



EXTENSIONNET

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“Managing change – building knowledge and skills” Further Followup

FORMS OF EVALUATION FOR AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION

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Review of Forms of Evaluation

The paper that I presented at the conference outlined the findings of a RIRDC sponsored Review of Evaluation in Agricultural Extension in Australia. The study was conceived in the context of an increase in the demand for material that could be used to train agricultural extension agents and other rural professionals in the field of program evaluation. Since then, Review has gone to RIRDC for possible publication.

For the Review, we collected and analysed over a 100 evaluation documents from rural extension centres, universities and agriculture departments in various states, and private consultants and individuals in Australia. We found that there are some very able and experienced evaluators active in the field of program evaluation in agriculture, and the case studies in the Review reflect the diversity and creativity in this field. However, during the course of the Review many extension agents and managers expressed a lack of knowledge, skills and confidence in this area. Also, we found that much of the existing evaluation practice in

extension is based around a few rather limited approaches and methods such as mail surveys and cost-benefit analysis, with little reference to developments and trends in program evaluation in other disciplines. Nevertheless, we did find strong indications that the range of approaches to evaluation in agricultural extension is expanding. A number of new and innovative evaluations are under way that are more formative and qualitative than has been the norm in the past.

While carrying out the Review we experienced some difficulty in finding well - documented examples of some types of program evaluation, such as formal systems of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) which operate throughout the life of a program. However, the published literature on M&E covers just one part of the lived experience: only the information that authors choose to write about comes into the public domain; other potentially valuable information often remains unrecorded and hidden. It could well be that practitioners do not fully realise the



Jessica Dart, Co Host of the Email Group Exteval

value of their experiences for others in similar situations.

Patton (1993) identifies the lack of evaluation as a frequent weakness of extension activities, and Woods et al, (1993) stress that key future strategies for rural extension workers include regular monitoring and evaluation of extension programs. So, a key lesson from the paper is that we need to improve our on-going systems of M&E for extension programs and document these experiences so that others can learn from them. In fact, a large proportion of the evaluation documents that we analysed were

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Conference Proceedings Available – see page 10

APEN'S COMING OF AGE



*Michael Taylor,
Secretary,
Natural Resources
and Environment*



Natural Resources
and Environment

- AGRICULTURE
- RESOURCES
- CONSERVATION
- LAND MANAGEMENT


Natural Resources and Environment (NRE) and previously Agriculture Victoria, has proudly sponsored APEN since its inception.

As a fledgling organisation, APEN needed support to achieve its goals as a professional association; goals which were then, as they are now, complementary to those of the Department. The relevance of APEN to NRE and to extension in Victoria is reflected in the active membership by many NRE staff and the early formation of APEN chapters in this state (Melbourne, Gippsland, Western Victoria and the NE Victoria-Riverina). However, the most compelling reason for NRE's on-going support for APEN is that effective extension is vital to enable us to achieve our outcomes for Government.

Outcomes of increased productivity and sustainable resource use are dependent on influencing the behavior of the people who manage those resources. Extension has its impact through helping people to develop new skills, knowledge and confidence, to adopt relevant technology and practices, and to develop as individuals and communities. To do this, the "tool box" available to modern extension workers needs to include much more than it did in the past. Gone are the days of the sole operator, equipped with technical expertise, a car and a telephone, whose main "tools" were farm visits, field days and the local press to achieve the desired results. Today, the complex economic and environmental issues facing rural Australia mean that those in extension work in teams and require skills in group facilitation, adult learning techniques, market research, and more. They must have an understanding of the whole system, the rural community and sustainability.

The change agents need to continually respond to change, to adapt and be more innovative. For example, the push for increasing accountability and continuous improvement means that skills in program evaluation are now a must for extension. The trend towards fewer, bigger projects (NRE delivers outcomes for government by investing in major projects) means there is more likelihood of extension and research teams being integrated to achieve desired results. For the same reason, there is more opportunity for public and private sector extension people to work closely together towards common objectives.

