

The “Most Significant Change” Technique: A participatory method for M&E



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National M&E Conference, Jakarta, August 28, 2014

Overview

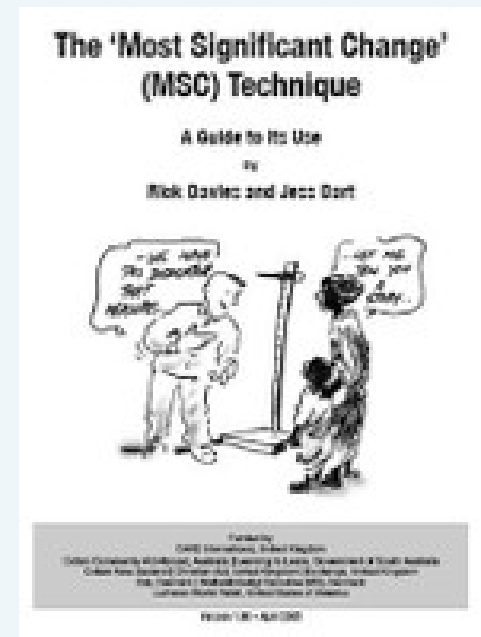
- Introduction to Most Significant Change (MSC) Technique
- MSC in M&E
- Examples of MSC in practice

Qualitative vs. quantitative monitoring

Qualitative	Quantitative
Focus on questioning	Focus on measurement
Open questions	Closed questions
About learning	About 'proving'
Dynamic	Static
Goal displacement is not an issue	Goal displacement can be a problem

What is the MSC?

- A qualitative, participatory M&E method
- Based on 'stories' of significant change caused by intervention
- Developed by Davies in 1996 - Bangladesh
- Now used in numerous development programs and the public sector



MSC Technique: why using stories?

- People tell stories naturally
- People remember stories
- Stories can deal with complexity and context
- Stories can address sensitive topics
- But stories are not known for accuracy/truth



MSC Technique: Core steps in using MSC

1. Determine *domains of change* to monitor (sorts of change caused by intervention)
2. Collect and write stories

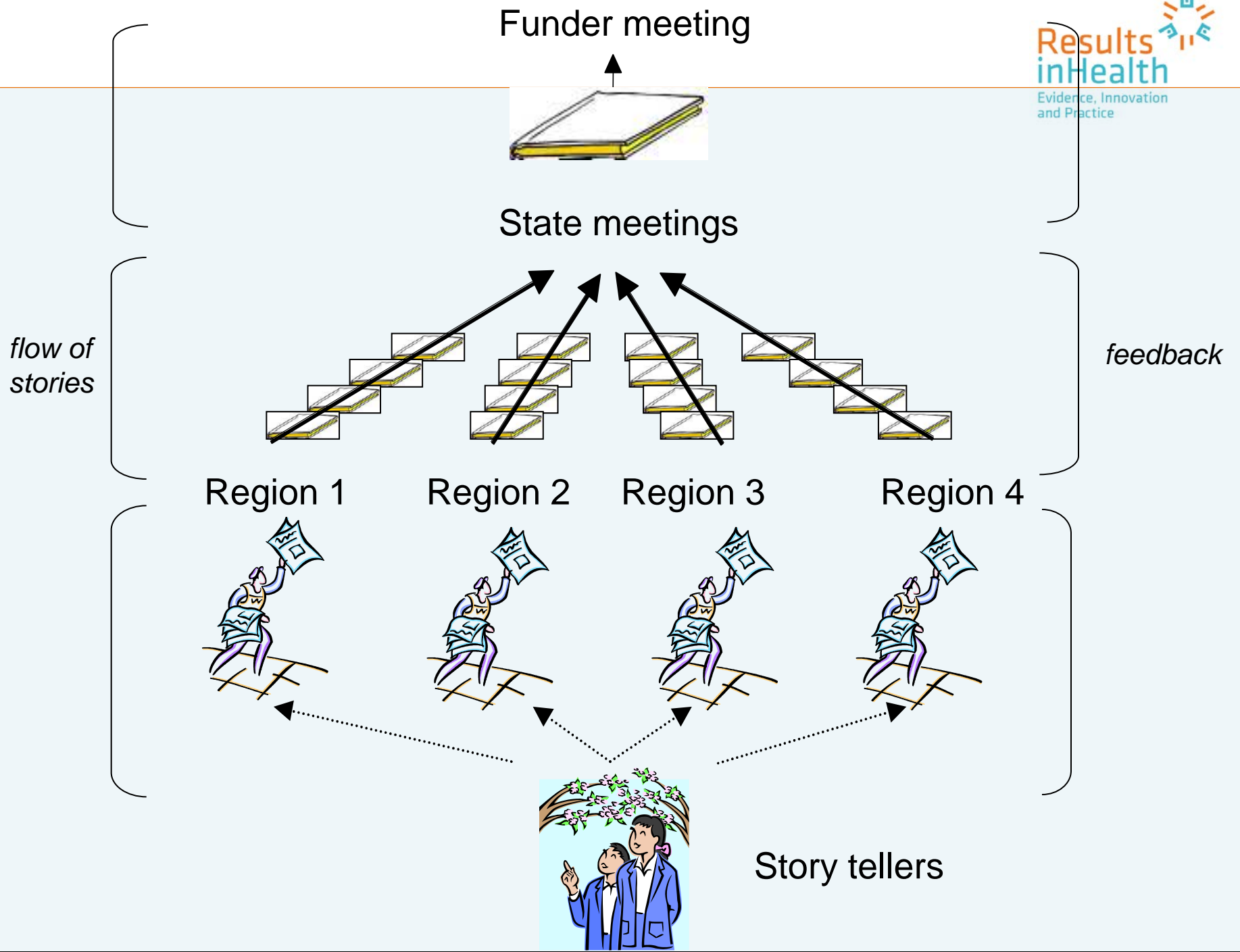
“In your opinion what was the most significant change that took place in ... over the last ... months?”

