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SOUTH PACIFIC COMMISSION

EIGHTEENTH REGIONAL TECHNICAL MEETING ON FISHERIES  
(Noumea, New Caledonia, 4 - 8 August 1986)

THE ROLE OF THE FISHERIES EXTENSION OFFICER  
IN PACIFIC ISLAND COUNTRIES

"Identifying what extension officers do as a basis  
for extension training and professional development programmes."

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(A) INTRODUCTION

1. The nature of extension work is usually a complex set of functions. Extension commonly involves such tasks as the dissemination of information, the provision of advice for the solution of client problems, adult and community education programmes and the promotion of the use of improved technology to achieve institutional and community goals. In many cases extension workers may also have administrative and regulatory roles related to commodity production. Such a multitude of roles may at times conflict with each other and at other times complement each other.

2. With a number of different outcomes (ends) appropriate for extension, different processes (means) may be used. More often than not in human interaction such as extension, ends are implicit while means are explicit. There is a danger that professional development programmes will either focus on means without attention to ends, or to ends without considering effective ways to attain them.

(B) SOME CONCEPTUAL CONSTRAINTS IN TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES

3. In Australia, and I suspect in many other countries, in-service training within departments of agriculture have traditionally focused on teaching skills, while professional development was more commonly left to the individual or to centres for post-graduate study.

4. During the past fifteen years, in line with general emphasis on designing training based on 'needs', changes in approaches to training for extension officers have been adopted. In particular it has been emphasised that training should satisfy the needs of individuals. In practice, training has often focused on external assessment of what those needs should be, and is based on what others think extension activity for an individual is and should be.

5. In a post-graduate research study (Trendell 1983) I showed that what extension officers thought they did was often different from what they actually did and what their peers and clients said they did. As outlined in that study, extension officers were not aware of what they actually did, just what they were attempting to do. Most people do not accurately reflect on their behaviour and its impact on others, also others do not provide accurate feedback when they experience people behaving differently from the way those people say they do.

I will illustrate this situation in the following short case study.

6. An extension officer wanted to achieve an outcome whereby through the use and understanding of budgeting techniques, clients would become more confident decision makers. He used group discussion as a means to achieve this end. The extension officer believed that his behaviour would encourage participation in group discussion and that this would be good for learning. He also believed that some control was necessary to get maximum participation. Other concerns for him included wanting clients to value his knowledge and ability (credibility and confidence). What he actually did in his discussion groups was to control discussion and offer his own views almost to the exclusion of the participation he sought. He was not aware of what he actually did, only what he intended to do. His clients were aware that he wanted to foster group participation in discussion, but they did not tell him that his actions were, in their opinion, inhibiting that discussion. In a discussion with his peers, the extension officer agreed that skills in getting people to participate in group discussion were required and this was in fact what he did. He therefore did not recognise a need for him to develop these skills through training. This case study illustrates the need for extension training not only to incorporate the acquisition of skills, but also feedback on how these skills are applied.

(C) DEFINING TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES.

7. In deciding on appropriate training for extension officers both external and internal assessment approaches are used. An external assessment of extension needs such as will be done at this meeting, will incorporate what the extension officer says he does and what others say he does, from this a list of necessary skills can be generated and then taught in training courses. Needs are developed from what others say an extension officer does (this will also be reflected in what the extension officer says he does) and by established patterns of extension work. In other words what is generally believed to be the role and duties of extension officers.

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TRENDELL B.P. Developing approaches to extension: A study of extension interaction with groups.

Masters Thesis, University of Melbourne, 1983

8. In addition the general fisheries development aims of the organisation are considered.

Figure 1. below refers.

