A Wide-angle View of Program Success:
When are performance indicators meaningful, what are their limitations, and how can we create alternative approaches?

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Workshop Objectives
• Distinguish between well-developed and poorly-developed indicators
• Write well-constructed indicators (both quantitative and qualitative)
• Distinguish between performance measurement/monitoring and program evaluation

Workshop Objectives
• Determine when indicators are most likely to provide useful data for decision-making, or not
• Develop alternative approaches that could complement or replace pre-determined indicators, depending on an evaluation’s focus
Focus of Workshop

- Focus mainly on indicators for outcomes
- Outputs – a common type of process indicator - e.g., # and types of workshop topics, # of times workshop delivered, # of workshop participants
- Can also have qualitative process indicators such as facilitators and barriers to participation; descriptions pertaining to satisfaction (likes/dislikes) that may complement satisfaction ratings

Focus of Workshop

- Can also have indicators for inputs - e.g., $ contribution from each funding source, # of staff, # of volunteers, # of person hours (staff, volunteer)
- We can discuss process and input indicators more, if the group wishes

What Are Indicators?

- Indicators are specific, observable, and measurable characteristics or changes that show the progress a program is making toward achieving a specified outcome. (CDC, 2001, page 52)
Writing Clear Indicators

- Indicators need to define success or progress toward the outcome

- Example: Developing an indicator for a program outcome ‘to increase social connectedness among isolated seniors’

What's Wrong with This Indicator?

- % (or #) of isolated seniors who become more socially connected

- # (%) of isolated seniors who report making at least one new friend in the program

- Could further define what we mean by ‘friend’ – someone with whom they can talk, do activities, have things in common

- A common error in writing indicators is to repeat the outcome without actually defining it

Writing Clear Indicators

- Indicators need to match outcomes

- Example: Developing an indicator for a program outcome ‘Teen mothers attend school regularly’

What's Wrong with This Indicator?

- # (%) of teen mothers who graduate from high school
Matching Indicators to Outcomes

- An indicator that corresponds to the school attendance:

- Of teen mothers enrolled in high school whose children are enrolled in child care program, # and % who miss less than 3 days per month during school year

  (From United Way of America, 1996)

Matching Indicators to Outcomes

- An indicator that corresponds to graduation rate:

- Of teen mothers whose children are enrolled in childcare program, number and percent who graduate from high school over a 4-year period

  (From United Way of America, 1996)

Indicator Examples

Outcome:
- Decreased exposure of adult nonsmokers to environmental tobacco smoke (ETS)

Indicators:
- % of adult nonsmokers who report they have not been exposed to cigarette smoke during the previous 7 days
**Indicator Examples**

- % of adults who report they are never exposed to cigarette smoke in restaurants
- % of adults who report they are not exposed to cigarette smoke at work during a typical work day

(CDC, 2001, p. 53)

**Indicator Denominators**

- Indicators involving %’s need a denominator
  - Often the denominator is implied – such as all program participants or the total population of an area

**Indicator Denominators**

- We could also write the indicator to make the denominator, & our calculation of %, explicit:

  \[
  \frac{\text{# of participants who report making at least one new friend}}{\text{All program participants}}
  \]
Qualitative Indicators

- Indicators have traditionally been numerical (quantitative)
- Qualitative indicators give us more in-depth information on the meaning of change for people, rather than simply counting whether a change did or did not happen.

For example, in addition to looking at percentage of isolated seniors who make at least one new friend, we can define what the friendship(s) might look like (what people do together, how they involve children or not, etc).

Qualitative and quantitative indicators yield complementary data.

Example: % of participants who quit smoking (quantitative). For deeper understanding of program’s impact, you could include ‘description of participants’ motivation to quit or not quit smoking’ as a qualitative indicator.

