

MSC Stories- October 2009

The Most Significant Change (MSC) technique was developed by Rick Davies and Jess Dart in the early 1990s. It is a participatory technique used for gathering qualitative data directly from beneficiaries. An abiding problem with trying to get beneficiary feedback in Africa is the significant courtesy bias. The major benefit of MSC is that it offers beneficiaries an opportunity to identify the single most important impact of an intervention. Rather than parroting the opinions of an external NGO to ensure continued support, they have to critically rank and evaluate the benefits. It is invaluable information to help calibrate and focus an organisation based on customer demands.

The MSC stories below were collected in October 2009; in Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda. A Camara facilitator asked students to participate in the study, and for permission to record the session. Interestingly, younger students were much more assured in voicing an opinion. Students were generally quite upfront about giving feedback; though in terms of documentation only the most interesting offerings were included in this report. In this sense the information is certainly not representative, but is arguably the best articulation available of the essence of Camara and its purpose. Members of staff were subsequently asked to discuss the stories and identify which were most meaningful for them in terms of the core function of the organisation. The stories selected were thus used to inform analysis of the model, and organisational strategy for 2010. In this manner the MSC technique facilitated direct beneficiary input in developing and enhancing the core design and structure of Camara.

Ethiopia

1. Harambee College- Nursing Campus (adults)

Students were asked to identify the most significant change that ICT education had made to them personally.

Man 1: '...Reading from the textbook is not easily understandable to me. When I have used the e-library on the computers it is easier to understand. I will not forget what I have seen on the computer. That is good.'

Man 2: 'I think the computers in this college have brought a significant advantage... books are very very expensive so you can easily get useful animation using the cds, so that is helpful.... that is easier to understand when you compare to books.'

2. Kamara Nursery (8-10 year olds)

Story told by Yisak Gezahegn (originally in Amharic)

Yisak: 'People in Europe are able to communicate using the internet, but here we are not able to do that. I want the internet to communicate with people in other parts of the world.... I want to use the internet to communicate by voice like a telephone and by picture.'

Ciarán: 'Who do you want to communicate with?'

Yisak (laughs): 'People in Ireland....'

'I want to know how to develop cartoons and animations with computers. Our teachers need to be trained so that they in turn can teach us this'

Ciarán: 'What do you want to do when you leave school?'

Yisak: 'Become Minister of Health'

3. Kamara Nursery (10-12 year olds)

(Originally in Amharic)

During the course of the focus group the students had highlighted the most significant changes that the computers represented for them. The benefits cited were acquiring knowledge and finding a job. They were then asked to pick which was more important.

Boy 1: 'First of all you must get the knowledge; otherwise you cannot get a job'.

Boy 2: 'Even if you get the job and you don't have the knowledge it will be very difficult for you to do the job'.

Girl 1: 'If there's no knowledge then there's no job'.

Girl 2: 'Always knowledge comes first. Knowledge comes prior to the job'.

Kenya

4. Star of the Sea (8-13 year olds)

Star of the Sea is an all-girl's public school based in Mombasa. Students were asked to identify how they would use computers in their future careers.

Girl 1: 'As a judge I won't like to carry files everywhere so I store my information in a flash disk, then I can carry this.'

Girl 2: 'I'd like to be a pharmacist so I'll use the computer to find out about any kind of medicine.'

Girl 3: 'As a scientist I'll use the computer to share ideas with my fellows in other parts of the country so that I can learn from them and exchange knowledge.'

When asked to identify the most significant change that ICT education had made for them, the students cited the following:

Girl 4: 'It has made me more knowledgeable.'

Girl 5: 'It has made me learn how to study information.'

Girl 6: 'I can learn the history of some time ago like the adventurers and the African explorers.'

Girl 1: 'When it's the day we have lessons we don't have to stay in class all the time, at least you can have some fun with the computers and that helps our medical (gestures at her head).'

Girl 7: 'I've learned things in detail- like I have to come in and research things that I know, for instance things that I can't see with my naked eye.'

5. Brainsworth Secondary School (17/18 years old)

The students were asked to identify the careers that they would like to pursue, and to assess whether being able to use a computer will be necessary in these professions.

Boy 1: 'As a journalist you need computers to work because you can't just process data or analyse reports without a computer'.

