

Monitoring and Evaluation

How do we decide what to do as we are confronted with the many decisions we have to make in life? We are constantly sifting the data and evidence around us, making our decisions on the basis of this, acting on decisions and counting the positive and negative consequences of our actions. We naturally monitor and evaluate - often without thinking about it too much.

Monitoring

What are we doing when we monitor?

It simply means we are looking at what's happening. We may be counting the numbers of people who use our services to see whether demand is increasing. We may be finding out who is using our services, what ethnic groups they come from or whether disabled people access our services. We may be looking around to see if we can order supplies more cheaply. There are all kinds of things we check on regularly. This is monitoring.

Evaluation

What are we doing when we evaluate?

Once we have collected information about our services and the people using them, we usually make some observations and come to some conclusions. We make judgements. We may judge that numbers using our service are increasing because a recent publicity leaflet has worked, or because a nearby service has closed down, or because we have done something recently to improve the quality of what we provide. We are using our monitoring evidence to make a value judgement. This is evaluation.

Why evaluate

When we do something ourselves we can usually see whether what we set out to achieve did actually happen as a result of our actions. Organisations are more complex. Their achievements are the result of the efforts of many people. They may also require the collaboration of other partner organizations. If we want to know whether we are achieving what we set out to, and about the wider effects our work has had, we need to agree on a way of evaluating which everyone in the organisation feeds into. By doing this we can:-

- Design and redesign our activities to achieve desired results
- Discover ways of improving what we do
- Decide on changes which need to be made
- Set new targets for future work
- Review our overall strategy for achieving our aims

The benefits of evaluation

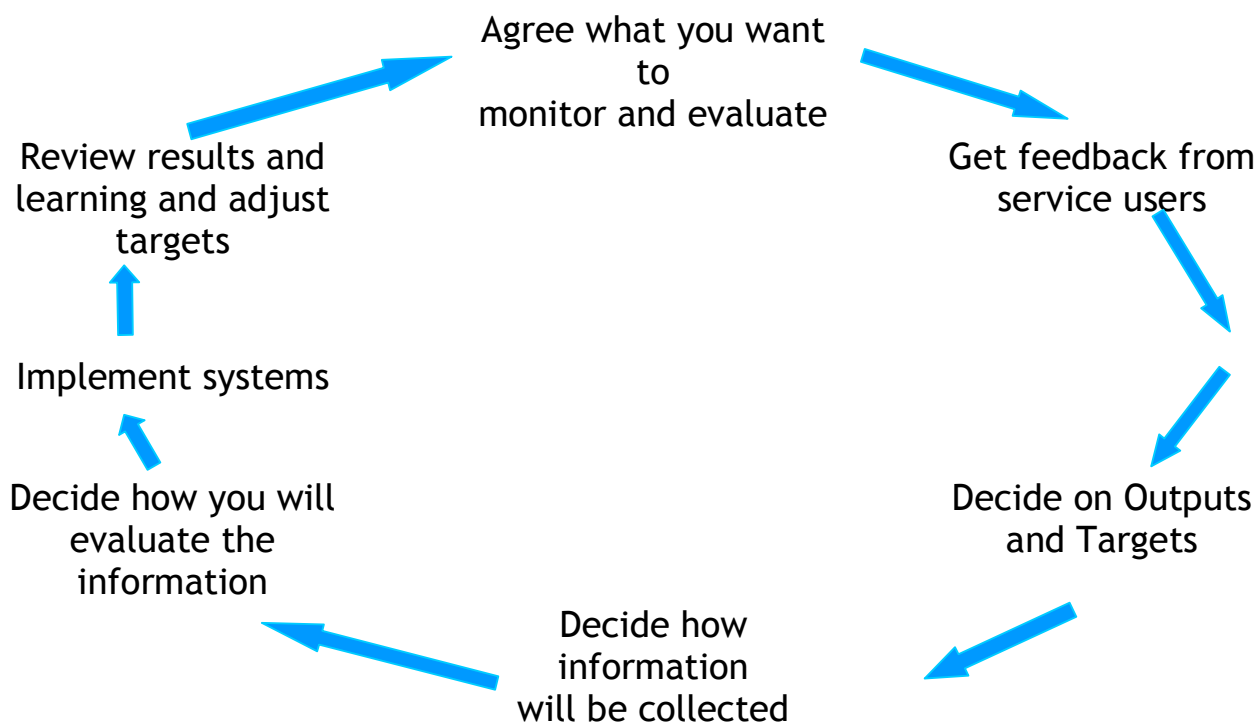
- Everyone in the organization will be pulling in the same direction
- There will be a clear idea of what constitutes success
- There will be a sense of achievement
- The organization will have a good public image
- It will increase attractiveness to users and funders