WHAT OTHERS SAY THE  
EXTENSION OFFICER DOES



ESTABLISHED PATTERNS OF  
EXTENSION WORK



GENERAL FISHERIES  
DEVELOPMENT NEEDS



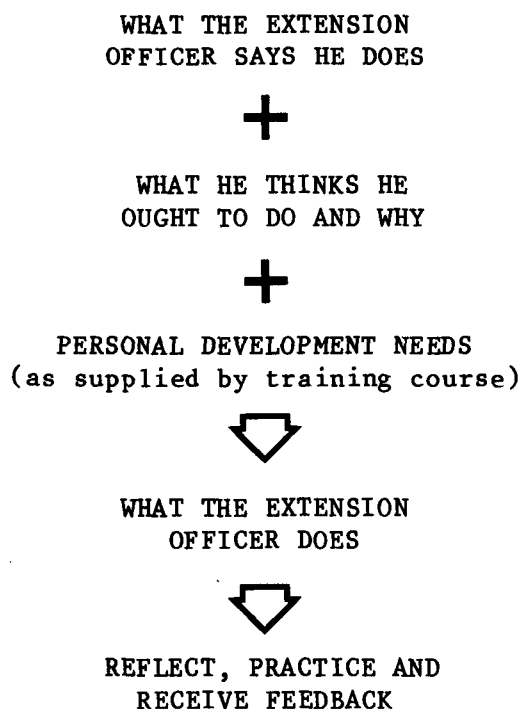
IDENTIFY SKILLS NEEDED  
AND PROVIDE TRAINING

9. I describe this as a training approach. It is an effective way of gaining skills. However, as illustrated in my short case study, an extension officer may not be aware of the need to further develop particular skills because he is not aware that what he believes he is doing is not in actuality what he does.

An internal assessment of needs

10. This is what should be done in the course of conducting extension officers training. This assessment together with accurate feedback of what the extension officer does will provide him with a professional development experience. What the extension officer says he does and what he thinks he ought to do will probably reflect what others say he should do (established patterns of extension work). Personal development needs will be reflected in what the extension officer actually does, or perhaps does not do.

11. Figure 2 An internal assessment of extension needs refers.



I describe this as a "professional development approach".

12. By combining both the training and professional development approaches, it is likely the extension officer will increase his flexibility of approach and understanding. This will enable him to work towards a multitude of ends while using effective ways to obtain them.

Combining external and internal assessments

13. Extension training which recognises the need for and relationship between skills and development is proposed as an effective approach to extension development. This development approach has been used for several years by the Department of Primary Industries in the conduct of training for technical staff from a number of countries including the South Pacific, South-East Asia, and the Indian sub-continent and Africa. It has not only been found to be valid for communication and management training, but has also been successfully applied to training in technical knowledge and skills.

(D) POINTS ON MAKING AN EXTERNAL ASSESSMENT OF SKILLS

14. This meeting will be deciding on the role of the fisheries extension officer in the Pacific and listing the skills he should have to perform his duties, and to do so will be conducting an external assessment of skills as previously indicated. In an external assessment of skills the first matter to be defined is the role of the extension officer and to list his duties. An adequate definition of an officer's role would normally contain these components:

- a. purpose of the job
- b. principal responsibilities
- c. working relationships
- d. client groups
- e. skills checklist (skills required to do the job)

15. When discussing the purpose (and the principal responsibilities of the extension officer's job, the question to be kept in mind is why? Constantly asking this question to each item will help to identify the desired outcome. Statements developed with an orientation towards results (ends) are more motivating than those about the means of achieving the results. Some examples may help to illustrate this point:

	MEANS ORIENTED DEFINITION	RESULTS/ENDS ORIENTED DEFINITION
Purpose of the job	To carry out extension with village fishermen	To increase the effectiveness and efficiency of village fishing industries
Principal responsibilities	To train staff	To ensure that staff have the necessary knowledge and skills to perform their jobs

While the purpose of the job is best defined in terms of ends, skills (other than technical knowledge) will focus on the quality of the means.

Some guidelines for developing skills checklists are listed below and further details on the process are provided in the appendix.

- a. set objectives and brainstorm for skills
- b. develop categories
- c. organise banding of skills within categories.

Once developed, this skills checklist will be used as the basis for the training needs analysis.

(E) POINTS ON MAKING AN INTERNAL ASSESSMENT OF SKILLS

16. The most effective means for a professional development approach is through one-to-one counselling and coaching. However, this is not possible or efficient in practice. However, it can effectively be accomplished in group training sessions, ie. Development Activities.