Boy 2: 'If I am computer literate, I can use the knowledge of the computer to control the heartbeat of the people, maybe if they are sick. But as a doctor if I do not have the knowledge of Camara I would fail at my job'.

Boy 3: 'I would like to be a teacher so I can teach other people how to use a computer'.

Students were then asked to identify the most significant change that access to ICT education had made to them personally:

Boy 4: '...The world is a digital world. For you to cooperate and live in the world, to exist in the world according to the times, you must be computer literate'.

Camara Volunteers- Mombasa Hub

The volunteer programme in the Mombasa Hub has been an exemplary model of volunteerism in Africa. While volunteers are traditionally perceived as benefactors, rather than beneficiaries of an intervention, the programme in Kenya has demonstrated how symbiotic and transformative this relationship can be.

6. Sheyha Salim:

'I had finished my school in 2005. First I did some packages- Windows. Then in 2006 I heard from my auntie, who knew Farid¹, about Camara... something about computers and she knew that I also like computers. So she came and told me that there's someone she knows.... so I joined them last year, I started in February. It was Skomara² at that time. When I started there I didn't know about computers, I just knew the packages- so I was like 'what the hell is this?' you know. I didn't know about the maintenance or those things- other stuff I didn't know.

So I was not interested at that time, because I saw new things there. But when I stayed for some time I got interested, you know how to use the computers and things like that. Then I stayed there for the whole year, and then this year- two years now. Me and my colleagues sat down and just said would we go to college and continue schooling. So we enrolled in Mombasa Aviation for a diploma in IT to continue our studies there...'

Ciarán: 'So what benefit has volunteering with Camara brought to you in terms of practical experience, do you think it's important?'

Sheyha: 'Yeah it is. About helping people- I go out and help people. Like we go for trips- Camara take us for trips, they teach us stuff here then we go out for trips and we show more people!'

Ciarán: 'And how long is it till you graduate from the diploma?'

Sheyha: 'We do a one year course- so in December!'

Ciarán: 'And what do you think you'll do then? Get a job somewhere?'

Sheyha: 'I have to do my degree first!'

1 Farid Ali- Then Kenya Technical Director, now Technical Director for Camara Africa.

2 Original Camara Hub in Kenya. Dissolved in late 2008.

7. Amina Farid

'I finished my high school last year, 2008. I did computer studies in school, and after that I wanted to pursue further studies in computers. But since I was waiting to go to university, time was long until next year so I thought I couldn't just stay like that doing nothing. Then I overheard about Camara... my teacher who used to teach me computer studies in school, they wanted computers from Camara. So he called me over and told me there's a place called Camara- they train students there but with a different operating system.'

'So I was curious, I wanted to know more about it since I just knew about Windows. So I came here... the next day I registered and I was in Camara. I was taught many things that I didn't even know. In school I was just taught how do use the Windows applications- Office, Excel, all that. But here I was even taught to use the command line which I didn't even know about. I realised that Linux was so interesting. As I was here my friends told me about Mombasa Aviation and I thought I shall go for further studies in my computer knowledge. So I went there and I registered for a diploma in IT... so next year I'll be finished my diploma and I'll go for a degree in IT.'

Ciarán: 'Has it been beneficial, in terms of pursuing your studies, to work with Camara? Has that helped?'

Amina: 'Yeah actually right now I'm schooling and at the same time I still come to Camara. To be frank I just love Camara, I just can't go away from it. It's in my blood (laughs). I got to learn things that I didn't even know. I'd get to learn these things, you know? And out there we won't get to learn these things. Like take an example: maintenance, it's very expensive to study maintenance...'

Ciarán: 'What do you think you'll do after you finish your studies?'

Amina: 'Possibly a masters or something... but first get work at least to know how IT is being used out there'.

8. Susan Mwasa

I joined Camara last February. It wasn't like I was coming to join; I was in fact bringing my sister to join. So the first time we went to Camara it was quite difficult for me to understand because we thought it was packages in another way. We went then and we saw people stripping the computers, Amina just put it in those words. And then after two weeks my mum pushed us to go back, she didn't know what was going on. So when we went back I told my sister "I'll support you, I'll just go there", because my dream was to be in business management. So we started going together and we got into our groups- so it's like we would meet and then we'd start going to classes together and all that stuff. So I became interested.

