Helpful definitions to understand the language of evaluation

Evaluation

According to Social Research Methods, Social Market Research (2012) the definition of evaluation is:

'The systematic acquisition and assessment of information to provide useful feedback about some object'

All evaluation work involves collecting and sifting through information, making judgments about the validity of the information and meaning that we derive from it.

The Goals of Evaluation

The generic goal of most evaluations is to provide "useful feedback" to a variety of audiences including sponsors, funders, donors, client-groups, administrators, staff, and other relevant constituencies. Most often, feedback is perceived as "useful" if it aids in decision-making.

Monitoring

According to the book, Definition and Purpose by Phil Bartle, PhD, monitoring is

'The regular observation and recording of activities taking place in a project or programme. It is a process of routinely gathering information on all aspects of the project'.

Monitoring involves giving interim feedback about the progress of the project to the donors, implementers and beneficiaries of the project as it is being implemented. Reporting of monitoring information prepares funders for making decisions at a later stage and enables charities to share a balanced view with funders ahead of sending in a final report. The gathered information can also be used to improve project performance as it is being implemented to improve outcomes and impact of a project.

Purpose of Monitoring

Monitoring provides information that will be useful in:

- Analysing the situation in the community and its project;
- Determining whether the inputs in the project are well utilised;
- Identifying problems facing the community or project and finding solutions;
- Ensuring all activities are carried out properly by the right people and in time;
- Using lessons from one project experience on to another; and
- Determining whether the way the project was planned is the most appropriate way of solving the problem at hand.

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Evidence

According to NESTA, National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts "evidence is not about particular types of data or specific research methods. Instead they are interested in high quality, robust and appropriate evidence which helps identify the most promising innovations, and then to continue to generate relevant types of evidence to ensure they are working as they intended or better"

NESTA notes 5 categories of evidence:

Level 1   You can describe what you do and why it matters, logically, coherently and convincingly

Level 2   You capture data that shows positive change, but you cannot confirm you directly caused this

Level 3   You can demonstrate causality using a control or comparison group

Level 4   You have one + independent replication evaluations that confirms these conclusions

Level 5   You have manuals, systems and procedures to ensure consistent replication and positive impact

Social Impact

According to the Economic and Social Research Council, social impact is:

'the demonstrable contribution that social activities make to society and the economy…embracing all the diverse ways that those activities benefit individuals, organizations, communities and nations'.

These contributions include, although are not limited to, the following:

* fostering social and/or economic performance, specifically efficiency
* increasing the effectiveness of public services and policy
* enhancing quality of life, community, health, social and creative output (equity)

Value

According to DEMOS, There is "no single authoritative definition of 'social value'".

Nevertheless, several leading organisations in this field do provide similar explanations of it. Many contemporary definitions of social value can be found in the work on Social Return On Investment or the approach that places a monetary value on a social contribution that dos not usually have a market value (like well-being or a reduction in obesity). For example, New Economics Foundation conducted research on the value created by a training programme for ex-offenders revealed that for every £1 invested, £10.50 of social value was created.

"Social value can therefore be described as "monetary measures or benchmarks that place financial value on the important social, individual and community impacts identified by stakeholders that do not usually have market values. The aim is to include the values of people in order to give people a voice in resource allocation decisions"

Generations Working Together

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Indicators of success

According to Management Science Magazine, success indicators are 'quantitative and qualitative benchmarks or measurements that show how successfully an organisation is achieving its goals'.

Quantitative evaluation This is information which can describe what happened – e.g. where and when, with whom, and how often. The information can inform you of the outputs of the project, such as how many workshops there were. It can also inform you of the outcomes of the project such as how many people joined Facebook since joining the project, or how many volunteered to get involved in the next initiative.

Qualitative evaluation This is information which can describe how and why the project has had an effect on individuals or communities. This kind of information can describe the soft outcomes of a project such as confidence gained. The information can tell the story of the project and enable the voice of those involved.