

# Evaluating the Effectiveness of Experiential Learning for Motivating Value Chain Stakeholders to adopt New Ways of Capturing Value

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## ***Abstract***

*Value chain management, where businesses situated along the value chain purposely work together to achieve outcomes that would not otherwise be possible, is proving a valid way of securing competitive advantage in a rapidly changing business environment. This research examines the effectiveness of experiential workshops, structured to reflect theories of adult learning and value chain management, for motivating managers of agri-food businesses to adopt value chain management approaches. The results show that experiential workshops are an effective means of motivating managers to acquire the knowledge necessary to proactively develop closer relationships with other businesses, leading in turn to the ability to capture value through non-traditional means. An average of 14 months after attending the workshop, the majority of managers from commercial businesses had changed how they managed their businesses. A number of the involved businesses had significantly improved their performance.*

## **Keywords:**

Agri-food Management, Experiential Workshops, Adult Learning, Mindsets, Innovation, Culture

## **Introduction**

In a rapidly changing business environment, typified by technological innovation, industry consolidation, deregulation, and changing consumer demands, new ways must be found to capture and create value (Boehlje, 1999; Senge, 1997; Senge, Dow & Neath, 2006). Value chain management (VCM), the deliberate decision by members of a value chain to combine their resources to improve competitiveness, is proving a powerful strategic approach that enables

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organizations to adapt to a rapidly changing business environment (Dunne, 2008; Fearne, 2007; Taylor, 2006). This comes from how, in developing closer strategic relationships with customers and suppliers, businesses acquire the ability to learn and adapt more effectively than if operating as separate organizations (EFFP, 2005; Senge, Dow, and Neath, 2006).

Closely aligned value chains are however forming slower in the agri-food industry compared to IT and automotive (Cowan, 2007; Fearne, 2007; Fortescue, 2006). A primary reason for the slow rate at which VCM is being adopted by businesses operating in the agri-food industry is said to be a function of the extent to which agri-business managers are unable to communicate effectively with businesses operating at different levels along the value chain (Taylor, 2006; Morgan, 2007). This results in the agri-food industry possessing a tendency to look to the past for ways it can compete in the future (Boehlje, 1999; Oram, 2008). It also leads to the continuation of entrenched adversarial business relationships (EFFP, 2004; Johnson, 2007), and perpetuates business models unsuited to enabling businesses to compete in a rapidly changing business environment (EFFP, 2004; Fortescue, 2006; Ison, 2000). It also leads to the continuation of mindsets unsuited to the task of forming and managing closely-aligned value chains (Boehlje and Lins, 2008; Oram, 2008).

A mindset [otherwise known as a mental model] is a tightly bound network of ideas, values and beliefs that determine individuals' attitudes towards the surrounding environment (Moon, 2004; Jarvis, 2004). They determine an individual's perception towards other individuals, businesses, and the systems within which they currently exist (Eckert & Bell, 2005; Fearne, 1998; Johnson 2007). Mindsets also influence an individual's preparedness and ability to learn about a given topic or how they might purposefully alter their behaviour to achieve a desired outcome (Fell and Russell, 2000; Johnson, 2007). They also determine individuals' attitudes and behaviour towards others (Argyris, 1995; Eckert and Bell, 2005). The ability, therefore, to act upon new value capturing opportunities relies on those involved possessing the necessary mindsets (Barrat, 2004; Whipple and Frankel, 2000), particularly in circumstances where adversarial relationships exist between buyers and suppliers (Johnson, 2007; Spekman, Spear, and Kamauff, 2002).

Motivating the agri-food industry to embrace the VCM business model on a wider scale than presently exists is therefore dependent on encouraging appropriate changes in the mindsets of individuals operating in the agri-food industry (Eckert & Bell, 2005; Fulton et al, 2003). Purposeful changes in mindset can only occur if individuals are motivated to learn, then use the acquired knowledge to critically evaluate the values, assumptions and beliefs which together shape their perceptions of the world around them (Kolb, 1984; Wlodkowski, 2008; Zull, 2002). Compared to traditional teaching methods, experiential workshops have been proposed as an effective means for motivating adults to reflect on the suitability of their present mindsets, potentially leading to purposeful changes in attitude and behaviour (Kolb, 1984; Moon, 2004). They have also been proposed as an effective means for instilling in individuals tacit knowledge (Jarvis, 2004; Knowles, Holton, and Swanson, 2005), which is more important than explicit knowledge for motivating and enabling individuals to successfully form, then manage, closely aligned value chains (Johnson, 2007; Senge, Dow, & Neath, 2006).