Getting ready to monitor and evaluate

- Get everyone in the organization thinking about and discussing what they do to contribute to the achievement of the organizations objectives so that you can agree on what needs to be monitored.
- Find out from users what they require of your service. Tell them what it is you are trying to achieve and how you are planning to do it. Ask them for regular feedback. The more users are involved, the more they will be able to help you be successful in achieving outcomes. But take care - some users may not be satisfied because, for example, you gave them accurate advice that they did not want to hear.
- Agree some standards or targets that you will measure against - e.g. 90% of service users will rate our service excellent on feedback forms by the end of this year, the percentage of service users from the ethnic minorities will increase by 10% by the end of this year, and we will reduce the time it takes us to respond to a request for support by half within one year. Notice that targets are very specific and often have numbers attached.
- Agree the methods you are going to use to collect data. Successful monitoring and evaluation does not need to be costly or even time consuming. Use the systems you already have in your organization for collecting information and obtaining feedback. These might be user registration, membership forms, supervision sessions, progress reports, case conferences, databases, diaries or day books.

- Hold regular meetings to report on progress, draw conclusions and decide on changes and improvements.
- Hold an annual event, involving users, to look at the longer term implications of your evaluation for future planning of the service.
- Be aware that good evaluation should lead to continuous improvement and change. Change is sometimes difficult and threatening and requires skilful management.

The monitoring and evaluation cycle



Monitoring and evaluation - some common terms

When an organization wants to approach evaluation systematically, so that everyone can contribute and learn, there are some techniques we can use. Here are some of the terms associated with evaluation that you may have come across:

Using 'performance indicators'

The 'performance' of an organization is its success in achieving the desired results. The indicators of how successfully you have performed could include:-

- **Quantitative** - it tells you that numbers using the service, or the percentage of users from target communities, are on, above or below target e.g. 25 people per week will seek advice at our drop in session

- **Financial** - it tells you that, what it costs to produce the service, is on, above or below target *e.g. the costs of running the drop in service will not exceed £150 per service user*
- **Qualitative** - it tells you whether the expectations users have of the service are met, whether it does what it says it will do *e.g. 90% of service users rate our service excellent on feedback forms*
- **Process** - it tells you whether people have a good experience of using the service, whether they are treated well, their requests are dealt with promptly and in a friendly manner *e.g. all queries will be dealt with within 4 days*
- **Outcome** - it tells you whether what happens to users as a result of their using your service is what you and they hoped and expected *e.g. 80% of users reported a successful outcome as a result of our advice to them*
- **Comparative** - it tells you whether results achieved are in line with other similar organizations, or better than could have been achieved by other means *e.g. 75% of service users reported that they had no other means available to them to address their problem.*

Performance indicators only work if you have set a standard and/or target to measure against. This is useful, because it gets everyone thinking about what they should be achieving and enables them to plan and set goals for themselves. It will help you design any feedback or evaluation forms in order to collect the required information, and to structure supervision sessions.

The three 'Es'

These are **economy**, **efficiency** and **effectiveness**. It is useful to add a fourth 'E' - **equity**. These terms are generally connected to assessing a service as 'value for money'

Economy is concerned with ensuring that the amount of resource used to produce the appropriate standard of service is kept as low as possible. This does not mean cutting corners

Efficiency is concerned with employing resources to produce the maximum output of service, not wasting resources.

