Informing and empowering those in horticulture to make better business decisions

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Abstract: This paper describes the process and summarises the results from assessments of capacity building needs for horticulture industries represented by Horticulture Australia Limited (HAL). To assess capacity building needs in horticulture, HAL developed an Industry Development Needs Assessment (IDNA) process and tool kit. The nine step IDNA process determines and prioritises industry development strategies and develops action plans. Key lessons for capacity building or industry development in Horticulture are:

- Each industry requires a tailored industry development plan based on its characteristics and strategic direction.
- Some of the biggest gains for industry are for initiatives beyond the farm gate.
- Engagement with agribusiness in the awareness, extension and adoption process is vital.

Keywords: Industry Development; Capacity Building; Needs Assessment.

Introduction

Horticulture Australia limited (HAL) is an industry-owned company that invests approximately $100 million annually in research and development (R&D) and marketing projects. HAL works with over 40 horticulture industries from the fruit, nut, vegetable and ornamental sectors. Each year HAL invests approximately $80 million in R&D, of which about $20 million is specifically invested in facilitating the adoption of R&D by industry participants. The term used for this is 'Industry Development', otherwise known as 'Capacity Building'.

HAL's definition of Industry Development is '*Informing and empowering those in horticulture to make better business decisions'.* It is about ensuring industry research and information can be used and adopted by industry participants throughout the supply chain and therefore enable the industry strategic plan to be implemented.

To ensure the investments in Industry Development are strategic and justified, HAL commissioned an independent review of Industry Development. The review recommended an industry specific, needs based approach for Industry Development and this was endorsed by the HAL Board. To help industry specific assessment of industry development needs and to ensure appropriate rigour and consistency, an Industry Development Needs Assessment (IDNA) Kit was developed. The IDNA Kit outlines the nine step process, provides information and guidelines for each step along with tools or worksheets (see Figure 1).

Industry Development Needs Assessment process

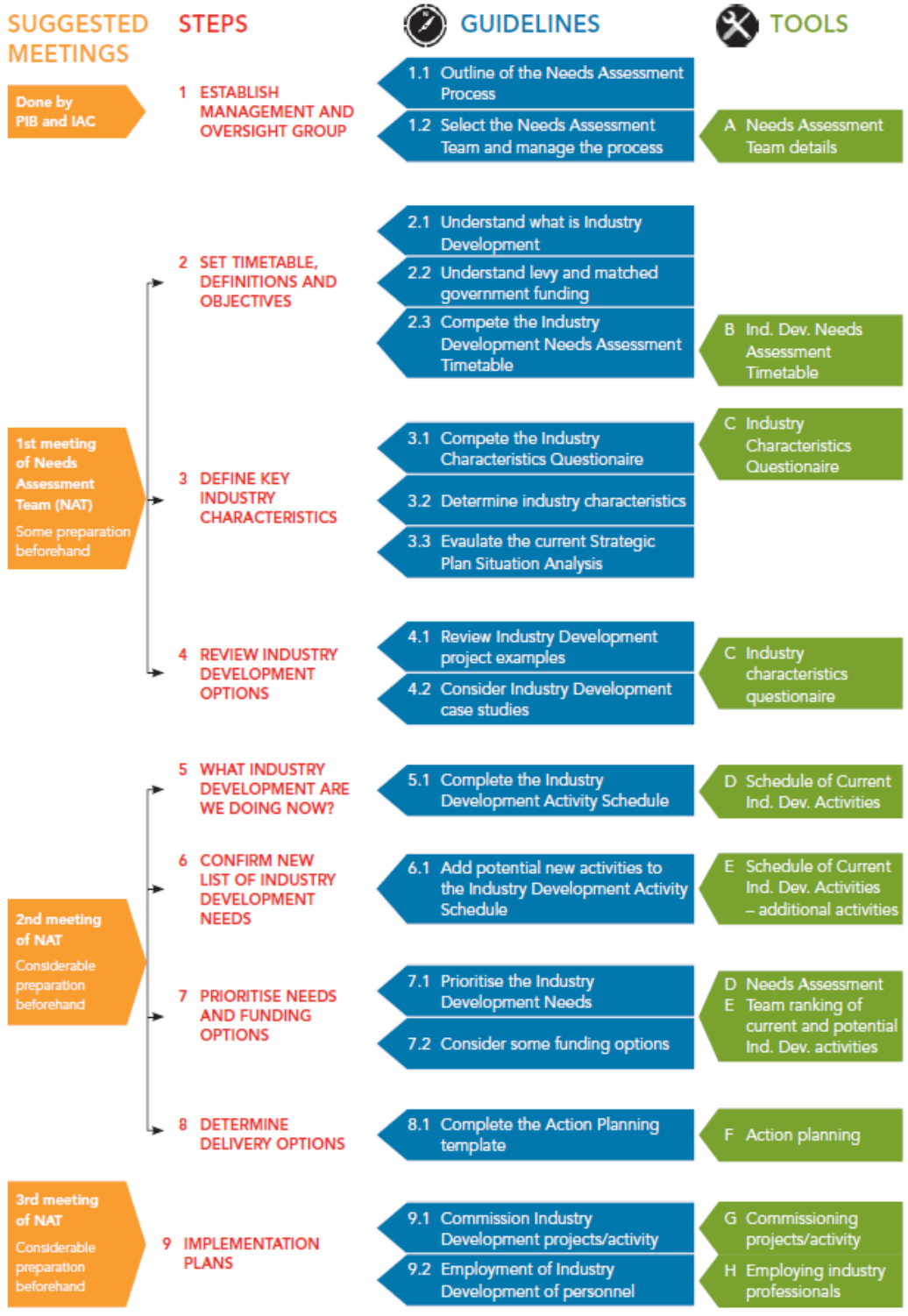
The nine step IDNA process is:

- Establish Management and Oversight Group
- Introduction and Start-up
- Define Key Industry Characteristics
- Review Industry Development Strategy Options
- What Industry Development are we doing now?
- Confirm New List of Industry Development Needs
- Prioritise and Funding
- Determine Delivery Options
- Implementation Plan.