APEN has now "come of age" as a professional network. It has a sound membership base, has organised successful national and international conferences and is continuing to deliver benefits to its members. APEN provides a vehicle for extension professionals to share experiences and continue to refine their understanding and skills.

I wish APEN continued success in extending the horizons of the change agent. 

From the Editor

Elwin Turnbull, University of Western Sydney, Hawkesbury.

In this edition some of the more popular sessions at the conference have been followed up by the presenters to let us know what happened at the conference and some of the follow up activities which have commenced. There has been such a good response to my request for follow up comments that there was no space for reporting on the conference evaluation in any detail. Suffice to say the conference was formally evaluated and 174 delegates (60%) completed the survey. The responses were generally highly complimentary about the success of the conference. Some constructive suggestions were made to help future organisers. The conference organising committee has a written report. If you are interested in the detail of the evaluation please contact Peter Davies or myself.

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found to be conducted when the programs were well established, or when they were already finished. The clients of the program (usually farmers) were not generally involved in developing the indicators for the evaluation. The most common aim of evaluation was to provide a report to justify spending and to understand whether the stated objectives of the program had been met.

I personally believe that we can benefit more from evaluations that are conducted when the program is still progressing, so that the findings can be used to improve programs as well as to *prove* that outcomes have been met. I also advocate evaluation that involves the field staff and farmers in deciding what gets measured in the evaluation.

E-mail Discussion Group Exteval

One of the things that came up during discussion at the conference was the need to form a forum to debate various approaches to evaluation and to support each other in evaluating extension programs in a meaningful way. Consequently I have set up an E-mail listserver called exteval for this purpose. To subscribe to EXTEVAL, send an e-mail message to Mailserv@unimelb.edu.au with the following in the message:

Subscribe exteval {your name}

To send a message to all the people currently subscribed to this list, just send mail to:

exteval@unimelb.edu.au

This discussion group is aimed at people who are interested in how to evaluate agricultural extension programs. It is aimed at extension in Australia, but anyone is welcome to join. The group is hosted by myself in conjunction with Bruce Frank from the School of Natural & Rural Systems Management, at the University of Queensland. The idea

to set up this discussion group was conceived at the Australasian evaluation conference in Adelaide (1997) and a further meeting was held at the APEN conference Albury in November 1997.

The Aims of the Email Group Exteval are:

- To give mutual support to each other to help evaluate projects and programs in agricultural extension
- To ask questions about appropriate approaches and methods of evaluation for particular contexts and to give advice to each other.
- To alert group members of new or relevant literature concerning evaluation of extension
- To alert group members to training opportunities in evaluation appropriate for extension programs

Future Proposals

Since the APEN conference I have been planning to start testing some innovative forms of participatory evaluation. I also now part an evaluation pilot team in the Victorian Department of Natural Resources and Environment (Primary Industries), and we are busy working with some of the major projects in further developing their evaluation plans. At the next APEN conference I hope to present some of these novel approaches to evaluation, which by then should have been tried and tested!

References

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ALBURY '97 – MAKING MEMORIES (Reflections from a Yank)

Mike Murray

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It has been four months since I had the opportunity of joining many of you at the 2nd Australasia Pacific Conference in Albury. I enjoyed meeting and interacting with the extension staff from throughout the country and region. We do not have similar conferences in California or the US, so it was a new experience for me. I saw some real energy and enthusiasm about being an extension professional in the many exchanges of ideas and information. When I received a request to prepare a short abstract of my presentation at the APEN Conference, 'A Contrast of the Australian and California Extension and Technology Transfer Processes', I readily accepted. In a relatively short space, I will review my paper and identify how I am attempting to use some of the ideas I learned down under to address issues in California extension. Interested readers who may want to discuss some aspect in greater detail may contact the author at mmurray@ucdavis.edu.

The paper broadly generalized individual Australian and California's extension programs. The organizational missions or objectives were defined and characterized. The University of California extension program has three major characteristics: it is delivered by academic staff through the Land Grant College, which anchors it firmly to a University research base; the extension programs are delivered through local county offices and receive financial

support from that county government. This insures that extension remains responsive to local issues or problems; and California extension advisors conduct significant amounts of applied research to demonstrate improved production practices or identify solutions to local problems. We see an important function of extension as helping people solve problems and demonstrating field applications of improved technology.

