



SUMERNET 4 All

Most Significant Change (MSC)

Technique Guideline





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Most Significant Change (MSC) Technique Guideline

for

Supported Partners under SUMERNET 4 All

This document serves as a general guideline for implementing Most Significant Change (MSC) Technique required for supported projects under SUMERNET 4 All. For more details on MSC Technique, please refer to Davies and Dart (2005), link given below.

A. Definition

The Most Significant Change technique is a qualitative and participatory form of monitoring and evaluation based on the collection and systematic selection of stories of reported behavioral changes as result from development activities.

B. Benefit

1. It is an effective tool for identifying behavioral change.
2. It is a good means in identifying unexpected change.
3. It is a good way to clearly identify the values that prevail in an organization and to have a practical discussion about which of those values is the most important.
4. It is a participatory form of monitoring that requires no special professional skills. Compared to other monitoring approaches, it is easy to communicate across cultures. There is no need to explain what an indicator is. Everyone can tell stories about events they think were important.
5. It encourages analysis as well as data collection because people have to explain why they believe one change is more important than another.
6. It can build staff capacity in analyzing data and conceptualizing impact.
7. It can deliver a rich picture of what is happening, rather than an overly simplified picture where organizational, social and economic developments are reduced to a single number.
8. It can be used to monitor and evaluate bottom-up initiatives that do not have predefined outcomes against which to evaluate.

C. Process

1. Identify target stakeholders or *boundary partners*.

Boundary partners are those individuals, groups, or organizations with whom the programme interacts directly and with whom the programme can anticipate opportunities for influence. These actors are called boundary partners because, even though the program will work with them to effect change, it does not control them. The power to influence development rests with them. In the case of SUMERNET 4

All, boundary partners are most-likely policy stakeholders whom you intend to directly engage to influence relevant policy processes. They could be stakeholders from government, private/commercial companies, and civil society. In the MSC survey, select most accessible and strategic boundary partners.

2. Determine the domain of change

Domains are broad and often fuzzy categories of possible significant change stories. A domain of change is not an indicator; it is defined broadly to allow people to have different interpretations of what constitutes a change in that area. In the case of SUMERNET 4 ALL, our domain of interest is the policy influence by your project as follow up of your research and policy engagement activities with the respective boundary partner.

3. Define reporting period

Most applications of MSC have been as a form of monitoring. Monitoring involves periodic collection of information, but the frequency of monitoring varies across programs and organizations. In this SUMERNET 4 ALL, depending on the scope of expected change, the reporting period ranges from 6 - 12 months.

4. Collecting significant change stories

The central part of MSC is asking open-ended questions to boundary partners. There are various ways to formulate the questions, however in this conference support programme, the suggested key questions are as follows:

1. "Thinking back about when you start to involve in our project, since *[period]* months ago, what do you think has been the most significant change in your personal and professional aspects as a result of your involvement?"
2. "Why do you feel that change is most significant?"

Since our domain of change focuses on policy influence, please add the third question:

3. "Please mention any influence of our project on your work due to our engagement"

Since the stories will need to be supported by information about the respondent and collection specific information (name, designation/role, institution, country, date of collection, place, etc.), will be also required to be collected. Please consider using the suggested MSC Questionnaire template enclosed with this guideline. The collection of the survey can be done in various ways, through face-to-face interviews, email responses, phone calls, or other appropriate means which will better ensure the response.

5. Formulate the stories

From the collection of responses from the key questions, the information is then arranged into stories. The stories should be written in a personal way as if the person him/herself wrote the stories. The following are two examples of the MSC stories:

Example 1

“In the past year that I’ve been involved with your team, the most significant change is in my capacity as a researcher. I became much more familiar with wetland ecosystems in dry deciduous forests in Cambodia and Vietnam. I also have new working relationships with colleagues in Cambodia and Vietnam which will be very useful for me in my future work.

(Mr. T, Director of Research Institute Vietnam, 20 November 2019)

Example 2

“The lessons from the project are useful for my work. In my work in this district, I can use the knowledge when we develop the investment plan, which is now underway. The investment strategic plan elaborated on where we should have factories, agriculture, livestock raising, and where to develop irrigation system. We are now developing the five-year socio-economic development plan. We are now making a village plan for the pilot villages. Lessons from this project can be used when we develop the village plan. There are currently two villages that the village plans are being completed. Later on, it will be expanded to other villages”.

(Ms. L, Planning division of Luang Namtha District, Lao PDR, 18 March 2018).

6. Verify stories

Since formulation of stories is done by you, it is useful to have another step which purpose is to confirm accuracy of your perception of the feedback by the respondent. The way to verify is simply by sharing the draft story to respective respondent and request their confirmation whether the story reflects correctly on their actual feelings. Consequently, respondent may also suggest modification of his/her story. Nevertheless, due to possible time constraints, it is left to the discretion of the organizer on the need for this verification process.

Sources:

Davies, J. and J. Dart. 2005. *The ‘Most Significant Change’ (MSC) Technique - A Guide to Its Use*. CARE International. United Kingdom. Available online at: <http://www.mande.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2005/MSCGuide.pdf>. Retrieved on: 22 May 2014.

Serrat, O. 2009. *The Most Significant Change Technique*. Knowledge Solutions. Asian Development Bank. Available online at: <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/27613/most-significant-change.pdf>. Retrieved on: 15 January 2020.

Most Significant Change Questionnaire *[Suggested template]*

Date :
Name :
E-mail :
Organisation :
Position :

Please answer the following questions:

1. Thinking back about when you start to involve in our project, since **[period]** months ago, what do you think has been the most significant change in your personal and professional aspects as a result of your involvement??

2. Why is this change significant to you?

3. Please mention any influence of our project on your work due to our engagement?

Thank you very much for your valuable reflection

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