(Towards Evidence Informed Practice, Ontario Public Health Association, 2009)
More Indicator Examples

Outcome:
• Our region will have a youth-led network to develop substance-free leisure activities outside of school hours, by January 2012

Indicators:
• (1) Network has youth in leadership positions; (2) Network organizes at least 2 after school or weekend leisure activities per week (e.g., sports, arts, socials)

Still More Indicator Examples

Outcome:
• Children in our program achieve developmental milestones appropriate to their age and/or developmental ability

(In this case, timelines may vary for each child)

Still More Indicator Examples

Indicators:
• Number (%) of children who demonstrate age/developmentally appropriate:
  • Communications skills (e.g., speaks, responds verbally to questions)
  • Gross motor skills (e.g., throws a ball, climbs, hops)
Still More Indicator Examples

- Fine motor skills (e.g. draws with a pencil, does puzzles, uses scissors)
- Problem solving skills (e.g. understands size and direction)
- Personal/social skills (serves food, washes hands, knows names of others)

Above examples based on Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ)
www.agesandstages.com/

Even More Indicator Examples

Outcome:
- Increased recognition of the affordable housing coalition’s expertise on housing policy relevant to people living in poverty, over the next year

Indicators:
- Number and types of requests for information on policies that facilitate affordable housing, from (a) elected politicians (b) government departments, and (c) media (quantitative)

Even More Indicator Examples

- Themes emerging from any further discussions (beyond requests) between affordable housing representatives and (a) elected politicians, (b) government departments, and (c) media, regarding policies that facilitate affordable housing (qualitative)
Even More Indicator Examples

**Outcome:**
- Household water use in our municipality will decrease by at least 10% over the next three years

**Indicator:**
- Average residential water consumption, in cubic metres

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A Word About Targets

- It is best to include targets after reviewing literature on similar programs and doing some early monitoring to determine what targets are realistic, rather than guessing and possibly setting targets too high or too low
- Targets can be written into either the indicator or into the outcome itself

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Choosing Indicators

- Choose indicators based on evaluation questions you want to answer – not simply because there is data available for particular indicators
- (Whenever possible, with quantitative indicators) choose indicators that have previously been tested – for characteristics like reliability, validity, sensitivity, specificity
- Keep indicators in context (e.g., organizational) and recognize they have limitations (e.g., data availability/quality, susceptibility to ‘gaming’)

Bouchard & Ancona, 2008
Your Turn!
In groups of 3:
• Choose a program that one of you is doing
• Choose or develop an outcome for that program
• Write one quantitative indicator and/or one qualitative indicator for that outcome
• Repeat the above process with each person in your group

Limits of Performance Monitoring
• Performance indicators have come to dominate evaluation of publicly funded projects/programs
• Fits with government accountability focus

Limits of Performance Monitoring
• This is helpful for upfront planning, but can lead to an excessive focus on outputs and quantifiable outcomes, at the expense of an in-depth look at process and context, and of qualitative data
• Performance focus can encourage monitoring without more in-depth evaluation
Limits of Performance Focus

- “Preoccupation with measuring a few indicators creates a kind of tunnel vision that shuts out the complexity of reality. Things appear simpler and more controllable than they are.” (Westley et al., 2006, p. 240)

- Stake (2004) is critical of simplistic indicators, and related measures. His responsive evaluation approach is a reaction to an over-emphasis on testing against pre-determined criteria.

- E.g., limits of standardized tests to provide a comprehensive picture of educational outcomes

- Monitoring performance is not the same as doing evaluation

- Evaluation - indicators are only one data source

- Evaluation goes further – e.g., ‘how’ and ‘why’ of results, unintended outcomes, attribution or contribution (re how results are linked to program)

- Burt Perrin has written/presented extensively on limits of indicators – for an example, see Perrin (2007)
Limits of Performance Focus

- We get preoccupied with questions like ‘did we achieve our outcomes?’ – without asking why or why not, or what else happened or did not happen

- What gets measured gets done – this can lead to narrow focus on pre-determined ‘performance’ criteria, rather than being open to evolving needs/capacities

Example: A community capacity project may start out tracking specific skills of community members (event organizing, proposal writing) with the intent at assessing how these improve over time – but later realize that broader leadership development has to happen first

What does not get measured may not get done

- For example, if ‘collaboration’ is defined as relationships among health organizations, less effort may go into inter-sectoral relationships that address broader determinants of health (e.g., housing, recreation, culture, transportation)
Limits of Performance Focus

• We can miss important lessons that are hard to quantify

• Example: In a community development initiative, qualitative analysis offers rich understanding of links among: relationship building, leadership development, network development, community ownership (and engagement), and differences among communities in their level and type of actions

Limits of Performance Focus

• We can miss unanticipated and/or unintended outcomes

• Example: If a physical activity support network only tracks participants’ activity within group get-togethers, they would miss physical activity (e.g., walking) that members do on their own or with others (including other group members) outside the group times

