



The participatory design of a performance oriented monitoring and evaluation system in an international development environment



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ABSTRACT

This article illustrates the application of the impact monitoring and evaluation process for the design and development of a performance monitoring and evaluation framework in the context of human and institutional capacity development. This participative process facilitated stakeholder ownership in several areas including the design, development, and use of a new monitoring and evaluation system, as well their targeted results and accomplishments through the use of timely performance data gathered through ongoing monitoring and evaluation. The process produced a performance indicator map, a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation framework, and data collection templates to promote the development, implementation, and sustainability of the monitoring and evaluation system of a farmer's trade union in an African country.

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1. Introduction

There is a growing body of literature on building performance measurement systems for human and institutional capacity development (Bamberger, 2000; Coleman, 1987, 1992; D'Ostie-Racine et al., 2013; Kumar, 1995) but scarce in its discussion of systems of monitoring and evaluation that offer continuous feedback, guidance for action, and evidence of impact on intended consequences and benefits for target populations (Bamberger, 2000). Monitoring and evaluation systems can help organizations align, communicate, and execute their strategies and plans to a vision that clearly identifies the measurable value they commit to add to their stakeholders.

Monitoring and evaluation systems, also known in the performance improvement literature as performance measurement and management systems (Guerra-López, 2010; Guerra-López, 2012), are integral tools for ensuring the effectiveness of international development efforts. International development refers to “all social and economic programs in developing countries funded by multilateral and bilateral development agencies or by international non-government organizations (NGOs)” (Bamberger, 2000)

with the term development applied synonymously with growth, specifically, as the reduction of poverty and for an improved quality of life (Kelly & Novak, 2007). While the reduction of poverty and an improved quality of life are the two overarching goals of international development, little attention has been paid to measuring this level of impact on target populations (Bamberger, 2000). Evaluation studies are often sponsored by donor and other funding agencies that respond to their own information needs in order to continue, modify, or terminate programs and initiatives, leaving the real question of impact unanswered, and often, missing the opportunity to strengthen the measurable performance of the organizations they support.

Further, international development is often confronted with changing organizational structures and mandates, variables that will likely affect the evaluation results. Interventions will require alteration to align to these changes and must be supported by a monitoring and evaluation system that offers ongoing and relevant feedback. This approach allows for appropriately aligned, en-route modifications, as for example, adjusting to the unpredictability of donor budgets (Kelly, Coughlin, & Novak, 2012; Novak & Kelly, 2010). Kelly et al. (2012) note a common weakness found with organizations aimed at institutional and capacity development is the absence of an, “internal system to define, link, monitor, and evaluate organizational performance”, without which development efforts are fruitless. A monitoring and evaluation process casts light on where the change is happening, in what direction it is happening, and to what level or degree. Without the measurement

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of en-route variables, it is unlikely problems can be identified as they arise, and further, provide the evidence to know how to fix them (Guerra-López, 2010; Guerra-López & Toker, 2012; Kelly and Novak, 2007; Kelly & Novak, 2007, 2012).

While historical efforts of capacity building evaluation have primarily focused on accountability for individual programs or initiatives, shifting the focus to institutional and human performance and their associated consequences (impact level results) is essential to sustainability. Measurable alignment to the overarching goals of a reduction in poverty and an improved quality of life is a prerequisite for sustainability. Economic sustainability translates to the ability to earn a wage that supports a quality of life of the population (Kaufman, 2006). Environmental sustainability may refer to the management of human consumption of land resources. These two forms of sustainability are reinforcing. For example, the lack of availability of food is recognized as the leading cause of poverty in developing countries (Comim, Kumar, & Sirven, 2009). Waiting until after a program or initiative has been implemented to determine its impact to economic and environmental sustainability may offer data that comes too late to alter the course of a program and its impact in a deliberate and proactive way.

This case study illustrates the design of a performance a monitoring and evaluation framework for a farmer's trade union in an east African country using the impact monitoring and evaluation process (Guerra-López, 2007; Guerra-López, 2010; Guerra-López, 2012; Guerra-López & Toker, 2012) systemic performance improvement framework. The process supports continuous feedback based on route variables that provide multiple opportunities for adjustment and modification during and after the implementation of capacity development initiatives. Moreover, the monitoring and evaluation framework is designed at the organizational level, which facilitates the selection, implementation, monitoring, improvement and evaluation of initiatives, in the context of the strategic plan, ensuring alignment between the organization's goals and its initiatives.