Generalizations of the Australian programs included: providing extension services through state departments of agriculture, with no formal linkages to the universities; separate administrative units for extension and applied research functions; purchaser/provider approaches to funding extension programs; a move from one-on-one services toward group facilitation and organization; a more "sociological approach" toward extension (ie: a consideration of the impacts of agricultural decisions or actions on other parts of society or the ecosystem); an emphasis on developing high-quality learning materials to substitute for reduced extension staffing; an organizational ethic that says sometimes the best thing that can be done is "to help a bloke make a graceful exit from farming"; and trends toward cost recovery, fee-for-service or privatization of extension functions.

These sort of contrasts precipitate differences in the way the respective organizations view the appropriate role of public extension. However, we also have similarities: both systems are experiencing decreased

public funding, with no relief in sight.

This leads to personnel problems such as recruitment or retention of the very best staff; and, Australian and California's extension programs are in the midst of drastic organizational changes and re-definition and we must be receptive to new ways of thinking about extension. Part of this process is a critical examination of all of the potential sources for funding or cost recovery, within the constraints of the organizational mission.

California extension is currently going through **significant organizational and ideological changes**. Two of the issues are: reductions in resources or, perhaps more accurately, reallocations of resources. We clearly have an increasingly urban population and, if we are to continue being relevant, need to deliver educational programs that are appropriate for this clientele group; and, while cost recovery has not caught-on yet, organizational expectations and career advancement criteria encourage the generation of external support monies. The end result is less time to conduct programs and more time devoted to chasing or justifying dollars.

Recently, I was involved in planning and conducting a workshop on 'Cost recovery and Revenue Enhancement' for California extension staff. Thirty-five advisor or managerial staff participated and there is another session scheduled for later in 1998.

One of the case-studies was based on organizational differences between Australian, US Land Grant and California extension programs. The objective was to challenge the participants to examine the goals and missions of the respective extension organizations to determine if cost recovery, etc., is consistent with the organizational mission. It appears that some of the cost recovery mechanisms observed in Australia may be applicable to California extension as well, but it is important to closely scrutinize how their adoption might impact the ability of extension to meet its mandate.

Based on comments from participants at the workshop, there is considerable interest by the extension staff in becoming "part of the solution", as California extension re-defines itself. There was discussion of forming a workgroup dedicated to looking at opportunities for the revenue enhancement of local extension programs. However, the conversations that occurred as we considered our core values and organizational mandates were equally helpful and can, potentially, be of value to our senior administration. I feel that we need to be very careful as we fine-tune this delicate concept known as public extension and can learn from each others successes and challenges. There are many lessons that come out of the collective Australian state extension programs that we can apply to our own odyssey and it appears that APEN might serve as a conduit for that information exchange. **I look forward to continuing the dialog.**



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THE ROLE OF FARMER KNOWLEDGE IN GROUP LEARNING: Observations from Prograze and Landcare case studies

Jo Millar, Department of Natural Resources & Environment, Wangaratta, Victoria

About the Conference Paper:

The conference paper explored the role of farmer knowledge in group learning using case studies of a Landcare and Prograze group, where group activity was focused upon building knowledge and skills for sustainable pasture management. Participant observation and group interviewing were used to examine;

- how farmer knowledge and experience was drawn upon and valued;
- factors influencing this process, and;
- the interaction of scientific and local knowledge in furthering individual and group learning.

In the Prograze course, farmer knowledge enabled scientific principles to be applied to real farm situations, thereby increasing understanding and shared meaning among participants and advisors. In the Landcare study, local knowledge was the driving force behind learning about pasture management in a practical, holistic sense. However, research findings suggest farmer knowledge can remain dormant unless critical factors in group learning and development are addressed. These include experiential learning using integrated information, with effective facilitation that fosters group autonomy and builds ongoing relationships and learning opportunities (as shown in the following figure).