 - What happened, why, when, where, how?
3. Select MSC story/stories

Participatory analysis workshop with stakeholders and storytellers

“Which of these Significant Change stories do you think is the most significant of all?”

 - And WHY?
4. Content analysis of stories



Integration of MSC into an existing M&E system

- As one time activity
- As part of planning and monitoring system
 - Stories are collected at different moments



Why using MSC as part of M&E?

- To monitor changes in complex interventions
- Can provide information on unexpected outcomes
- To identify what needs changing
- To build sense of common values and purpose
- To improve accountability
- Develop staff skills in observation and analysis

Considerations for implementing MSC in M&E

- Capacity building required
- Finding champions and drivers
- Labour and time intensive
- Costs and sustainability
- MSC not suitable as stand-alone method for project monitoring

*“Since I’ve learned to read, I’ve never been lost,
because I can read the street signs”*

*“It was nerve-wracking to begin with, but in the end
we could do it. We were shy, but in the end we thought
of course we can do it!”*

Examples of Results inHealth's experience with MSC

Project	Use of MSC
Restoring Coastal Livelihood project in South Sulawesi	Integration MSC in M&E system
Buddy project for HIV positive migrant women in the Netherlands	MSC as part of project evaluation
Orphans and Vulnerable Children / Sexual Assaults and Domestic Violence in South-Africa	MSC in final project evaluation
Integrated services for Violence Against Women (VAW) survivors and Women Living with HIV (WLHIV) in Jakarta and Medan	MSC as part of M&E system
Longitudinal Qualitative Research on Program Keluarga Harapan (PKH) Graduation	MSC in research project

MSC in research setting: Longitudinal Qualitative Research on PKH Graduation

Project objectives:

- To determine the impact of loss of Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) payments following graduation from PKH programme
- To explore the possible sequencing and adaptation of social assistance programmes, livelihoods and microfinance to create pathways for graduates towards sustainable livelihoods

Purpose of using MSC:

- To collect data on the most significant changes in livelihood of graduated PKH participants
- Collect information that may not be captured by other methods
- To support other data collection methods (triangulation in analysis)

Concluding remarks

- Time consuming process
- Good training of staff essential
- MSC stories are illustrative but always need to be combined with other M&E methods
- Added value especially if topic is complex or sensitive
- Process is appreciated by beneficiaries and other stakeholders



More about MSC



What is MSC

In order to effectively measure the progress and impact of complex interventions, new Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) techniques have developed. Some of these techniques explicitly focus on the inclusion of the perspectives of stakeholders and beneficiaries involved in the intervention.

The "Most Significant Change" technique (MSC) is such a method. The MSC technique is a qualitative and participatory form of M&E based on the collection, systematic selection, and analysis of stories of significant changes caused by development activities. It can be used as a valuable addition to a wider M&E framework.

MSC helps to identify the significant changes that result from a particular intervention and gives stakeholders a heightened sensitivity to the beneficiaries. Through in-depth discussions of these stories by the stakeholders and beneficiaries, important effects of the intervention are uncovered that may have remained unclear when using traditional M&E approaches.



Participants

The training is organized for programme coordinators/managers, project/intervention implementers, evaluators and consultants working in (international) development, who are interested in M&E approaches and tools that are adapted to better suit the complex environments in international development.

Training Objectives

The training is a combination of theory and practice. It will focus on helping participants to understand the MSC technique, how to implement the method, how to analyse the stories of change and ways to integrate MSC in a wider M&E system. The focus of the training will be on the learning component and high-level involvement of beneficiaries and stakeholders in M&E.

This basic course will help you to address the following issues:

- Learn how MSC can contribute to the M&E of "complex interventions";
- Obtaining practical experience in the collection, selection and analysis of MSC stories;
- Learning how to integrate MSC in an existing M&E system.

- Upcoming ResultsinHealth Training on MSC and Qualitative Data Analysis in Jakarta, 17-21 November
www.resultsinhealth.org

- MSC Guide (2005) at
<http://www.mande.co.uk/docs/MSCGuide.htm>

- MSC community at Yahoo