Effectiveness is concerned with ensuring that the services produced meet the needs of users and achieve the stated objectives of the organization. For example, it might not be effective to produce information leaflets if your user group has problems with reading. Information produced does not equate with people making use of that information to meet their needs. This is why of the three 'Es', 'effectiveness' is the most important to evaluate. Economical and efficiently run services that do not meet needs are not good value for money.

Equity is suggested as the fourth 'E' because it is also important that your service is effective for all those who could benefit, including groups who are harder to reach through disadvantage and marginalization.

Inputs, process, outputs and outcomes

These are connected to the three 'Es'. It is probably most useful to work backwards. As we have seen, an effective organization is one that achieves its objectives and meets the needs of its users. These are the desired **outcomes**. These could be trainees moving into employment, people receiving benefits to which they are entitled, local communities enabled to participate in regeneration projects. There may be additional outcomes which were not expected, and even some which were not desired.

An organization is unlikely to achieve any outcomes without some activities. These activities are the organisation's **outputs**. It is important to remember that an organization's outputs (activities) need to reflect both their own, and funders, needs and requirements, as funders often set their own outputs as part of any contract/agreement. These outputs could cover a variety of activities for example training courses, advice sessions, community consultation days, producing leaflets etc.

To produce these outputs the organization is involved in **processes** of production. These might include recruitment and supervision of staff and volunteers, decision-making processes, meetings, applications for funding and systems for handling information. Finally, none of this will happen unless there are inputs into the organization. These could be finance, people, information, training supplies, professional services and equipment.

Any evaluation needs to take account of all these, because they all contribute to achieving the final outcomes. If we are not achieving what we set out to, or feel we could do even better, we need to know at which level to pay attention in order to make the difference. Could it be that we have sufficient resources, or that our organizational processes lead to waste? For example, do we spend too much time in meetings because our information systems are not up to the job? Could it be that the training courses we are running have not kept pace with the changing needs of our user groups? Are there external factors that prevent our excellent outputs achieving the desired outcomes? For example, some of our trainees failing to make use of what they learn with us because they are having problems with their benefits, and need advice from another agency?

Evaluation is an essential tool for identifying these issues and planning to address them.

Some frequently asked questions

- **How can we evaluate if we are developmental rather than service providing?** It is hard to specify a concrete outcome from the work. Yet it is doubtful that any development worker would want to carry on without any idea if they were achieving anything by their efforts. The process of thinking through what success looks like to you, in order to evaluate it, is very useful for clarifying, defining and putting boundaries round otherwise potentially endless work.
- **How do we know that we achieved an outcome rather than it being the result of some other action or agency?** We can never know entirely or accurately. You can ask users, other agencies, members of the public, volunteers and others to tell you what they think, through surveys and questionnaires. This kind of subjective evidence, when drawn from a range of stakeholders, is perfectly acceptable for evaluation.

TIPS

- Be very clear about what you want to measure and why
- Be clear about who will measure and when they will do it
- Be clear about who will evaluate and when they will do it
- As far as possible, integrate monitoring into regular work practice in a way that supports the work and build evaluation into normal review cycles and processes
- Integrate funders' needs for monitoring and your own into a single system. Be proactive - tell funders what the most valuable measures of success will be

- **How do we know what a particular measure is telling us about our service?** Some measures can be misleading. If numbers using the service are down, does this tell you that the service is unpopular or that you are doing a good job and reducing need? One measure on its own will never be useful. Only by being part of a range of inter-connected measures will it give you useful information.
- **What if our funders want to measure something that we don't consider useful?** Funders usually want to know if you are providing value for money compared to other ways they might achieve their objectives. You also want to know this. Negotiating with funders how both your needs can be met through evaluation will be useful and empowering - assuming you have the same objectives for the user group concerned. If there is a real mismatch between your objectives and the funder's, you may need to rethink your funding strategy in the longer term.

Case Study

Inglewood Mentoring Project (IMP)

Implements a Monitoring and Evaluation System

IMP trains people from the local community as mentors to support young people in and out of school with their learning and development. They are a small, mostly volunteer run project with some funding from the local authority and local charitable trusts. They decide to implement a simple monitoring and evaluation system.