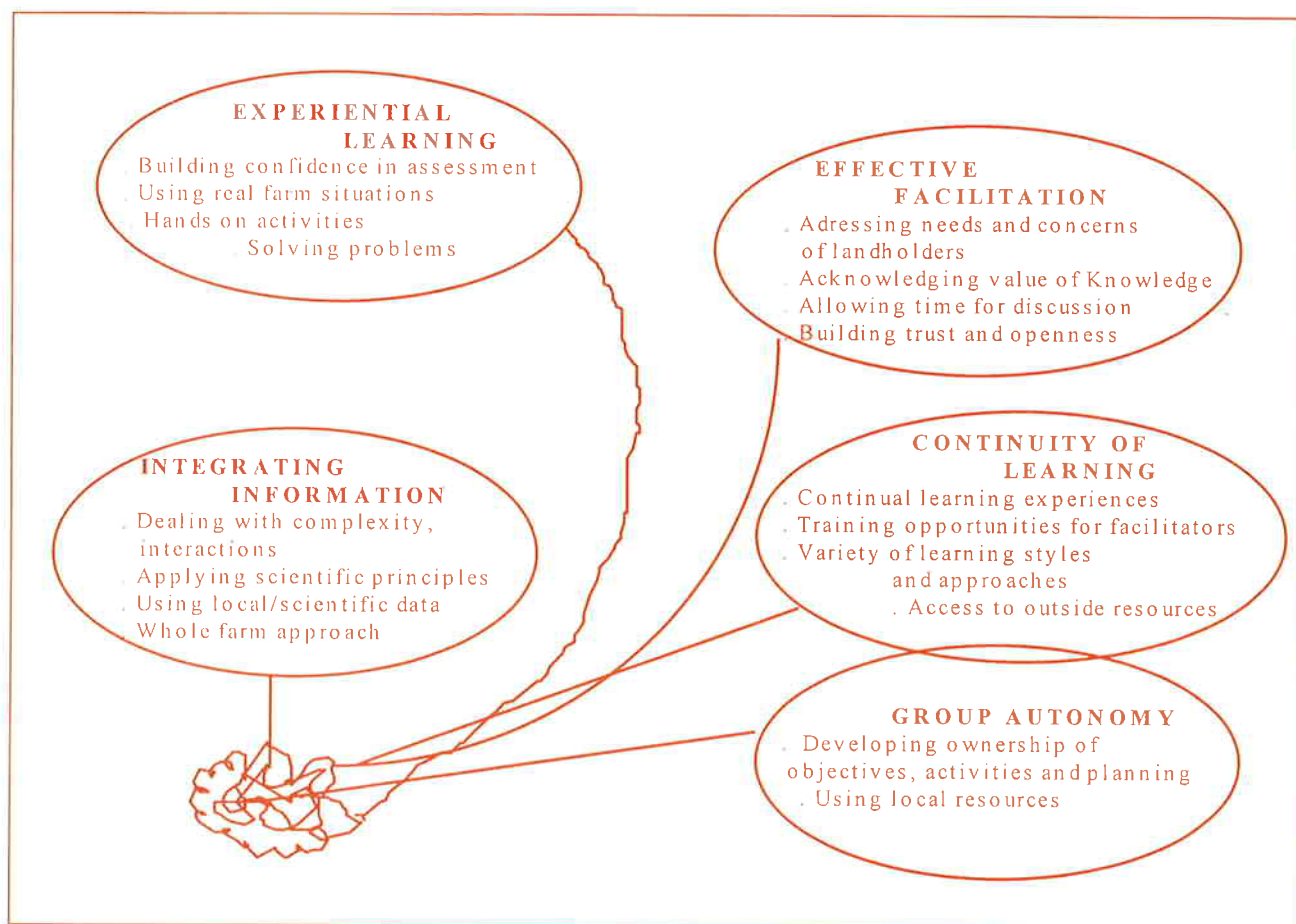


Figure - Critical elements in valuing and using farmer knowledge

Points of Interest Raised:

There was a general agreement that the critical elements identified were important principles in adult learning and community development. Questions centred on how to support groups in addressing all these factors simultaneously and

avoiding overemphasis on certain processes (eg effective facilitation to the exclusion of developing ownership OR experiential learning without integrating information). Another issue raised was how to cater for a wider range of groups and individuals in society in terms of building their capacity for social learning and implementing change. Do groups such as Landcare and Prograze attract the informed few? Therefore, are we neglecting the wider knowledge held in rural or urban communities?