So in November I changed my course to do IT. Yeah it has benefited me in such a way that when you go to class- you know most of the schools or colleges nobody opens the computers maybe until you're doing finals. So when they taught us about the RAM, the CPUs and all that stuff, it's like the two of us- we know everything. And then there was an exam about how to remove a computer and get it back in less than ten minutes. We did that with Athman³ the first time he trained us. So it was quite easy, it was like passing through. So yeah it has been fun, and I haven't regretted a single bit.

So I've been here, I've been doing maintenance; we have been going outside to help people. And at the same time we have been helping personal people- homes. People call us and say "my hard drive has been this and that" so we just go and check it out. So yeah, like we are the experts! We are the first ladies in our area (laughs). People are like "A lady!"- It was like the computers are practically dead and now they are working. People are curious about Camara so we try to bring them over.... so I think it is actually benefiting us a lot.'

3 Camara Kenya's M&E Officer.

Uganda

9. Green Circle Primary School

The students were asked to list the jobs they hope to work in when they leave school. When asked whether they would need computers for those jobs they gave the following responses:

Boy 1: 'A pilot will need the information in the computer for directions.'

Boy 2: 'If you are a doctor and if somebody has got his medical sheet you can take the sheet and type the words into the computer so that if the patient comes along later you can look up the computer for the words.'

Boy 3: 'For me to become a surgeon I need to learn more about the theoretics.'

10. Kitooke Secondary School (17/18 year olds)

Kitooke is one of the more remote Camara schools. When asked whether computers would help them in their future careers the students gave the following responses:

Boy 1: 'The computers can help you store very much information ... that you can't store in your head'.

Girl 1: 'You can put information on the web so everyone around the world can know what you're doing'.

11. Mubende Infants School- Class 1

(10/11 year olds)

The students were asked to list the jobs they hope to work in when they leave school. When asked whether they would need computers for those jobs they gave the following responses:

Boy 1: 'I want to use the computer as a doctor in order to search for the file if somebody comes suffering from AIDS they want to search the database for this.'

Boy 2: 'I want to use the computer for communication'.

Girl 1: 'I want to use the computer to search for news in other countries'.

Boy 1: 'I use a computer to know what is taking place in the world'.

12. Mubende Infants School- Class 2

(11/12 year olds)

When asked whether computers would help them in their future careers the students gave the following responses:

Boy 1: 'I will use a computer to know my fellow musicians and their backgrounds so that I become an international musician'.

Boy 2: 'I will use a computer to talk to my friends from outside countries'.

Girl 1: 'I will use a computer to count money'.

Boy 3: 'I will use a computer to carry out research'.

Boy 4: 'I will use the computer to work out the mechanical problems in machines'.

Boy 5: 'I will use the computer to see the past'.

Boy 6: 'I will use the computer to know information which is taking place in outside countries'.

Students were then asked to identify the most significant change that access to ICT education had made to them personally:

Boy 7: 'It has helped me to know more about the past'.

Boy 8: 'It has helped me to get friends in outside countries'.

Boy 9: 'It has helped me to make research about science'.

Boy 10: 'It has helped me to know the background about Africa'.

Boy 11: 'It has killed boredom'.

13. Mubende Infants School- Class 3

(9/10 year olds)

The students were asked to list the jobs they hope to work in when they leave school. When asked whether they would need computers for those jobs they gave the following responses:

Girl 1: 'I want to be a bank manager and I will use a computer for counting money'.

Girl 2: 'I want to be a typist and I will use the computer for typing'.

Boy 1: 'I want to be a mathematician; I will use it to conjure the numbers'.

Boy 2: 'I want to be a pilot and I will use the computer to find directions'.

Boy 3: 'I want to be an artist and I will use the computer to draw some pictures'.

Boy 4: 'I want to be a typist and I will use the computer to type exams'.

Boy 5: 'I want to be a lawyer and I will use a computer to keep documents'.

Boy 6: 'I want to be an accountant and I will use a computer to count the money'.

Boy 7: 'I want to be a footballer and I will use a computer to keep the score mid-season'.

Boy 8: 'I want to be a footballer and I will use a computer to look for skills'.

Boy 9: 'I want to be a secretary and I will use a computer to teach people how to use a computer'.

Students were then asked to identify the most significant change that access to ICT education had made to them personally:

Boy 10: 'We have learned the story of Ugandan culture and other countries'.