17. In development activities the course will adopt three stages.

- (a) The extension officers reflect on what they do (or at least say they do), the various activities they use and why. Understanding why is a very important aspect as it is the guide they use for their behaviour.
- (b) The extension officer (after exposure to some skills) will then undertake an exercise with others in the course which includes planning, preparation, conduct and evaluation of a project.
- (c) Progress is reviewed at various stages and feedback of individual performance is provided by personal reflections. Other extension by the officers (who may be acting as clients) and by the trainers. Feedback is presented in terms of the behaviour and maps for that behaviour held by the extension officer.

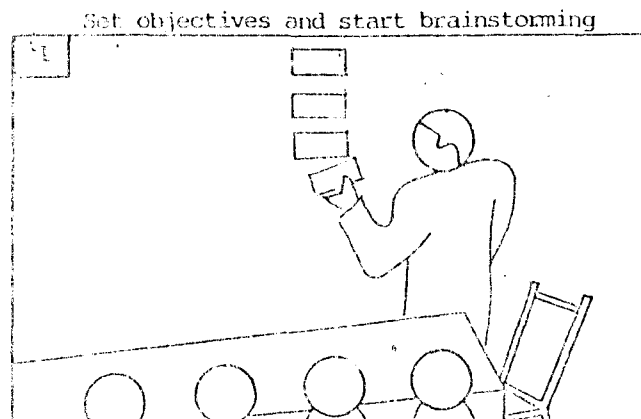
18. The feedback is designed to give personal responses from the group to communications from the extension officer. The belief is that the meaning of communication is the response it gets. As a result of this feedback the extension officer will perceive this need for new knowledge, new skills or updating of those previously taught, and trainers can provide these in appropriate ways.

APPENDIX

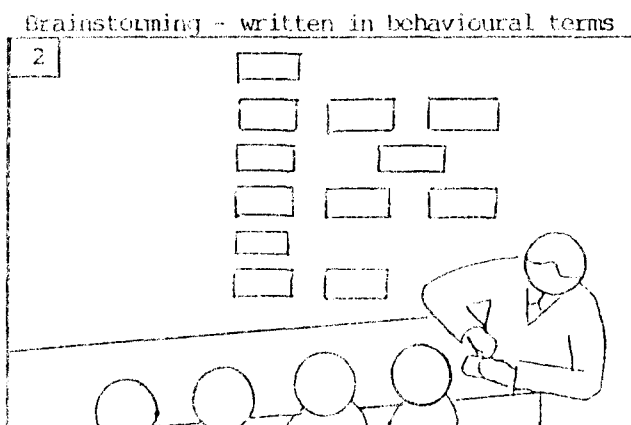
STEPS TAKING WHEN DEVELOPING A SKILLS CHECKLIST

In considering the steps taken to develop the checklist it should be emphasised that the function of the group facilitator is only to record the discussions of the brainstorming group, list the categories and band them strictly as advised by the group. He should take no part in the discussions other than solicit ideas and record them appropriately.

Step 1 The meeting is divided into groups with one facilitator (recorder) for each group. The group initially set the objectives.



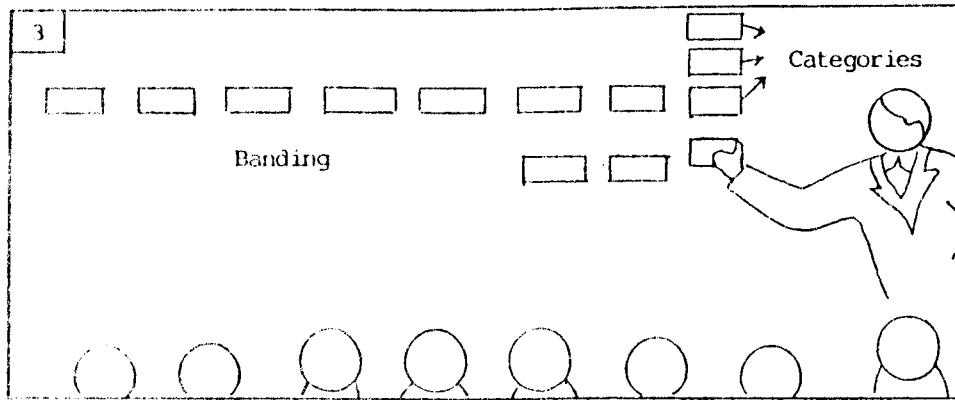
Step 2 Brainstorming - every member of the group gives ideas on what the extension officer does. These are listed (usually on pads of sticky paper) as they occur, by the facilitator - one idea leads to another.