Further Development of Issues:

I would like to invite comment and discussion from readers on whether the factors identified in this study relate to their experiences and observations in working with groups. In particular, I would be interested in developing the capacity of extension practitioners to put these principles into practice. For example, to observe and reflect on the value and potential of local knowledge using participatory methodologies such as group interviewing, rapid appraisals and mapping exercises. This can be built into project evaluation, extension training and networking opportunities.



“WHATEVER HAPPENED TO EXTENSION?” From agricultural extension to consultancy in New Zealand

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This article gives a quick summary of the Conference paper, followed by an “update” on how our thoughts on these issues have since evolved.

What Happened?

Before 1984, government extension aimed at farmers was provided free of charge by MAF’s Advisory Services Division (MAF-ASD). MAF-ASD was seen to play an essential role in achieving the government’s objective of increased agricultural production. Its focus, therefore, was on technology transfer, adoption and diffusion. In its heyday (the beginning of the 1980s) MAF-ASD employed around 450 advisors, who made extensive use of mass media such as field days. In June 1984, the Labour party won the election and took over from the National party of Sir Robert Muldoon. Many of the policies adopted by the Labour government were based on the philosophy of “user pays”, that is: the person, group or organisation who benefits from a good or service, should pay for it. If unwilling to pay, the production and marketing of that good or service should cease. With this principle in mind, the government started to look at MAF-

ASD and asked the question: “why should the tax payer pay for a service that is geared towards only a small proportion of society?”.

In 1986 it was announced that MAF-ASD would “go commercial” as MAFTech. MAFTech introduced part charging for its advisory services in 1987. By 1990, full commercial charging was realized. In 1991, MAFTech changed its name to Agriculture New Zealand (AgNZ). AgNZ was sold off to Wrightson Ltd (a publicly listed stock and station agency) in the beginning of 1995.

Staff numbers have gone down dramatically over the years. Whereas MAF-ASD employed over 400 advisors in the early 1980s, AgNZ currently employs around 90 consultants. Many of those who left, established themselves as private consultants. Currently, around half of AgNZ’s total revenue comes directly from on-farm consultancy. The other half is generated by projects for third-parties, such as the facilitation of monitor farms for the Meat Research and Development Council (MRDC).

Consultants’ Views on the Change Process

For our research, we interviewed people who worked as MAF-ASD advisors in the 1980s, and who now work as private consultants (be it with AgNZ, another firm, or on their own). We will highlight a few results from these interviews, but refer back to our paper in the APEN Conference Proceedings for a more extensive overview.

Most interviewees, but not all, were surprised by the direction and initial speed of the developments of the mid-1980s. They found it hard, at the time, to believe that the government would actually stop funding agricultural extension. Many developed a repertoire of reasons and arguments why the government would continue its funding, such as: “the government needs us to get agricultural research out” and “we can demonstrate that we work hard, so we’ll be right” (later, when the emphasis shifted from output to outcome, replaced by: “we can demonstrate that we achieve real change, so we’ll be right”).

Once the wheels of change were set in motion, and the privatisation and commercialisation process started, many interviewees felt confused and frustrated. Our interviews were filled with comments like: “we didn’t know who to charge, for what and how much”, “the people in management positions had no idea how to run it as a business”, “I brought in the money to keep two or three others in a job”. Many felt that they were left in the dark about what was happening, and that a clear direction and vision for the company was lacking. And many interviewees referred to MAF-ASD and MAFTech as “top-heavy” but short on business management experience.

Current Issues (our personal views)

In this section we present some of the “positive” and “negative” aspects of the current extension/consultancy system in New Zealand. We see four distinct positive consequences of the privatisation and commercialisation exercise. First, there are significant savings for the tax payer (MAF used to spend over 20 million NZ\$ each year on extension). Second, there is more accountability and clarity in the system as consultants are exposed to market forces and paid according to actual performance.