#### Motivating Changes in Behaviour

Fulton et al (2003:74) state that little has been published on “identify(ing) the keys to communicating value chain information” to agri-business managers in a manner that leads to long term changes in attitude and behaviour. Motivating individuals to learn is a challenging endeavour (de Bono, 1999; Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005; Senge, 1997). It is even more challenging to motivate adults to translate what they learned into purposeful action (Goleman, 2000; Ison et al., 2000; Jarvis, 2004).

Motivating adults to learn, then purposely act on what they learned relies on presenting information in a manner that leads them to perceive that it possesses value, for example, through showing how it will enable them to solve a problem that they face (Knowles, Holton & Swanson, 2005; Moon, 2004). It also relies on presenting the information in a way that appeals to their senses (Zull, 2002; Wlodkowski, 2008).

Motivating adults to purposefully change their behaviour relies on creating a sense of urgency about the need to change, for example, sensing that they may miss out on an opportunity which will not be repeated; or that they will be left in a vulnerable position compared to those that do

change (Hamel, 2002; Moon, 2004; Rother and Shook, 2003). Additionally, though an individual may possess knowledge that suggests a need exists to change their attitude and behaviour, they will not do so unless they also possess a mindset that supports the desire and ability to change (Knowles, Holton & Swanson, 2005; Zull, 2002). This can lead to them possessing a greater willingness to embrace business models not traditionally associated with the agri-food industry (Fell & Russell, 2000; Ison et al 2000; Johnson, 2007).

To facilitate a purposeful change in mindset, an individual must be willing and able to learn (Jarvis, 2004; Moon, 2004; Wlodkowski, 2008). Effective learning occurs when an individual is prepared to critically reflect on whether the ideas, values and beliefs that underpin their current mindsets are appropriate, given the knowledge they acquired through the learning event (Kolb, 1984; Moon, 2004). Known as double loop learning, motivating an individual to critically evaluate then modify their current ideas, values and beliefs in the light of new knowledge is critical to motivating purposeful changes in their attitudes and behaviour (Argyris, 1995; Senge, 1997; Moon, 2004; Zull, 2002). Double loop learning is more likely to occur when the learning experience is able to establish an emotive bond between the individual, the topic and how they might apply the acquired knowledge to solve a problem(s) that they face (Gross Davis, 1993; Jarvis, 2004).

