting was subsequently confined to regional committees, and the CEC. At the staff meetings, the stories were shared and commented upon, but no voting occurred.

Some regional committee members became very enthused when they were getting lots of 'winning' stories and disillusioned when their stories didn't get accepted. The competitive factor was a problem in a lot of ways. As an aside – my observations as a non-Australian, and having lived in both Hindu and Muslim cultures are that under an Australian culture, people often dislike processes involving comparison and promotion of individuals above others – and the MSC process is all about comparison! This concept is colloquially named 'the tall poppy syndrome'. It could well be that this was not an issue in the Bangladesh where the approach was developed due to cultural differences.

### Time

Participants frequently lamented that the biggest problem with the MSC process was the amount of time that it consumed before and during meetings. Reading out the stories, discussing and voting for them frequently took over an hour, and occurred at the majority of the meetings of the project. Some felt that this time was justifiable in term of the benefits derived and others did not. This issue is taken up further in the next chapter, in which an evaluation of the MSC model is presented.

## Issues of culture and ethics

Early on in the process, it became clear that the approach advanced by Davies had not focused on issues of ethics and confidentiality of the storytellers. There is a huge omission in the MSC process described by Davies, in that it does not protect the identity of the informant. Perhaps it is telling of the situation of farm families in Bangladesh, that confidentiality of the actors mentioned in the stories was not mentioned as an issue. In fact, in the Bangladesh case the stories were seen to gain credibility because they contained enough information for the storyteller to be located and the story to be verified. When the approach was transposed to Australia, the confidentiality of the stories became paramount. In the application of the MSC process to the Australian context a process was needed:

- whereby people recording stories of their own experience gave and recorded their consent for these stories to be used in evaluation
- whereby people recording stories that involved others, either render the stories anonymous, or seek consent (and record this) from the subjects of the story
- for tracking whether the subjects have given their full consent
- to ensure that the stories are not used as evaluation material in a way which divorces them of context
- for ensuring that stories are not published without going through the project committees and gaining approval from the storyteller
- in which committees have some agreed rules and adhere to them as far as ethics are concerned.

In December 1998, protocols were set in place to deal with issues of confidentiality and ethics. Firstly, a question regarding whether the subjects had granted permission for the story to be used for evaluation was added to the proforma. Those stories that were placed in the booklet *Target 10 Evaluation Stories* were carefully dealt with, and all the subjects who featured in the stories were contacted and their consent sought before distribution. However, there was still much debate about how to protect the identity of subjects in the stories, especially stories that contained some element of negative news.

During the 12-month trial, several people asked whether the stories could be used to place in newsletters or to use as 'good news stories to give to the minister'. From the beginning a rule was

made that no story could be published without the approval of the CEC. However, we continued to debate whether it was ethical to use the stories for purposes other than evaluation. In the end, the ethics code from Market Research Association was followed. This required that no stories collected on the grounds of evaluation could then be used for other purposes. I suggest that if the subject thinks they are giving information for one purpose it is unethical to use it for another.

## **7.6 Conclusions Concerning the Implementation of the MSC Process**

It was possible to implement the MSC process across a large Victorian extension project, albeit in a slightly modified form than that advanced by Davies. A reference group appears to be an important addition to the model, in order to guide the process, and allow it be adapted to the local context. To successfully transpose the approach to a different culture (from a Bangladeshi savings and credit project to Australian extension project) new processes were needed:

1. To get the ball rolling, some pre-implementation activities were needed. These ensured that participants fully understood the process and were willing to become involved.
2. To manage the complex process of collection and selection of stories, people are needed to facilitate and organise the process. One way of doing this was to appoint regional champions, who together form a learning group for the process.
3. A process was needed to gain the consent of the storyteller, and to be able to track this consent.
4. In this Australian context, competitiveness and pressure became an issue that needed careful management. Where possible an environment should be created to minimise unhelpful competition by careful choice of the fora where stories are selected.