2. Conceptual framework

The approach to monitoring and evaluation presented in this article is grounded performance improvement theory. Performance improvement seeks to identify measurable performance gaps (problems or opportunities); understand its causal factors, and identify solution alternatives that address the causes of the problem; select the most effective and cost-efficient solutions; and finally monitor, evaluate, and improve those solutions, to ensure performance problems and their root causes have been resolved. Performance measurement and management is central to performance improvement. Performance management *“involves obtaining regular feedback, tracking actual performance along the measurement dimensions established in the goals, feeding back performance information to relevant subsystems, taking corrective action if performance is off target, and resetting goals so that the organization is continually adapting to external and internal reality.”* (Rummler & Brache, 1995, p. 21).

Hence, the use of performance monitoring, management, and evaluation tools can play an important role in the continued success of organizations that operate in an increasingly complex world of interdependencies. Useful monitoring and evaluation is aligned to the desired impact on society and clients to which an organization commits to deliver, where impact refers to the societal consequences of an organization's actions (Kaufman, 2006). The use of these integrated tools can provide a means for exploring the dynamic complexity of organizations, by tracking and linking performance measures, and how these are impacted by organizational initiatives that are meant to improve performance at the various levels of the organization (strategic or societal well-being;

tactical or organizational sustainability, and operational or internal competence).

Performance within organizations occurs, and consequently must be measured, at various levels. These levels – strategic, tactical, and operational – are the building blocks toward the desired ends. The strategic level represents the long-term goals and a purposeful plan for the societal impact – the value that will be added to external clients, community, and society. The tactical level is the results that are delivered to the external client but do not necessarily, or by default, provide value added from a societal level, as in the strategic level. For example, we can help vocational training clients be placed in jobs (tactical result), but if the particular job is not helping the client earn at least what it costs them to live (strategic result), then our perception of success and impact will be different. The operational level accounts for the results that are delivered internally as a result of activities and processes undertaken by individual staff and teams. For example, increasing clients' competency and skills through vocation training. Here again, the value of training is not for the sake of training, if the aim is to enhance the quality of life of participants by helping them reach self-sufficiency, then we have to ensure that this training will allow them to be placed in the types of jobs that allow them to at a minimum make what it costs them to live. Beyond a traditional logic model that might take a “bucket” approach to placing indicators into inputs, processes/activities, outputs, outcomes, and impact categories, the IMEP seeks to understand the specific relationships among and between each configuration of indicators. It is through this understanding that we can find maximum efficiencies and understand which variables account for what portion of effectiveness.

The IMEP aims to ultimately add value at all levels of performance results by providing all levels of decision-makers with a system view of the indicators and data they are tracking. This systems approach facilitates an alignment of all elements, from adding value to all internal and external stakeholders to then linking these with the appropriate resources and methods to deliver desirable, worthy results. Such a systems approach to monitoring and evaluation accounts for the interdependencies of the relevant performance variables, rather than focusing on fragmented or isolated pieces.

The IMEP has been designed as a holistic framework that positions monitoring and evaluation as performance tools that support timely decision making about how to measurably improve performance at all levels of the organization. To strengthen utility and value, the evaluator must have an understanding of the external context and realities in which monitoring and evaluation activities will be conducted – and to which the evaluation recommendations must be aligned. This alignment contributes toward the implementation and adoption of performance-oriented solutions because it builds relevance and stakeholder buy-in. This stakeholder focus is driven by a participatory approach that ensures they own the process, the logic, and the use of their monitoring and evaluation system.

With its focus on societal value and utility, the IMEP describes an aligned set of iterative steps. The process begins with a focus on stakeholders and their needs, specifically, the types of decisions to be supported and the relevant strategic, tactical, and operational performance objectives to which they are (or should be) linked. This foundation then guides the formulation of important evaluation questions. Measurable indicators are then derived from these questions with the indicators then casting light on the data that should be collected. The process for identifying what indicators should be collected is unique to the IMEP, as it includes the participation of all relevant stakeholder groups in developing a performance indicator map (PIM) (Guerra-López, 2013). PIMS allow us to illustrate a measurable performance system and its

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