### Experiential Workshops

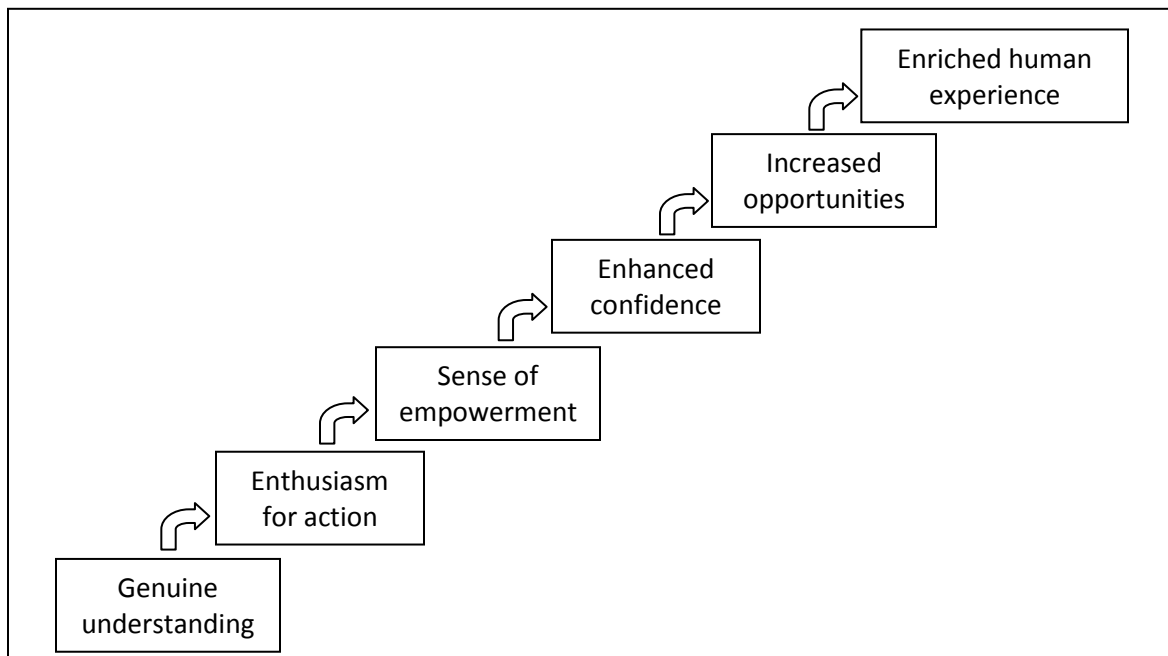
Argyris (1995), Zull (2002) and Moon (2004) are among the many researchers who say that experiential workshops are an effective way of facilitating double loop learning. Argyris (1995) states that this is best achieved through providing individuals with generalizations on which they reflect as they go about their daily tasks.

Experiential learning differs from traditional learning in that the teacher is not viewed as being superior to the students (Zull, 2002; Moon, 2004); nor are they viewed as a conduit through which the information is communicated to students (Jarvis, 2004; Knowles, Holton & Swanson, 2005). Experiential learning utilizes a facilitator who is equal in status to the students. The facilitator's primary role is to encourage the students to make a direct connection to the material presented, through facilitating a discussion on how they might benefit by applying the

knowledge in their own situation. This is achieved through encouraging meaningful interaction between peers, each of whom will possess a different perspective of what they witnessed and how they might apply the resulting insights to their own situation (Ison & Russell, 2000a; Fell & Russell, 2000; Moon, 2004). In so doing, the participants are able to gain a greater understanding of how relationships that exist between the ideas presented, individuals or groups, and the wider environment might influence their future opportunities (Fell & Russell, 2000a; Jarvis, 2004; Zull, 2002). This same process leads to a stronger emotional connection being established between the individual, the topic, and how they might act upon the knowledge in the context of their own situation and prior experience.

Figure 1 below shows Fell and Russell's (2000) description of how, through sharing experiences and understanding about how the perspectives of others compare to their own, agri-business managers can become less focused on the mechanics of how the present system works and the outcomes that it produces. Instead, their focus shifts towards the future. This leads to them developing a common language. It also leads to changes in how individuals perceive each other and the system within which they interact. This results in a powerful emotional connection developing between the individuals, particularly in terms of how they could together redesign the present system to achieve the outcomes they desire. This sense of aspiration motivates individuals to continue learning together, and leading to the participants possessing the desire and ability to embrace new and innovative approaches to capturing value.

**Figure 1: Adapted from Fell and Russell (2000)**



### Research

The potential for utilizing experiential learning techniques to facilitate purposeful changes in the attitudes and behaviour of agri-business managers is not well documented (Dart, Peteram & Straw, 1998; Fulton et al, 2003). The research was designed to identify whether a one-day experiential workshop is an effective means of motivating agri-business managers to learn about other elements of the value chain, then act upon their newly acquired knowledge by purposely applying VCM principles to how they managed their business(es).

Delivered to agri-business managers across Canada between December 2007 and February 2009, the workshops were structured to reflect the adult learning theory first proposed by Kolb (1994), and the principles of VCM first proposed by Collins and Dunne (2002). The three areas of knowledge that the workshop sought to convey to the participants reflected that which the literature says individuals need to possess to become a member of a closely-aligned value chain.