Third, it is our impression that the client focus has improved. Consultants have to assess carefully what clients want, need and expect, and they have to deliver according to their criteria. As a consequence, the farmers who make use of a consultant probably get a better service. Fourth, we believe that asking clients to pay for advice actually increases the likelihood of that advice being taken up and put into practice.

Besides these positives, we see three distinct negative consequences of what has happened. First of all, the information exchange between the actors of the “Knowledge and Information System” has suffered. Consultants are often reluctant to share information with other consultants: they try to get an edge over competitors by establishing their own niche and keeping information and “tools of the trade” close to their chest. Furthermore, the contacts that consultants have with research are under threat as research in New Zealand is being commercialised and there is less scope for informal contact and collaboration. And last, but not least, consultants sometimes even loose out on information from clients (and many consultants view their clients are an extremely valuable source of information).

When clients pay per hour, it might be hard for the consultant to get access to information that doesn’t directly relate to the issue being tackled in a farm visit.

Second, it can be very hard to get into a consultancy job. MAF used to be, in the old days, a good training ground that allowed new advisors to steadily grow into the job, and to develop confidence and skills. Nowadays, new staff are under much more pressure, with high expectations and little scope for learning through trial and error. To complicate things even further, it may take three years for a consultancy firm to reach a break-even point with a new consultant straight from university. As many firms are small, the risk of failure is often too great. Consequently we believe that, although existing client demand might warrant an increase in consultant numbers, not enough fresh blood (and ideas, questions, creativity and challenges that come along with it) flows into the agricultural consultancy sector.

Third and last, extension as a government instrument to communicate with farmers and to induce behaviour change is gone. Just as financial incentives are gone. We believe these developments are a major concern. It makes sense to

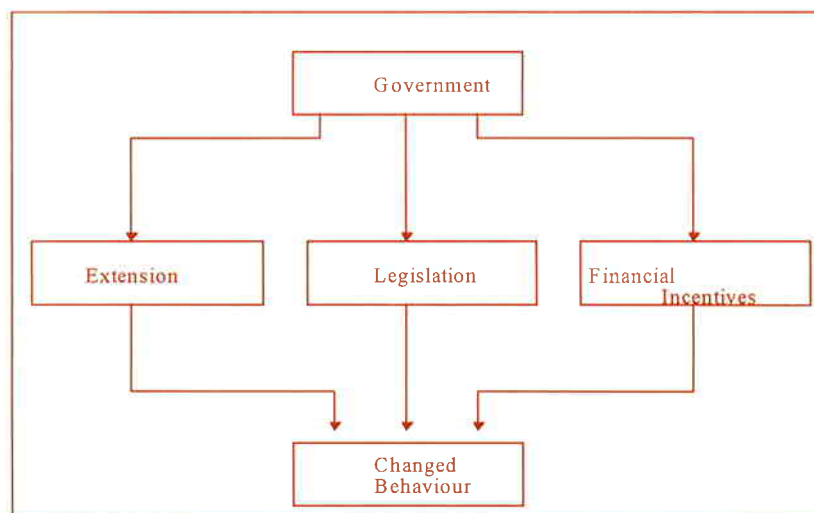


Figure: Extension in an integrated mix of policy instruments aimed at changing behaviour.

commercialise advice which has farmers as the primary or sole benefactors, such as advice on how to increase production and/or productivity. As much of the advice given in the beginning of the 1980s was of this type, the move from extension to consultancy in this era was understandable. But times have changed, and many important issues have since emerged that go beyond the farm gate and affect the wider community, such as sustainability, animal welfare, health and safety.

On these “public good” issues there is a real need for direct and extensive communication with farmers. But the central and regional governments tend to, with extension and subsidies gone, rely on legislation in order to achieve desired changes in farmers’ behaviour. We believe it is

dangerous to concentrate on legislation, without extension to create problem awareness, to develop government policy, to explain the rational behind new policies, and to give farmers the motivation and skills to deal with problems. A top-down “stick approach” often leads to annoyed and angry farmers, and a deteriorating relationship between rural communities and governing bodies. As much behaviour on the farm is easy to legislate but extremely hard to control, the actual results of the “legislate it” approach might be only a fraction of what can be achieved with a policy that integrates legislation, extension and (maybe even) financial incentives. Having said this, recently the interest of regional government in the use of extension as a policy instrument is growing.

