



AGRICULTURAL KNOWLEDGE: LINKING FARMERS,
ADVISORS AND RESEARCHERS TO BOOST INNOVATION

AGRILINK'S MULTI-LEVEL CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

THEORY PRIMER: 2) "BINDING" AND "NOT BINDING"
GOOD PRACTICES – NECESSITY TO DIFFERENTIATE

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AgriLink

Agricultural Knowledge: Linking farmers, advisors and researchers to boost innovation.

AgriLink’s multi-level conceptual framework

Theory primer: 2) “Binding” and “not binding” good practices – necessity to differentiate

The elaboration of this Conceptual Framework has been coordinated by **The James Hutton Institute**, leader of AgriLink’s WP2.

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This document presents the multi-level conceptual framework of the research and innovation project AgriLink. It is a living document.

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It has gone through a transdisciplinary process, with implication of both practitioners and researchers in writing, editing or reviewing the manuscript. This participation has been organised within AgriLink’s consortium and beyond, with the involvement of members of the International Advisory Board of the project, including members of the Working Group on Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System of the Standing Committee on Agricultural Research of the European Commission.



Theory Primers

The purpose of the primers is to provide AgriLink consortium members with an introduction to each topic, which outlines the key points and identifies options for further reading. The primers have also served to demonstrate the wide range of expertise in the consortium, and to highlight the specific research interests of consortium members. Primers are intended to act as a **foundation for academic journal articles, and an early opportunity for collaboration between consortium members.**

2) “Binding” and “not binding” good practices – necessity to differentiate

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1.0 General Overview of the Theory or Approach

1.1 Summary of the Theory, Approach or Topic

The notion of “practice” is widely used to analyse farm related activities and disseminate knowledge regarding these activities.

There are two different uses of the notion of “good practices”.

- 1) Non prescriptive approach. Identification of “good practices” can aim at sharing experience and know-how (production, advice) when observations have shown good results of certain practices. It is acknowledge that such information may only help decision making, and that what is a “good” practice may vary according to the objectives of the action, the context, etc.
- 2) Prescriptive approaches. Description of “good practices” is provided to various stakeholders in order to set the norms of their activity. These norms can be used for various purposes (regulation, subsidies release, etc.). It is acknowledge that a “good practice” is a framework for decision making, and that it is the responsibility of the concerned stakeholder to adopt it.

1.2 Major authors and their disciplines

1) The concept of “practice” has a long history in anthropology and social sciences (Turner 1994). Practices studies are grounded approaches “*in taking up a point of view on the action, withdrawing from it in order to observe it from above and from a distance, he [the researcher] constitutes practical activity as an object of observation and analysis, a representation.*” Bourdieu 1977 p.2

Farming System research and extension papers have shown that 1) for similar agricultural productions practices may be diverse and value driven and 2) that good performances could be obtained by a variety of practices (e.g. works presented in IFSA, research of Inra-SAD, research of rural sociology Group of Wageningen...).

Basically, these approaches were opposed to the idea that there is one and only “one best way” to produce.

2) This concept has been captured by some approaches who are willing to impose a certain way of production. Hence the development of prescriptive approaches. For instance, the pesticide industry is describing “good practices” for the use of each crop protection product that is sold in the EU. These are “binding good practices”, if the farmer does not follow them, the law will make him responsible for any accident that will occur. In that case, the fact that



the prescribed “good practice” is not relevant or feasible does not matter (e.g. prescription of personal protective equipment in hot environment; if a farmer does not wear it because it is impossible (hit stress), he will be considered as responsible for his intoxication).

1.3 Key references

Turner S. 1994. The social theory of practices. Tradition, Tacit knowledge, and presupposition. The university of Chicago Press.

Bourdieu P. 1972/1977. Outline of a theory of practice. Cambridge University Press.

FAO 2004. Good Agricultural Practices – a working concept. Background paper for the FAO Internal Workshop on Good Agricultural Practices Rome, Italy 27-29 October 2004

1.4 Brief history of how the theory has developed and been applied

See above.