They are:

- the conceptual knowledge as to *why* the partnership is being formed (Batt, 2002; Duffy, 2005);

- the operational knowledge as to *how* to operate as a closely-aligned value chain (Boehlje and Lins, 2008; Hornibrook and Fearne, 2005; Whipple, 2007); and
- the knowledge required for them to *consciously recognize* themselves as part of a larger system (Boehlje, Hofing, and Schroeder, 1999; Fulton et al., 2003; Johnson, 2007).

Based on theory presented by, amongst others, Kolb (1984), Zull (2002), Moon (2004) and Jarvis (2004), the experiential learning process commenced with a concrete experience, provided in the form of video case studies. The facilitator then led the participants through a process of reflective observation, abstract conceptualism and active experimentation.

The decision to use video case studies as the concrete experience came from researchers [including Gross Davis (1993), de Bono (1999) and Zull (2002)] saying that video is a valuable medium for providing a concrete experience upon which individuals are motivated to reflect, then conceive how they might benefit from applying the knowledge to their own situation. This comes from how video appeals to multiple senses, while accurately depicting circumstances and issues to which the audience can readily relate, through being able to convey a large volume of information and differing perspectives in a short period of time.

As a value chain invariably involves multiple stages spread across a wide geographic area, it was expected that video would be an effective means of accurately conveying the structure, systems and players that together comprise the value chains being studied and discussed by the participants. It was also expected to be an effective means of enabling those already involved in closely-aligned value chains to accurately convey how they had benefited from belonging to the chain, along with how the benefits had been achieved.

An added benefit of using video is that it enables the end results to be conveyed to the participants, as well as how those results were achieved. De Bono (1999) states that showing the desired end results early on in the learning process is an effective means of providing participants with a clear sense of purpose about what the workshops are seeking to help them achieve. Knowing where they are heading and why lessens the likelihood that the learning

experience will be negatively impacted by the participants feeling anxious, overwhelmed or out of control (Jarvis, 2004; Zull, 2002).

The videos were followed by a period of facilitated interaction. The participants were encouraged to share with their peers the extent to which the scenario they witnessed differed from their own situation and how they might act upon the information to improve their future opportunities. The facilitator then led the participants through a process of abstract conceptualism and active experimentation. This took the form of candid discussion among the participants, along with value chain mapping and role playing exercises. The hope was that this process would result in the participants being able to develop problem solving skills that they could later apply in their own situation.

The anticipated outcome of the workshops was for the participants to leave with a greater sense of understanding about the opportunities that they could realise through connecting with other individuals and businesses in new and innovative ways (Kolb, 1984; Moon, 2004; Zull, 2002). It was hoped that this, along with a sense of achievement and a desire to emulate the successes they had witnessed in the videos, would stimulate participants to continue learning after the event. This, in turn, says Argyris (1995), Jarvis (2004) and Knowles, Holton & Swanson (2005) could result in individuals possessing the ability to develop ever more sophisticated problem solving skills.

### **Data Collection**

Learning and behavioural change is a time-orientated process that is impacted by factors both internal and external to the participant (Kolb, 1994; Knowles, Holton and Swanson 2005; Zull, 2002). Researchers [including Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, and Lowe (1996), and Pawson and Tilley (2007)] say that a combination of qualitative and quantitative techniques can provide a wealth of valuable data on the causes and extent of change in individuals' attitudes and behaviour; including the extent to which political or cultural factors influenced individuals' decision-making processes. Yin (2002) and Pawson and Tilley (2007) say that using multiple sources of data enables researchers to more clearly define causes and effects than would otherwise be possible.



For these reasons, data was gathered from four sources, using a combination of Likert scores and open ended questions. The first source of data came from using exit surveys, designed to gather participants' perspectives immediately after the workshop. The exit survey asked respondents to assess the workshop's structure, the usefulness of the material presented and whether they believed that it constituted a valuable learning experience. As researchers including Argyris (1995), Jarvis (2004) and Zull (2002) say that changes in an individual's perspective towards the surrounding environment and others is a precursor to double loop learning, the exit survey also sought to identify if changes had occurred in individuals' perceptions and, if so, towards what or whom. A final question asked their permission to follow up 12 months later to identify whether they had used information acquired from the workshop.

Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe (1996) (1996) and Robson (2002) are among those who say that semi-structured surveys are a valuable research technique. They enable researchers to delve deeper into specific areas of interest that may arise during the data collection process, while simultaneously ensuring that responses can be directly compared through analysis. Pawson and Tilley (2007) and Yin (2002) also say that semi-structure surveys provide an effective means of exploring issues relating to emotion and personal values, while simultaneously ensuring that the research remains focused on the issues being researched. They were therefore chosen as the primary technique for gathering data 12 months after the workshops occurred, with Likert scores used discriminately to help weigh individuals' depth of feeling towards specific criteria.

A third source of data came from a series of semi-structured interviews conducted with workshop organizers and hosts. The primary purpose of this element of the research was to help determine whether aspects of the workshop provided greater value to certain members of the audience, and why. The process also offered an opportunity to explore whether the organizers had communicated with anyone who attended the workshop since the event had occurred, and the nature of those communications.

The fourth source of data came from the workshop facilitator and researcher, being the same person. This provided intimate knowledge into the chain of events that occurred from designing the workshop through to analysing and reporting the results.

## Results and Discussion

Of the workshop attendees, 279 voluntarily completed exit surveys. Of these, 108 stated that they were willing to participate in follow-up interviews. After non-responses, the number of follow-up interviews totaled 95. The average period between the workshop and the follow-up interviews was 14 months. Each interview lasted 20 to 90 minutes. 80% of the respondents were managers of commercial businesses and the primary interest of the research. At a similar period of time after each workshop, the individual most connected with organizing each of the workshops was also interviewed. These responses totaled 14. Table 1 below lists all the respondents.

**Table 1: Surveys and Interview Statistics**

<b>Activity</b>		<b>Number of Participants</b>
Exit surveys		279
Follow-up respondents		95
Follow-up respondents by sector*	Farm managers	41
	Processors	10
	Retailers	7
	Government	13
	Industry organizations	6
	Sales / marketing	12
	Other	6
	Commercial business managers**	76
Workshop organizers/hosts		14

\* Some of the follow-up respondents were classified under more than one sector.

\*\* Total number of respondents involved in managing commercial businesses.

Responses from the exit surveys and the follow-up interviews were coded according to whether the responses reflected evidence of factors that, according to adult learning theory, influence the effectiveness of experiential learning, in particular, evidence of double loop learning. This included factors such as whether changes occurred in respondents' perspectives towards their business, other elements of the value chain or the wider environment. Responses were also coded according to whether they reflected evidence of factors that, according to management theory, are important to effective VCM. These included changes in how they communicated with other business, which could lead to respondents perceiving the opportunity and possessing the ability to capture value in new and innovative ways.

The following is a selection of the research results. They show the extent to which changes occurred in the perspectives of the respondents who participated in both the exit surveys and follow-up interviews. The initial responses are presented to show any differences from results gathered across the overall population (n=95). These responses are compared to those from respondents who manage commercial businesses, and those from respondents who manage commercial businesses and were later identified as having changed their management behaviour.

To illustrate the extent to which double loop learning may have occurred during the workshop and the potential reasons why, Table 2 illustrates the extent to which responses from the voluntarily completed exit surveys differ across the three groups of respondents. Table 3 illustrates the extent to which responses from the follow-up interviews differ across the same three groups. Out of the 76 Managers of Commercial Businesses (MCB) who attended the VCM workshops and participated in the entire research (exit surveys and follow-up interviews), 61 had changed their management behaviour during the intervening 14 months. Only four of the 61 expressly said that changes in behaviour were not directly attributable to the workshop; though their responses suggest that the workshop still played a factor in changing their attitude and behaviour.

