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PROBLEM-DRIVEN EVALUATION

IS YOUR PROGRAMME FACILITATING PROBLEM SOLVING?
ULTIMATELY, WE WILL ATTEMPT TO REVIEW WHETHER THE PROGRAMME HAS CREATED TANGIBLE VALUE FOR ITS TARGET GROUP, OR POSITIVELY CHANGED THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT RESPONDING TO THE PROGRAMME’S GOAL AND OBJECTIVES

- A problem-driven evaluation is a learning journey where implementers are invited to reflect on the progress of their work to discover what they have achieved and to explore what this could mean to the design of their future strategy.
- A problem-driven evaluation is useful for programmes aiming to strengthen their future strategy by facilitating processes of finding and experimenting with locally relevant solutions to locally felt problems.
- A problem-driven evaluation builds on the principles of the Problem Driven Iterative Adaptation (PDIA) learning-by-doing approach, developed by Harvard professor Matt Andrews and his colleagues. (1)

The standard evaluation has seven steps and includes two workshops with implementing teams. These are supported by a review of documents and interviews of key partners or other external stakeholders involved in the project or programme.

The first two steps form the foundation of the evaluation. These steps help us identify, together with the implementing team, direct project partners and beneficiaries, and support us to develop relevant interview questions to engage external stakeholders in the evaluation.

After completing these steps we have an initial understanding of the results of the project and strategies applied. We can determine areas of influence where the programme or project has contributed to a policy change, has facilitated behavioural change or has catalysed other types of change in the project environment.

WE ARE NOW READY TO FOCUS ON COLLECTING MORE INFORMATION ON KEY CHANGES TO DESCRIBE THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE PROJECT TO THE PROBLEM-SOLVING PROCESS
Steps three to five consist of data gathering and analysis. This phase looks at changes in policy and behaviour, and validates outcomes to which the project has contributed. It can include literature reviews, analysis of secondary data, interviews, surveys or other qualitative evaluation methods.

The last two steps facilitate organisational learning and design of the future strategy. The purpose is to discuss and finalise the initial evaluation findings of the earlier steps with the implementing team. The team will also have a chance to reflect on underlying causes of failures and to propose a way forward to strengthen problem-driven and adaptive management of the programme or project in the future.

WHAT TOOLS WE USE IN PROBLEM-DRIVEN EVALUATION?
We start by drafting a visual problem map of the overall development challenge and its sub-causes on a fish-bone diagram. We use the programme or project theory of change/logic model and discussions with the project team as a guide. This problem analysis is based on the project strategy and helps us discuss the progress and success of the implementation with the project team and with external stakeholders during the entire evaluation.

We use a Triple-A factor analysis, describing authority, acceptance and the ability to analyse the change space of the programme or project. (1)

The objective of the second step is to identify strategic areas where the programme/project is already addressing specific ‘manageable parts’ of the overall problem, and where the programme/project has focused during the evaluation period on building an enabling environment to address the issues.
Steps three to five deepen the analysis and verify the initial results discovered, together with the implementing team

**STEP III**

To illustrate the policy influence of the programme/project we identify results where the programme/project has contributed to a policy change. These outcomes/outputs are mapped on a timeline with a context change. The aim is to discover how programme/project activities link to changes in the overall governance system. The timeline can also help explain why some initially planned activities were not eventually implemented or why the strategy changed during the implementation period.

**STEP IV**

Next we draw concepts from the outcome mapping methodology to facilitate discussion of results in specific parts of the programme strategy, targeting behavioural change. (2)

Even if the programme has not used an outcome mapping methodology earlier, the concepts support us to assess the current status of the gradual change of intended behaviour among the direct target group. (3)

**STEP V**

Next we will collect and analyse information to validate the outcomes of the project focusing on physical changes to which the project or programme has contributed. The aim is to document cases where the project/programme has positively changed a physical environment responding to the programme’s goal and objectives.
THE SUCCESS OF THE PROJECT IS MEASURED BY BEING ABLE TO FACILITATE A PROCESS WHERE LOCAL PROBLEMS ARE SOLVED OR BY BUILDING AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR PROBLEM SOLVING TO BEGIN

Failures are a particularly good resource to analyse political economy drivers that influence programme outcomes. (5) We propose to use an iceberg diagram analysis to discuss non-visible patterns, structures and mental models that direct behaviour. (6) The discussion can help organisations explain reasons for failed strategies and approaches, and improve future design.

The final step is an iterative process to formulate recommendations for the future. An important part of this step is to reflect on the findings with the programme lead and implementers to jointly design the next iteration. If needed, the recommendations can be further validated with the direct beneficiaries and with donors or supporters, to confirm that the next iteration is feasible and responds to their needs.

An outcome harvesting methodology can also be used to conduct steps three to five, when time and resources are available. This methodology is especially suitable for large, dynamic and complex projects. (4)

References:


(3) Better evaluation – Outcome mapping: http://betterevaluation.org/plan/approach/outcome_mapping


(6) North West Earth Institute, ‘Systems thinking model: The iceberg’ https://www.nwei.org/iceberg/
Capability is a network of practitioners and researchers for problem-driven development

GOT ANY QUESTIONS?

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