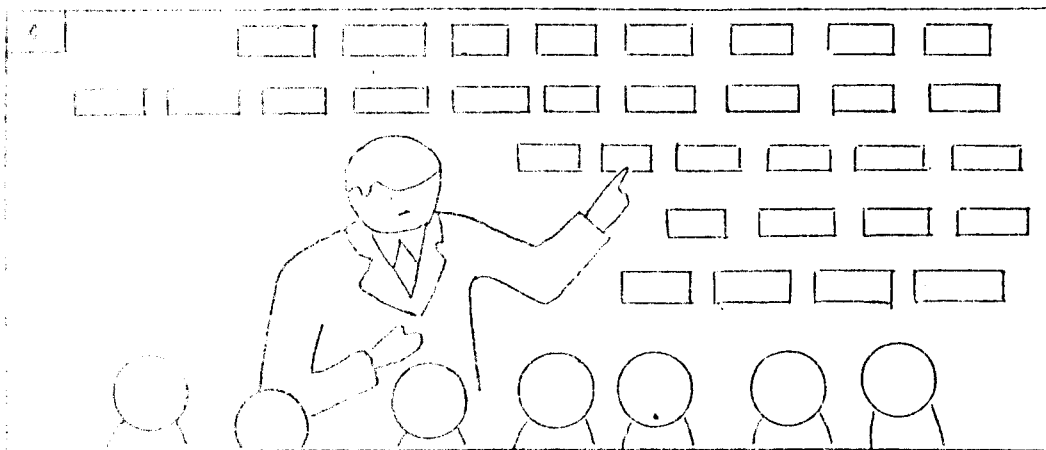
**Step 3** When the brainstorming dries up the group then starts sorting the ideas produced into categories.

Selecting categories



**Step 4** The items in each category (bands) are then organised within in degree of difficulty or time skill is needed.

Organise banding in sequence

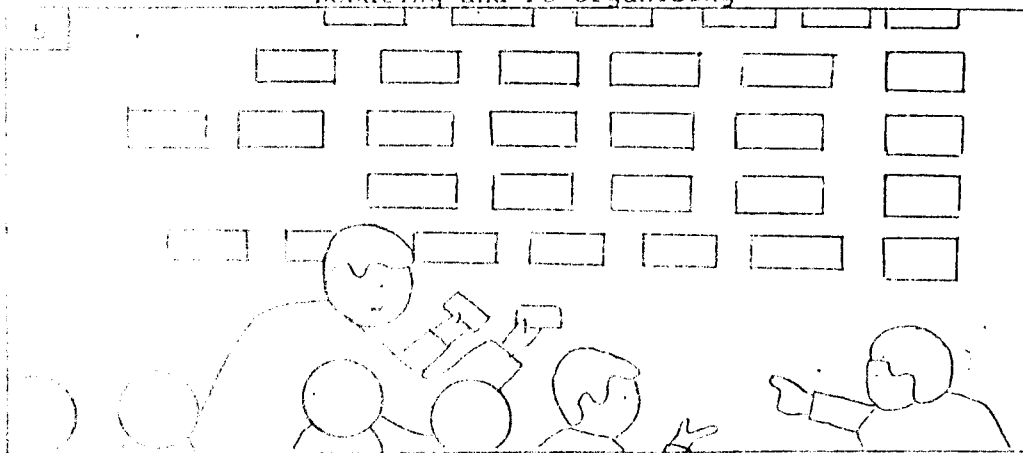


Notes

Bands organised either on degree of difficulty or time skill is needed.

**Step 5** The group considers the complete analysis and reorganises any items it considers necessary.

Debating and re-organising



Two examples of the results of this type of skills check list sometimes called a DACUM analysis are shown on the conference notice board.