### Initial Impact

Results from the exit surveys show that the workshops led to at least short-term changes in respondents' perceptions towards their business and the world around them. In particular, the topic of value chains, VCM, and how or why they could benefit from adopting VCM practices. The majority of respondents stated that the workshops changed their perspectives compared to prior to attending the workshop and provided a sense of why they might consider changing their behaviour (both of which the literature says are important to facilitating double loop learning). This suggests that the workshops may have been effective in establishing a base from which people were prepared to reflect on the appropriateness of previous assumptions in light of newly acquired knowledge, leading, potentially, to changes in attitude and behaviour.

**Table 2: Exit Survey Responses**

Impacts	All respondents by type (n=95)*		MCB (n=76)*		MCB who changed behaviour (n=61)*	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Changed perspective about value chains	77	<b>81</b>	60	<b>79</b>	50	<b>82</b>
Perceived importance of communicating with other levels of the value chain	71	<b>75</b>	55	<b>72</b>	47	<b>77</b>
Changed perspective towards their business (or industry)	69	<b>72</b>	54	<b>71</b>	46	<b>75</b>
Changed perspective about factors critical to managing value chains	57	<b>60</b>	47	<b>62</b>	39	<b>64</b>
Identified way to use VCM to improve business or self (personal development)	51	<b>53</b>	42	<b>55</b>	37	<b>60</b>
Recognized specific factors involved in developing close business relationships	55	<b>58</b>	43	<b>56</b>	35	<b>57</b>
Learning from others' experience helped clarify how might implement VCM	43	<b>45</b>	32	<b>42</b>	30	<b>49</b>
Increased understanding of what VCM means as a business strategy	41	<b>43</b>	31	<b>41</b>	25	<b>41</b>

\* Questions contained in the exit surveys were completed voluntarily. The number of responses received for any question does not, therefore, equal the population of any entire group.

The results do not show any statistically significant differences in how the perceptions of any of the individual groups changed in relation to a specific theme or item that was presented or discussed at the workshop. The primary differences across the three groups of respondents is in how a larger percentage of Managers of Commercial Businesses (MCB) that went onto change their management behaviour identified how they could benefit by adopting VCM approaches compared to MCBs overall and, in particular, the wider population. This suggests that those who went on to change their behaviour left the workshop feeling a sense of aspiration about emulating their peers. For those respondents in particular, the workshop appears to have been successful in establishing an emotional accord between them personally, the topic of VCM, and the value of the information for purposely achieving a desired outcome.

### Reflection and Objective Reasoning

Results from the follow-up interviews show that the workshops were more successful in changing respondents' perceptions of their business or industry than suggested by the exit surveys. They also show that changes in perception occurred over the longer term, not only within the immediacy of the workshops, and that this led to objective reasoning, particularly among those MCBs that went on to change management behaviour.

Every MCB who changed his/her behaviour since attending the workshop had been influenced by seeing how others had benefitted from the application of VCM principles. This led them to perceive that they were part of a larger system and able to benefit by directly connecting and communicating with other links in the chain. The results show that these changes in perspective occurred most readily in MCBs that went on to change their management behaviour. This suggests that the workshop had led to them possessing a greater aspiration for ‘why’ and ‘how’ they might change compared to other participants.

**Table 3: Follow-up Interview Responses**

Impacts	All respondents by type (n=95)		MCB (n=76)		MCB who changed behaviour (n=61)	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Benefited from learning how others have benefited from applying VCM approaches	89	<b>94</b>	72	<b>95</b>	61	<b>100</b>
Changed perspective towards their business (or industry)	86	<b>90</b>	68	<b>89</b>	61	<b>100</b>
Perspective included seeing my business (or client) as part of an inter-linked chain	86	<b>90</b>	68	<b>89</b>	61	<b>100</b>
Saw the importance of connecting operationally with other links in the chain	88	<b>92</b>	70	<b>92</b>	59	<b>97</b>
VCM offer opportunities that my business (or industry) are not currently exploiting	84	<b>88</b>	65	<b>85</b>	58	<b>95</b>
Identified how I (or my clients) could benefit by connecting with other links in the value chain	81	<b>85</b>	65	<b>85</b>	58	<b>95</b>
Provided knowledge that I could use to improve my (or clients) business	72	<b>76</b>	60	<b>79</b>	57	<b>93</b>
Saw the importance of communicating with other links in the chain	79	<b>83</b>	63	<b>83</b>	56	<b>92</b>
Consider it a valuable learning experience for improving management capabilities	76	<b>80</b>	61	<b>80</b>	55	<b>90</b>
Gave me ideas / knowledge that I reflected on afterwards	72	<b>76</b>	59	<b>77</b>	53	<b>87</b>
Viewing a business or chain as a series of processes and need for synergy	71	<b>75</b>	56	<b>74</b>	51	<b>83</b>

