

Storytelling provides a powerful means to obtain information on a project's outcomes from participants' experiences and viewpoints. Storytelling provides meaningful information that can highlight both the strong points and weaknesses of a project, as well as any unintended consequences. In a way, by asking participants to provide a story on a project, it asks them to evaluate an aspect of a project, rather than provide information for someone else to place a value on, storytelling generally brings out memorable or momentous experiences.

Storytelling has a number of benefits including:

- Understanding the project from the viewpoint of the participants
- Reflects the importance of context and its impact on outcomes
- Allows the identification of unintended consequences
- Provides a means to engage participants in evaluation.

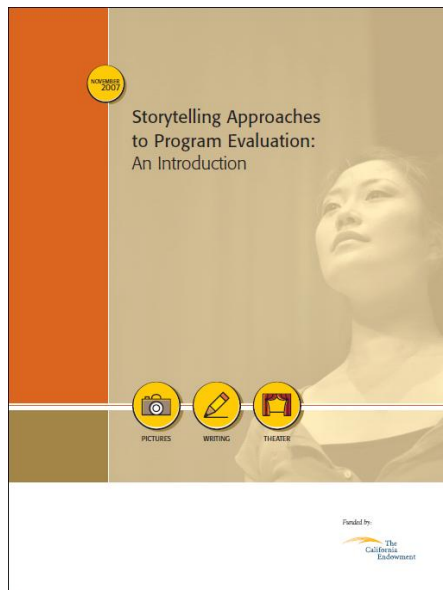
Excerpts from stories can be used alongside graphs or in reports to provide a first person voice as to a project's impact.

The **Most Significant Change** is methodology to collect, analyse and evaluate stories that is increasingly being used in evaluating projects both in Australia and overseas.

Stories can be collected through blog postings on a project's website. For example, the Zero Carbon Moreland project have a webpage of [participants' stories](#) .

[Appreciative Inquiry](#) is a form of research that looks at investigating a project's positive outcomes in order to understand and replicate these rather than looking to understand why a project has not worked.

The [California Endowment's Storytelling Approaches to Program Evaluation: An Introduction provides a guide to other storytelling approaches](#) .



THE MOST SIGNIFICANT CHANGE

The Most Significant Change (MSC) is a method of participatory evaluation that involves the collection of significant change stories at different levels of the intervention (for example project staff, change agents, intervention participants) and collectively deciding on the most significant change stories based on selected themes (called domains). The domains reflect broad categories, such as change in capacity to take action, or a change in participation in an activity, as well as lessons learned.

MSC has its roots in the overseas development field but is becoming more widely used in community development and behaviour change interventions in Australia.

[Davies and Dart](#) (2005) list the following benefits from using the MSC method:

- It is a good means of identifying unexpected changes.
- It is a good way to clearly identify the values that prevail in an organisation and to have a practical discussion about which of those values are the most important.
- 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.

- It encourages analysis as well as data collection because people have to explain why they believe one change is more important than another.
- It can build staff capacity in analysing data and conceptualising impact.
- It can deliver a rich picture of what is happening, rather than an overly simplified picture where organisational, social and economic developments are reduced to a single number.
- It can be used to monitor and evaluate bottom-up initiatives that do not have predefined outcomes against which to evaluate.

Pros and cons of MSC

Pros	Cons
Participatory process of evaluation	Requires all stakeholders to participate
Focus on learning and process	May require training in MSC
Can capture unintended consequences	Time consuming

Requirements

- A person to lead and coordinate the MSC process
- People to collect stories. This can involve having one or two people collecting stories, or getting participants to record stories from one another. Alternatively, you could ask people to write their own stories.
- Ways to record stories of change - digital voice recorder, or film (remember that you must seek all participant's approval prior to recording) or notepaper/template. You can also complement this by photography or images of change, taken by the storytellers.
- A document tracking sheet to record who has provided a story, and what stories are classified as most significant.

Process

The following provide a guide on using the MSC technique:

[MSC Quick Start Guide](#) [The Most Significant Change Technique User Guide](#) [Australian Government Land and Coasts Developing a Performance Story Report](#)

Quick-Start Guide

A self-help guide for implementing the Most Significant Change technique (MSC)

Jessica Dart & Rick Davies
October 2005

This aim of this guide is to help groups design an MSC system for their programme or project. The guide splits MSC design into 9 steps. Each step is described, then some questions are asked in relation to the step. Hopefully, answering these questions will help your group develop an appropriate MSC process. This document was designed to be used as part of a one-day training workshop in MSC – it was not intended to be a stand-alone document. But please feel free to copy this document, just acknowledge Dart and Davies as the authors and please let us know how it can be improved by contacting Jessa Dart, jessadart@carifund.org.au.

Overview of MSC

MSC involves the collection and systematic participatory interpretation of stories of significant change. Unlike conventional approaches to monitoring, MSC does not employ quantitative indicators, but is a qualitative approach.

The MSC approach was originally developed by Rick Davies through his work with a participatory rural development project in Bangladesh in 1984. It has since been adapted and widely promoted by Jessica Dart in Australia. Information about the MSC approach has also been made available globally through a MSC approach internal discussion group set up in 2000, which now has more than 125 members. Access to the mailing list and papers concerning the work of Rick, Jessica and others can be found at 2000discussion.org.au/mostsignificantchange.htm.

In 2000 the name Most Significant Change Approach was settled on as it embodies one of the most fundamental aspects of the approach: the collection and systematic selection of reported changes.

Overview of steps to design an MSC process

1. Starting
2. Establishing 'domains of change'
3. Collecting Significant Change (SC) stories & consider ethics
4. Determining who will review the SC stories
5. Determining a process for reviewing the SC stories
6. Feedback
7. Verification
8. Secondary examples / meta monitoring
9. Review the system!

The 'Most Significant Change' (MSC) Technique

A Guide to Its Use

by

Rick Davies and Jess Dart



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DEVELOPING A PERFORMANCE STORY REPORT

user guide

The best practice for design of an MSC system is to have a workshop on the MSC approach to all the stakeholders. Feedback is a process. It is really important to feedback your selected SC stories and the reasons for the selection.

Examples of the use of MSC

The [Castlemaine 500](#) project used the MSC method to complement quantitative data collected through billing data. The MSC method showed a community-wide excitement around the topic of energy efficiency, and that a capacity to change had been developed in the community, even though the quantitative savings were not great. This underscores the reason why it is important to balance quantitative data with qualitative information, especially for projects that involve people changing behaviours. Behaviour changes, unlike the models of behaviour suggest, is not a simple process, and occurs through time, and amongst other supporting and conflicting influences and factors. In the case of the Castlemaine 500 project, if evaluation had solely rested on quantitative methods, the project could be construed as not having met its goals, whereas the use of qualitative data shows otherwise.

Case study on MSC

[The Ambassadors' Stories- a case study on using the Most Significant Change method with the Whitehorse Sustainable Ambassadors](#)

Further Links & Resources

[Rick Davies MSC site](#)

[The most significant lessons about the Most Significant Change technique](#)

[MSC resources \(including links to powerpoints\) from the Department of Education and Children's Services \(SA\)](#)