1. Agreeing on what to evaluate

A meeting is called of staff, volunteers, mentors and committee members to discuss what they are trying to achieve, where they are successful and where the gaps and challenges are. They decide that they need:

- to attract more mentors from ethnic minority backgrounds
- to target more young people who are not in school
- more systematic liaison with other agencies working with these young people

2. Getting feedback from service users

Mentors invite some of the young people they work with to provide feedback on the service at an informal social event. Young people show a high level of satisfaction with the service. For them a successful mentoring relationship makes learning a more positive experience and increases their self-esteem. They do feel that some young people get more attention than others and wonder if there are guidelines about what they should expect.

3. Agreeing outputs and targets

A working group of a mentor, a staff member, a committee member and a young person meet to draft some targets in the areas outlined. These are:

- By the end of the year at least 5 new mentors from ethnic minorities will be trained
- By the end of the year IMP will increase the number of young people not in school that they work with by 10%
- Within the next 6 months meetings will have been held with key agencies to set up mechanisms for regular, systematic liaison with a set of guidelines on good practice
- Within a year the mechanisms will be in place with at least 2 agencies
- Within the next 6 months a consultation with young people and mentors on guidelines for the mentoring process will result in a report on the way forward
- 90% of young people in a 6-monthly feedback survey will score IMP as excellent in having increased their self esteem

4. Collecting information

The targets are agreed by IMP. The manager discusses with staff, volunteers and mentors how they will contribute to reaching targets. The working group consults with staff on how best to collect information to monitor progress. They decide:-

- To put information on ethnic backgrounds of mentors onto the database and check monthly to see whether numbers from different communities are increasing
- To check the database of young people monthly to look at the proportion not in school
- To present data from the above to the management committee so that they can monitor progress on targets and adjust plans as appropriate
- To schedule a special report and discussion at committee on progress with liaison with key agencies in 3 months time
- To use supervision sessions with mentors to discuss progress on the consultation on guidelines for mentoring
- To design the self-esteem survey and ensure mentors go through it with their young people every 6 months

5. Evaluating the information

IMP decides to hold an away day at the end of the year to look at progress, discuss problems and use what they have learned to plan both the service and evaluation for the year ahead. Part of this will be to plan a feedback event for young people.

6. Reviewing and adjusting the system

The manager of IMP, through staff meetings, supervision and training sessions, ensures that any difficulties people are having implementing the system or meeting targets are openly discussed and satisfactorily resolved

Useful Publications

- **Just about Managing** - by Sandy Adirondack
London Voluntary Service Council
356 Holloway Road
London N7 6PA
Tel:- 020 7700 8107

- **Quality of Service - Measuring Performance for Voluntary Organisations** - by Alan Lawrie
Directory of Social Change
24 Stephenson Way
London NW1 2DP
Tel:- 020 7209 5151

- **PQASSO - How to implement a Quality Assurance System, Charities Evaluation Service (CES)**
The Charities Evaluation Service (CES) has produced four linked books on aspects of evaluation:-
 - **Monitoring Ourselves** by Anne Conner
 - **Managing Evaluation** by Willem van der Eyken
 - **Developing Aims and Objectives** by Gill Whitting
 - **A Rough Guide to Change** by Jenny Hyatt

Organisations that can advise and help

- **Voluntary Action Sheffield**
The Circle
33 Rockingham Lane
Sheffield S1 4FW
Tel:- 0114 253 6600
Fax:- 0114 253 6601
Minicom:- 0114 253 6602
Web:- <http://www.vas.org.uk/>
VAS Information sheets:- <http://www.vas.org.uk/documents/index>

- **Charities Evaluation Service**
4 Coldbath Square
London
EC1R 5HL
Tel:- 020 7713 5722
Fax:- 020 7713 5692
Email:- <mailto:enquiries@ces-vol.org.uk>

INFORMATION SHEETS available from VAS:

Accessible Organisations
Acquiring and Managing Premises
Action Planning
Business Planning
Child and Vulnerable Adult Protection
Closing Down
Community Interest Companies
Constitutions
Contracts and Procurement
Data Protection
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