The majority of respondents, particularly those that changed their businesses behaviour, also stated that the workshop provided ideas and knowledge that they reflected on after the workshop. This further supports the occurrence of double loop learning, through an emotional accord

having been established between many of the respondents, the information presented, and the value they attributed to the acquired knowledge for helping improve their business opportunities.

An example of how this occurred in practice is reflected in a quote from a farm manager whose behaviour changed after attending the workshop. *“When you showed that example, I saw it as a warranted way to do business. So I took it as an example that was worthy of showing people generally about new opportunities. That gave me the confidence to believe that I could do that too. Not that I had to copy this, though it was ‘let’s go ahead with this.’”*

That this emotional accord may have led to changes in the mindsets, attitudes and behaviours of a wider proportion of those who attended the workshops, not just respondents who participated in the year-long research, is borne out by a statement made by one of the workshop organizers: *“When I see some of them now that they attended the workshop, they may not be in a value chain, though they are still more open minded and more engaging. They are no longer only focused on themselves and have not reverted to their old ways of being more competitive. It has changed their perspectives and led to them being more engaging.”*

### Enablers and Achievements

The extent to which changes in perspective, attitude and behaviour led to MCBs possessing the ability and motivation to capture value in new and innovative ways are illustrated below in Table 4. Also detailed in the statistics and the descriptions listed below are enabling factors that led to them identifying opportunities and achieving the outcomes identified by the research.

The most commonly identified change in behaviour among the MCBs was in how changes in the perspectives they held towards their business and the environment in which they operated led to the majority of CBMs changing how they made business decisions. Many MCBs also engaged more with businesses operating at different levels of the value chain, overall and during the decision-making process.

**Table 4: Changes Achieved**

Changes	MCB who changed behaviour (n=61)	
	Number	%
New perspective led to changes in how I / we make business decisions	57	<b>93</b>
More focused on strengthening relationships with other levels of the chain	52	<b>85</b>
Purposely work with specific people / organizations	51	<b>84</b>
Communicate more with people at other levels of the chain	51	<b>83</b>
Greater belief in my own abilities, self worth	50	<b>82</b>
More focused on reacting to market opportunities	49	<b>80</b>
Where to focus efforts, to increase chance of establishing / managing a successful chain	49	<b>80</b>
Provided knowledge and ideas that increased my confidence in applying and/or discussing VCM	46	<b>75</b>
Changed the information that I communicate to others	44	<b>72</b>
Crystallized my thinking on why I should change, led to making more informed decisions	44	<b>72</b>
Number of commercial businesses who have identified new opportunities	42	<b>69</b>
Engage more with other levels of chain in decision making process	39	<b>64</b>
Changed others' views towards me / my organization positively	26	<b>42</b>
Number of commercial businesses who have increased margins	20	<b>33</b>
Number of commercial businesses who have increased sales	17	<b>28</b>

Quotes from three respondents illustrate the extent to which their decision-making processes have changed, and why. They also illustrate how what the respondents learned from the workshops, combined with what they had learned from subsequent interactions with other members of the value chain (whether or not they had attended the workshop), led them to also possess a greater ability to act on their business decisions.

A farm manager stated: *“We work closer with people and empathize more with the overall chain. By enabling us to identify how we might benefit from specific options, it also provided us with the ability to better assess the underlying reasons of why we should (or should not) be doing something.”* Interacting more directly with other levels of the value chain led him to realise that while his accelerated lambing system was bringing in greater revenue, his customers would prefer that he focused on supplying a specific quality of lamb during the naturally occurring season. While this reduced the overall price he received for his lamb, it allowed him to reduce his costs by a greater amount. This led to an immediate increase in operating profit. It also positioned him to be able to capture more information on the performance of his lambs, which he expects will allow him to identify ways to capture additional value over the long term.