2.0 Application to the analysing the role of farm advisory services in innovation

2.1 Relevance to AgriLink Objectives

| [tick relevant] | AgriLink Objectives |
|-----------------|---|
| X | Develop a theoretical framework utilising a multi-level perspective to integrate sociological and economic theories with inputs from psychology and learning studies; and assess the functions played by advisory organisations in innovation dynamics at multiple levels (micro-, meso-, macro-levels) [WP1]; |
| X | Assess the diversity of farmers’ use of knowledge and services from both formal and informal sources (micro-AKIS), and how they translate this into changes on their own farms [WP2]; |
| | Develop and utilise cutting edge research methods to assess new advisory service models and their innovation potential [WP2]; |
| | Identify thoroughly the roles of the R-FAS (regional FAS) in innovation development, evaluation, adoption and dissemination in various EU rural and agricultural contexts [WP2]; |
| X | Test how various forms of (national and regional) governance and funding schemes of farm advice i) support (or not) farmers’ micro-AKIS, ii) sustain the relation between research, advice, farmers and facilitate knowledge assemblage iii) enable evaluation of the (positive and negative) effects of innovation for sustainable development of agriculture [WP4]; |
| X | Assess the effectiveness of formal support to agricultural advisory organisations forming the R-FAS by combining quantitative and qualitative methods, with a focus on the EU-FAS policy instrument (the first and second version of the regulation) and by relating them to other findings of AgriLink. [WP4]. |
| | At the applied level, the objectives of AgriLink are to: |
| X | Develop recommendations to enhance farm advisory systems from a multi-level perspective, from the viewpoint of farmers’ access to knowledge and |



| | |
|---|---|
| | services (micro-AKIS) up to the question of governance, also recommending supports to encourage advisors to utilise specific tools, methods to better link science and practice, encourage life-long learning and interactivity between advisors [WP5] ; |
| X | Build socio-technical transition scenarios for improving the performance of advisory systems and achieving more sustainable systems - through interactive sessions with policy makers and advisory organisations; explore the practical relevance of AgriLink’s recommendations in this process [WP5] ; |
| X | Test and validate innovative advisory tools and services to better connect research and practice [WP3] ; |
| X | Develop new learning and interaction methods for fruitful exchanges between farmers, researchers and advisors, with a focus on advisors’ needs for new skills and new roles [WP3] ; |
| X | Guarantee the quality of practitioners’ involvement throughout the project to support the identification of best fit practices for various types of farm advisory services (use of new technologies, methods, tools) in different European contexts, and for the governance of their public supports [WP6] . |

2.2 How this can be applied/developed in AgriLink

Personal position, to be discussed:

For research. We need to be cautious about the diversity of practices and the reasons why they are diverse (various constraints met by farmers, contexts...).

For dissemination of our research results (including the many short notes to be released). We need to be explicit in each document that the notion of “good practices” is used to share experience and not as a binding approach.

2.3 Research questions relevant to AgriLink [see the draft conceptual framework for further options]

I feel that one important dimension of the innovation studies should be the analysis of the adverse effects of innovations, and the analysis of how this knowledge on adverse effects is made available to stakeholders.

If we consider that there is one best way to produce, to deliver advice, then there is only one optimal development path. An authoritarian policy regime (and its researchers) may decide what is THE “good practice”.

If we consider that innovations are not win / win games, but may entail benefits and costs, winners and losers, then innovation adoption needs to be based on an assessment of these different aspects.

A growing number of farmers distrust technical messages coming from the industry and some advisory services because they were not informed of adverse effects of certain measures or prescriptions (eg. pesticide use and farmers’ health). In this situation, we can make the hypothesis that a total lack of information on adverse effects of the innovation will have a negative impact on innovation adoption.



2.4 Methodological implications

- To favour typologies of the diversity of practices rather than the assumption of “representative agent practices”. To be cautious regarding any normative interpretation of results on “good” practices.
- However, we should not reject the heuristic value of identification and exchanges around the notion of practices.

References (to documents referenced in this template only)

Turner S. 1994. The social theory of practices. Tradition, Tacit knowledge, and presupposition. The university of Chicago Press.

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