Limits of Performance Focus

• More emergent approaches to evaluation (such as developmental evaluation) keep us from getting locked into a narrow focus on pre-determined indicators and outcome objectives

• Even with more conventional evaluation approaches, where we measure success or progress relative to pre-determined indicators, we can leave some flexibility for emergent findings.
Limits of Performance Focus

• “A program with clear, specific and measureable goals is like a horse already trained for riding. Programs with multiple, conflicting, and still developing goals can feel wild and risky to an evaluator whose only experience is with seasoned and trained horses.” (Patton, 2008, p. 272)

System Dynamics Influence Both Intervention & Evaluation

(The following information in this section from Hargreaves & Parsons, 2010)

• When system dynamics and other conditions are not considered in a evaluation’s design, the evaluation with inevitably miss crucial aspects of the intervention and its environment that are affecting the intervention’s operation and success

System Dynamics Influence Both Intervention & Evaluation


• Implementation - Evaluate specific activities/processes/participants, vs patterns over time & space (as system dynamics move from organized to self-organizing)

• Outcomes – evaluate predefined specific ones, vs predetermined general outcomes/types of outcomes
System Dynamics Influence Both Intervention & Evaluation

- Planned predictable results can overlap with emerging, unpredictable results in a program
- Communities of Learning, Inquiry & Practice (CLIPs) – can be embedded within a larger organization
- See www.insites.org/clip/index.html

Alternatives to Performance Focus

Some approaches that are becoming popular among those looking for alternatives:

- Developmental evaluation
- Outcome mapping
- Appreciative inquiry

Developmental Evaluation

“The only man who behaves sensibly is my tailor; he takes my measurements anew every time he sees me, while all the rest go on with their old measurements and expect me to fit them”

(George Bernard Shaw, cited by Patton, p. 277)
Developmental Evaluation

- “DE is an approach to evaluation in innovative settings where goals are emergent and changing rather than predetermined and fixed…

- Innovative initiatives are characterized by a state of continuous development and adaptation, and they often unfold within dynamic and unpredictable conditions…

Developmental Evaluation

- DE supports such innovative initiatives by bringing data to bear to inform and guide emergent choices.” (Patton, 2008, p. 277)

- DE is an approach, not a method. We can use existing evaluation methods within DE approach

Developmental Evaluation

- Social innovators do not expect to arrive at a fixed, stable state – want an approach that supports development and change within a complex, adaptive system

- Commitment to change does not involve judgment about the effectiveness of what was done before

(Gamble, 2008)
Developmental Evaluation

- “Developmental evaluation records the roads not taken, unintended consequences, incremental adjustments, tensions and sudden opportunities” (Gamble, 2008, p. 20)

- Indicators and related tools like logic models have a place in DE, but they are kept flexible and can evolve as changes are observed

- Strong focus on reflection, about both outcomes (including unintended ones) and processes that influence them

Some Questions:

- What is the relationship between the intervention and its context, and how do they affect success?
- What are the patterns of success across diverse programs or components of an initiative?
- How does the definition of “success” change over time?

(Hargreaves & Parsons, 2010)
Outcome Mapping (OM)
(The following information is adapted from Earl et al., 2001)

- OM Focuses on your sphere of influence
- Boundary partners – organizations with whom we work to influence change
- OM sensitive to context
- Contribution vs attribution (see also Mayne, 2001)

Outcome Mapping (OM)

- Assumption that changes among boundary partners contributes to larger social impacts – rather than trying to measure change beyond immediate sphere of influence

- OM indicators are focused on negotiated behaviour changes among ‘boundary partners’ (individually or as a whole)

Outcome Mapping (OM)

- OM uses sets of ‘graduated indicators’, called progress markers, to monitor change in boundary partners’ behaviour

- Progression from ‘expect to see’, ‘like to see’, ‘love to see’

- Progress markers correspond to ‘outcome challenges’
Outcome Mapping (OM)

- Progress markers tracked in 'outcome journal' (which look like worksheets)
- Also have journals for strategies and organization/program performance
- Some commonalities between OM & logic models, but OM broader, less linear, & captures complexities

Outcome Mapping (OM)

- Outcome challenges & progress markers are written more broadly than we typically write outcomes & indicators when using logic models & conventional performance monitoring approach

