

**Yes We Hear You! Utilizing the Success Case Method for Program Evaluation**

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# **Yes We Hear You! Utilizing the Success Case Method for Program Evaluation**

## **Introduction**

Many organizations utilize various evaluation methods for determining the success of their programs and future programming. One such method used by Organization Development (OD) practitioners is Brinkerhoff's (2005) Success Case Method (SCM). SCM is a quick and simple model that combines analysis of extreme groups with case study and story-telling (Brinkerhoff & Dressler, 2003). Krueger (2004) stated that use of stories in evaluation studies has considerable potential. Brinkerhoff & Dressler (2003) contended that collecting stories and comparing stories of successful participants with the stories of non-successful participants can help to identify key performance system factors that enable some to make successful use of a program, while others are not nearly so successful. Our poster describes the application of SCM to the Minnesota Teacher Induction Program (TIP) as an innovation in program evaluation in the field of agricultural education.

The TIP conducts program evaluation through an online questionnaire at the beginning and end of the school year. However most of the quantitative analysis generates mean scores, which does not bring out the voice of the extreme successful and non-successful cases (Brinkerhoff, 2002; Russ-Eft & Preskill, 2009). The SCM gives voice to successful and non-successful participants, and compares their stories to learn what worked, what did not work, and what can be done to get better results from future efforts. Through our experiences, we determined there are benefits to using the SCM in the evaluation of agricultural education programs like TIP. However, the usage of SCM is not intended to replace more rigorous and comprehensive evaluation methods, but is used as a complementary, simple, fast, and credible tool (Brinkerhoff, 2002).

## **How It Works**

The SCM was used to learn more about the TIP from the summative experiences of new secondary agriculture teachers during the 2014-15 school year. During the first phase of SCM, potential success and non-success cases of new teachers were identified based on the TIP End-of-Year questionnaire. The cases of new teachers' experiences with the TIP were categorized by using the range of mean scores for Likert-type questions and responses to open-ended questions. We identified three success cases and two non-success cases.

The second phase was to conduct interviews with the identified new teachers to probe, understand, and document their verifiable success and non-success stories. Thirty-minute personal interviews with each of the five participants were conducted by telephone and recorded with permission. Pseudo names were assigned to the participants to ensure confidentiality. Content analysis was performed by reading the stories from the success and non-success cases and organizing them by themes based on the TIP goals.

## **Results/Implications**

Based on the findings from the interviews, the following recommendations are suggested for the TIP in 2015-16 and organized by themes based on TIP goals.

*Psychosocial Mentoring:* To achieve this goal, every new teacher is assigned a senior mentor. It is understood from the stories that a successful mentoring requires a good relationship between

the senior mentor and his mentee. For example, Kate said “my senior mentor was so supportive that I opened up to him and I was never hesitant to ask anything, I still reach out to him when I need help.” But Tom said “the mentor part of TIP didn’t work out for me. I didn’t feel comfortable to share much with my mentor. Finally I craved feedback from my mentor, which I didn’t get.” It was also found that teachers who expressed non-success with their mentoring had never contacted the TIP with their relationship problems. Further, senior mentors had not reported any relationship issues. As a result of the SCM, two check points will be introduced when new teachers and senior mentors will be asked to identify relationship problems.

*Monthly Professional Development:* TIP conducts web-based and face-to-face professional development seminars for new teachers. Some new teachers enjoyed the web based seminars. For example Kate said “I liked the web-seminar, especially how you assigned guest speakers (TIP coaches) to each meeting. I also liked the breakout sessions too, it helped me connect with other new teachers.” The face-to-face seminars were a success with most teachers. Sara said “face-to-face meetings were incredible. The speakers chosen were good, and I loved to meet everybody in person. I only hope there were more face-to face meetings.” Amy agreed and said “the first face-to -face TIP meeting helped me move –in. I hardly knew anybody in Minnesota, but after the meeting I felt connected to the MN Ag Ed family.” The new teachers wanted more face-to-face seminars, but were also mindful of the fact that they were located in schools across Minnesota and it was not feasible to travel to one place every month for TIP meetings. Thus, there was a suggestion for Regional TIP seminars. Based on the SCM, the TIP plans to conduct more face-to-face meetings at events in 2015-16 where new teachers may already be travelling.

*Program Management Resources:* It was determined that new teachers had individual preferences on how instructional and program resources should be shared. Some teachers did not access resources posted on a Moodle site. For example, Tom said “As teachers we have several log-ins and I don’t have good experience with Moodle, so I didn’t use it at all for TIP. But I used the resources that were shared on Drop-box.” The TIP plans to use Google Docs to share resources in 2015-16 to ensure more new teachers access the resources.

### **Future Plans/Advice to Others**

The SCM will continue to be used for summative evaluation of the TIP. In addition, SCM will become a formative assessment earlier in the year to benefit current participants. We suggest that to ensure homogeneity, it is best to have a one person conduct the interviews. We also offer the advice that it is desirable for the interviewer to understand the program, but that person not be in a position of power that could make participants uncomfortable when sharing their experiences.

### **Costs/Resources Needed**

Indirect costs were an office phone for making interview calls, and a computer with recording features. The only direct cost was the hourly rate for the graduate student (i.e., TIP Coordinator) to conduct interviews.

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