For each step of the process information, guidelines and worksheets have been developed. The IDNA Kit contains a large variety of industry development examples and details six in-depth case studies of successful industry development programs from within horticulture and agriculture. In addition, the kit uses and builds upon research carried out by the Cooperative Venture for Capacity Building (CVCB).

The CVCB was established in 2001 by the Rural Research and Development Corporations, Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries and the Murray Darling Basin Commission. Best practice in capacity building was researched and resulted in the identification of five underlying capacity building strategies (Coutts et al. 2005):

Figure 1. Industry Development Needs Assessment Process, Guidelines and Tools



Facilitation – Industry members define their own goals and learning needs and work with a facilitator to learn and improve. For example, this service may be provided by Industry Development Officers or Group Coordinators.

Technological Adoption – Development of a specific technology, management practice or decision support system. This may involve local trials, demonstrations and/or field days.

Training – Specifically designed training programs and/or workshops to increase understanding and/or skill levels. This could involve study tours.

Information – Access to a broad range of information, such as websites, newsletters or conferences.

Consultant/Mentor – Where a mentor, consultant or advisor works over time with a individual or group to improve their managerial, technological, social and/or environment situation. This may include leadership development programs.

The examples and worksheets in the IDNA Kit highlight these five underlying capacity building strategies and encourage a strategic approach to industry development. While some industry development initiatives may incorporate more than one of these strategies, such as an Industry Development Officer project, each of these strategies result in different outcomes and have different management and evaluation processes. The aim is to ensure industries assess their specific capacity building needs and develop a more strategic approach to industry development based on their industry characteristics and strategic direction.

Previous Industry Development Activities

Prior to the development of the IDNA process and tool kit, many horticulture industries had a large mix of separate industry development projects, including:

- Industry Development Officers and/or Managers (IDOs or IDMs)
- Study Tours (in Australia and/or overseas)
- Conferences and seminars
- Training workshops and/or field days
- Leadership development seminars and/or scholarships
- Communication initiatives, such as newsletters, magazines, websites, DVDs, etc.

While each of these types of industry development projects have the potential to provide valuable outcomes for industry, management and evaluation of them varied considerably. Also, it was recognised that maximum benefit could be obtained by combining them into a coordinated strategic approach that directly links industry development initiatives with the industry strategic plan and takes into account current industry characteristics.

Completing an Industry Development Needs Assessment

While the IDNA Kit details a complete process, industries were encouraged to modify and tailor the assessment process to suit their specific needs. The level of complexity in carrying out an IDNA was largely determined by the size of the industry and the majority of industries combined their IDNA with a strategic planning process.

Individual industries were asked to ensure participation of key industry members who collectively have a mix of industry knowledge, experience, strategic thinking and ability to provide ideas from different perspectives. An independent facilitator was usually engaged to ensure participation of the key industry members and drive and complete the IDNA process.

Outcomes from conducting Industry Development Needs Assessments

Many industries were initially reluctant to complete an IDNA, however most reported significant benefit from the process. The needs assessments resulted in several common outcomes for many of the horticulture industries, including:

- A strategically focused industry development plan that directly links with the industry strategic plan
- Replacement of a mix of (often) unrelated projects with a nationally coordinated program that includes regional or local delivery sub programs
- A greater focus on the entire value chain, not just growers
- Ensuring market information drives decision making throughout the entire value chain, including on-farm business decisions
- A recognised need to engage with the private sector and commercial providers (agribusiness).

For some industries, this new approach has resulted in a move away from generic Industry Development Officers (IDOs) providing on-farm technical advice to industry development professionals having a specific focus and/or strategic role within the industry. While there was a commonly identified need to engage with the private sector and commercial providers (agribusiness) in facilitating the adoption of R&D, there is a high level of uncertainty about how to do this and maintain information integrity and ensure no an unfair commercial advantage.

Examples of Industry Development programs that have been developed include:

> The **Citrus Industry** employed a General Manager – Market Development who has a key role in ensuring a focus on market information and coordinating regional based industry development programs and Value Chain Coordinators.
>
> The **Vegetable Industry Development Program** was based on the industry's strategic plan. An open tender process was undertaken for the delivery of Program Coordination & several sub programs including: Consumers & Markets; Knowledge Management; People Development & Leadership; and the regional delivery sub programs of Innoveg. An additional regional delivery sub program, known as Collaborative Industry Organisations, was also incorporated.
>
> The **Nursery Industry** created a nationally coordinated industry development program that sub-contracts services to state organisations with payments based on recorded activities, outputs and outcomes.
>
> The **Macadamia Industry** developed several linked programs to cover industry communications, market development and regional delivery.

Acknowledgments

Organisations and individuals involved with the Cooperative Venture for Capacity Building (CVCB). For more information on the CVCB and the research carried out, www.rirdc.gov.au and search *'capacity building'.*

Richard de Vos from *'de Vos Consulting'* who, along with Horticulture Australia Limited, developed the Industry Development Needs Assessment Tool Kit.

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