OM - Outcome Challenge

The program intends to see local communities that recognize the importance of, and engage in, the planning of resource management activities in partnership with other resource users in their region. These communities have gained the trust of the other members of the partnership and the recognition of government officials so that they can contribute constructively to debates and decision-making processes...
OM - Outcome Challenge

• They are able to clearly plan and articulate a vision of their forest management activities and goals that is relative to their context and needs. They call upon external technical support and expertise as appropriate. They act as champions for model forest concepts in their communities and motivate others in the partnership to continue their collaborative work. (Earl et al., 2001, p. 47)

Progress Marker Examples

• Expect to See: Acquiring new skills for involvement in the MF (model forest)
• Like to See: Calling upon external experts when necessary to provide information or meet technical needs
• Love to See: Sharing lessons and experiences with other communities nationally and internationally to encourage other MFs (p.47-48)

Appreciative Inquiry

• Appreciative inquiry – celebrate/look for patterns of success, while considering the ‘ideal’ and how to get there – “what gives ‘life’ to a system…when it is most effective and constructive?” (Gamble 2008, p. 51)
Appreciative Inquiry

(The following information is adapted from Preskill & Catsambas, 2006)

- Organizational researcher David Cooperrider found that peoples’ interest and energy diminished when asked problem-focused questions, but increased when asked about successes

- Cooperrider’s 4-D model: Discovery, Dream, Design, Destiny

Appreciative Inquiry

- Encompass Model (used by Preskill & Catsambas in an evaluation context):
  - Inquire – appreciating the best of what is
  - Imagine – what might be?
  - Innovate – what should be?
  - Implement – navigating the change (includes monitoring & evaluation)

Appreciative Inquiry

- Inquire phase has three core questions
  - Peak experience question: ask people when they felt most energized, most proud to be part of the program
  - Also ask them to tell a story about what they & others were doing and what contributed to the success
**Appreciative Inquiry**

- Values question: ask people what they value about themselves, the program, the work they do

- Wishes question: ask people what three wishes they have to make more of the exceptional experiences possible

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**Appreciative Inquiry**

- Other questions that fit with Inquire include asking people about successes, high points, outstanding moments, what 'gives life' to organization when it's most effective, their own contributions, how their work could be transformed

- Ideally, people interview each other and share with group

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**Appreciative Inquiry**

- Imagine phase: develop a vision for the future of the program

- Have people imagine a celebration of success and describe what that looks like and how it happened

- Individual reflection and group discussion
Appreciative Inquiry

- AI-oriented evaluation is compatible with programs that evolve over time, are complex, and involve system changes – so fits well with DE
- AI can be used in development of logic models, evaluation questions, methods (e.g., surveys, interviews), overall evaluation planning (systems for carrying out evaluation) – AI does not focus on pre-determined indicators

Appreciative Inquiry

- AI approach to evaluation is participatory, collaborative, inclusive of diverse stakeholders, focused on learning & change, innovative
- Evaluation capacity building is part of the AI approach

Appreciative Inquiry

- Innovate phase: connect the vision to proposed actions, based on themes from Inquiry and Imagine phases
- Develop ‘provocative propositions’ for change
- This can be a lengthy process over weeks or months if more discussion or research needed
Appreciative Inquiry

- Propositions have some resemblance to outcomes and processes

- E.g., “constant attention to neighbourhood development has resulted in a broad range of housing options ranging from subsidized and low cost to highest level of market value” (Preskill & Catsambas, p. 22)

Appreciative Inquiry

- Implement phase: Develop action plans to make vision a reality

- Includes celebrating & supporting success

- Monitoring and evaluation are part of this phase

Your Turn!

Think of two stakeholders with whom you share evaluation findings, who have differing views about the role of indicators. In your view:

- For each of the two stakeholders, where do indicators fit within evaluation? How important are they to each stakeholder, and why/why not?

- How open is each stakeholder to evaluation approaches that place less emphasis on pre-determined indicators? Why/why not?
Your Moment in the Spotlight 😊

- As you discuss the questions, begin to put yourselves in the roles of the two stakeholders you have discussed (one of you in the role of each).
- What might you say to each other? Think of some dialogue that might occur.
- One ‘stakeholder pair’ will be asked to volunteer to act out some of their dialogue.
- Others in the ‘audience’ can jump into the scene, replace one of the actors, add new characters, and/or redirect the dialogue.

Your Insights from Today’s Workshop?

References