An independent meat processor who operates his own retail outlet, while also supplying other retailers too, stated that what he learned at the workshop *“made me more aware of the middle man, how many steps are in my process and if they need to be there. Cut down my chain from 20 steps to three or four. Which has made the chain more efficient, provides more money (\$) for the farmer and for me, and provides a better deal to the end customer. Keeping to three players provides more money and better value for all.”*

The manager of a large meat processor stated how they had benefitted from viewing a case study of a closely-aligned lamb value chain with farmers, then discussing their differing perceptions of what they had witnessed and how they might move forward in a coordinated approach. *“Seeing how those guys were looking at the case study (allowed us) to identify people there who wanted to see if there are ways of working on a shared risk / shared reward basis.”* The manager also stated that having insights into how not all farmers perceived challenges and opportunities in the same way had enabled them to *“have more meaningful conversations with those interested in forming a chain, which has helped change producers' minds and enabled us to move forward and embrace the management philosophy that already existed.”*

These statements illustrate how some of those that attended the workshops had benefitted from what they learned. The statistics illustrate that the workshops led to the majority of CBMs adopting a more strategic approach to business than existed prior to them attending the workshop. This came from them possessing a greater array of knowledge towards the challenges and opportunities facing another element of the value chain, and perceiving themselves to be part of a larger system. This led to them developing the ability to communicate more effectively with other members of the value chain(s) in which they operate. The motivation to act on that knowledge came from the aspiration they felt from perceiving that they could benefit from working more intimately with others belonging to the same system.

While the findings show that the workshops did not lead to every CBM changing their perspectives or management behaviour, none of the findings refute the claim that experiential workshops are an effective means of motivating and enabling managers of agri-businesses to



seek new ways of capturing value. The results show that those CBMs that did change behaviour subsequent to attending the VCM workshop are most likely to be those for whom the experience led to an emotional accord developing between what they learned from others (the how), the material presented (the concept), and that they could use the information to achieve a desired outcome (the why). This appears most likely to occur through the existence of a double loop learning process, which lasted long after they attended the initial workshop.

## **Conclusion**

Experiential workshops that utilise adult learning theory to convey the principles of VCM are an effective means for changing the mindsets and attitudes of MCBs operating in the agri-food industry. In establishing an emotive bond between the individual, their situation and how they might utilize the information to achieve an identified opportunity, experiential workshops are also an effective means for motivating changes in the behaviour of MCBs. As stated by Argyris (1995), Knowles, Holton and Swanson (2005), Moon (2004) and Zull (2002), the results show that changes in behaviour are unlikely to occur unless individuals experience an event that leads them to critically assess their current values, ideas and beliefs in light of newly acquired knowledge.

The research expanded upon work by Kolb (1984), Argyris (1985), Jarvis (2004) and Ison and Russell (2000) to show that, in reflecting on what they have learned after the event occurred, a combination of aspiration for what they could achieve and confidence about how to achieve new and exciting opportunities creates within individuals a desire to act; in this case, purposely applying VCM approaches to how they manage their business. It also expanded upon work by Argyris (1995), Senge (1997) and Fell and Russell (2000), through showing that in interacting and communicating more effectively with other members of the value chain, many of the MCBs became self-directed learners. In perceiving themselves to be part of a functioning system, they are more likely to feel motivated to explore opportunities to work with like-minded peers to capture value in new and innovative ways.

The research was new and unique. It brought together various theories surrounding adult learning and the principles of VCM. With a degree of caution, the results show that experiential workshops are a good method for encouraging managers of commercial businesses situated along the entire value chain to adoption VCM practices. This comes from them possessing the motivation and ability to capture value in ways that they had previously not considered or thought possible. Following a similar approach in your own situation could prove the applicability and usefulness of experiential workshops for encouraging the wider adoption of VCM practices in different circumstances. It would also test whether the concept and expected outcomes can be generalized across different cultures and states of economic development.

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