Effective knowledge transfer through discussion groups

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Here’s the science...

1. Social learning theory

“People learn from one another via observation, imitation and modelling.” (Bandura)

“watching, listening, asking questions and doing”
And some more science...

2. The innovation decision process

“...how an innovation is communicated over time... through a social system” (Rogers)
Why do farmers try new things?

Gaining knowledge
Acquiring skills
Changing mindsets/attitudes

All three needed for change

Practice adoption leading to change
Discussion groups: the key to change

...a group of local farmers who meet regularly on each other’s farms to see, discuss and learn (Parminter, 2010)
Learning opportunities for members

- (New) technical information
- Sharing knowledge and experiences
- Picking up new ideas
- Help in solving problems
- Support in trying new ideas
- Positive space
- Interaction with other farmers
- Make friends
- Personal development

Discussion groups act as an effective means for farmers to witness technologies in practice by their peers and thus give members the confidence to apply such technologies in their own businesses (Millar, 2010).
What evidence is there?

Group members are more likely to achieve performance targets...

...and earn €125/cow (2.5 cent/litre or €247/Ha) in additional gross margin
Five ingredients for success

- Membership and group organisation
- Trust and security
- Enjoyment and fun
- Solidarity
- Facilitation and learning drivers
The role of the adviser

• Facilitator...not chairperson
• Before/ during / after meeting activities
  • During ... questioning, prompting, involving, challenging
• Group norms/ creating the learning environment
• Technical knowledge (when required)
Financial support for discussion groups

• Dairy Efficiency Programme
• Development Programme for Dairying
• Cash Plan Programme
• Beef Technology Adoption Programme
• Sheep Technology Adoption Programme
• KT Groups (2015 – 2021)
Summary

“Children learn as they play. Most importantly, in play children learn how to learn.”