Conclusion

The title of the conference paper mentioned a paradigm lost, and one regained. During the discussions at the workshop someone stated that he could clearly see a paradigm lost (that of government paid extension provided by civil servants), but also asked us to clarify which paradigm emerged from this major loss. We certainly feel **there are some unresolved issues** created by the uprooting of MAF’s extension service (such as lack of ongoing communication between government and farmers and the problems this can cause), but we also feel that **it has created exciting new opportunities for those, once working for the government**, to go out on their own and provide a profit generating consultancy service. ✪

THE WHOLE BRAIN APPROACH

Kerry Cochrane, Orange Agricultural College, University of Sydney.

Background on the Ideas

The Herrmann Brain Dominance profile is a metaphor developed by Ned Herrmann to understand differences in people particularly in relation to right brain left brain thinking. Participants in a Brain Dominance Workshop fill out a 120 question questionnaire prior to receiving a print out similar to that illustrated below.

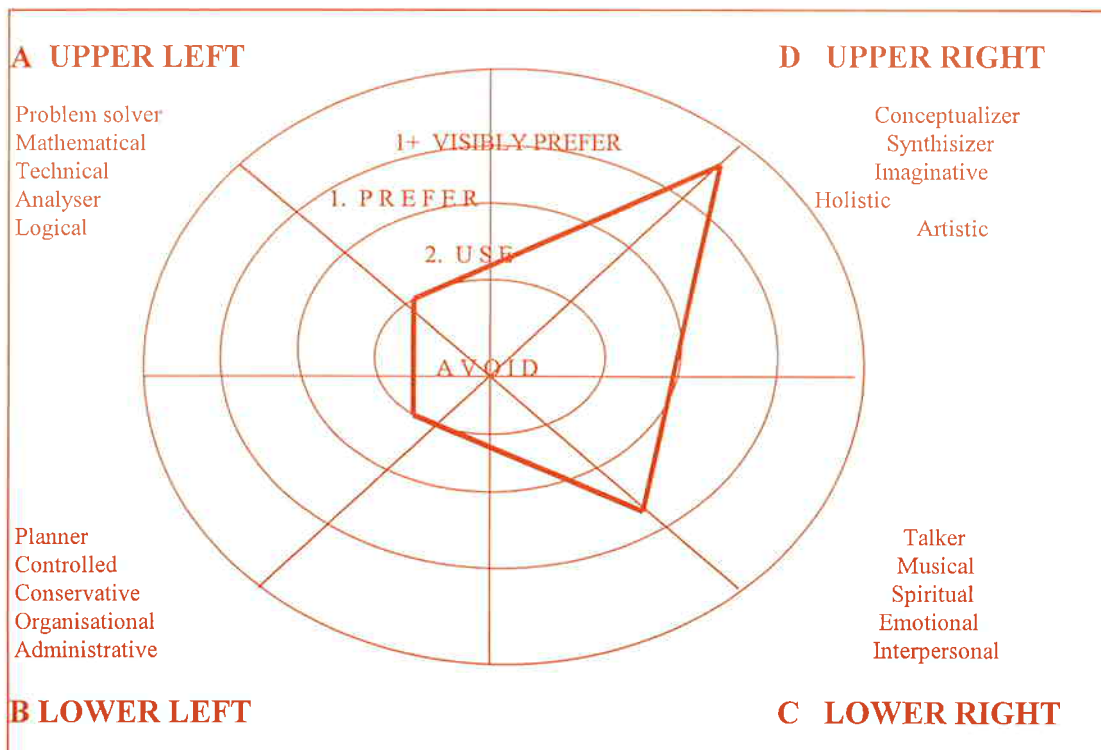


Figure - Characteristics of Dominance in the D Quadrant (Herrmann, 1988)