

Getting the most out of evaluating your partnership: the eight key principles

The word evaluation can have a curious and powerful effect upon partnerships and the people that work in them. Its mere mention can cause people to take pause, adopt serious expressions and begin speaking in hushed, earnest, almost reverent tones about its complexity and importance.

Evaluation is perceived as a mystery that can be understood and appreciated only by those initiated into its inner workings. There is an almost ritualistic air to its introduction to proceedings and, after a decent amount of genuflecting in its direction, it is covered up with gentle reverence and put upon an altar, far from the dusty trail upon which the partnership is travelling.

It will rest upon this alter, a lifeless relic, covered up, away from and unsullied by the sweaty, mundane, day to day work of the partnership. It will only be revisited, taken down and uncovered at significant moments in the partnership's journey, being used in much the same way as most people use religions: to mark initiations and beginnings, weddings and new associations, funerals and endings and various other important Holy Days or significant events.

Those inducted into the sacred mysteries of evaluation, its high priests, will almost certainly possess the necessary faith and zeal to spread evaluation's message far and wide. The power of evaluation, however, always remains incarnate exclusively within these holy people. It is they that must be consulted at all times on matters concerning the Holy Trinity of Evaluation: monitoring, assessing and improving.

This view of evaluation, as something set apart and needing rarefied skills, is one of the main contributors to its under utilisation as a tool for improving and developing partnerships.

This article will explore how the process of evaluation can be demystified and its power put into the hands of those best placed to use it: those that get their hands dirty and do the day to day work of the partnership. It will describe how a partnership can make its evaluation processes a stimulating, creative, participative, ongoing and intrinsic part of its activities. It will enable all those involved in partnership working to become the lay preachers of the evaluation faith, moving it from the periphery to the centre of a partnership's activities.

The eight principles

In order to demystify the process of evaluation, our first task is to uncover those characteristics that contribute towards making it an effective and worthwhile activity. These characteristics can be encapsulated within the following eight principles:

1. Adopt an open minded approach to evaluation
2. Emphasise the important role evaluation plays during the problem solving process
3. Bring evaluation to life through stories
4. Make evaluation creative and stimulating
5. Make evaluation ongoing and involving
6. Make evaluation challenging
7. Uncover and strengthen the golden chain that leads to success
8. Encourage everyone to champion a partnership's achievements

1. Adopt an open – minded approach to evaluation

Evaluation is going on everywhere and all the time during the day to day work of a partnership. Clients, partners and partnership staff alike all react positively or negatively to differing situations and approaches. They talk to each other 'off the record' about their experiences, evaluating them and identifying ways in which they can be built upon and improved. They then act on their insights, learning to cope better and improve things as they go along.

This type of informal, richly qualitative information can come from anybody at any time and it can breathe new insights and enhanced effectiveness into a partnership's approach to its work. It is not, however, always given the importance it deserves, sometimes going unnoticed, unacknowledged and unrecorded.

Being open minded about what constitutes evaluation and where it can come from will counteract this tendency towards being dismissive of certain types of information, and enable us to start noticing, appreciating and capturing the day to day insights that would otherwise remain latent within a partnership.

A good example occurred at a half way house near Northampton that focused on the needs of young offenders. It had always been able to build good relationships between itself, the youths in its care and the police and other local authorities. Quite suddenly, however, this ability to build positive relationships disappeared almost overnight, and nobody could figure out why. Until that is one of the assistant cooks working in the kitchen just happened to mention that the police liaison

officers had recently changed, and that whereas the original ones took off their hats, jackets and lapels before they entered the building, the new ones did not. She had noticed that this caused anxiety and suspicion amongst the young people at the centre and that their behaviour had altered accordingly. This was not surprising given their history and previous experience of the police; it was more or less a conditioned response. As soon as the new officers were given this feedback and they began taking off their hats, jackets and lapels before entering the building, the anxiety, suspicion and negative behaviour began to disappear and relationships gradually returned to normal.

Informal feedback from a perhaps unexpected source had identified the problem accurately, so enabling it to be addressed quickly and effectively.

2. Emphasise the important role evaluation plays during the problem solving process

Problem – solving activities that a partnership undertakes to improve effectiveness will always involve some form of evaluation of the current situation in order to identify the causes of the problems being experienced. As, however, everybody involved is concentrating on the solutions and the session is labelled ‘Problem Solving’, the evaluation of the current situation is not always given as much attention as it should be. This can lead to shorthand assumptions being made about the causes of the problems and much potentially helpful evaluation information remaining unexplored or hidden away within the heads of those doing the problem solving.

Most well known techniques¹ used during problem solving sessions have two uses, the first being to evaluate the problem and the second being to identify potential solutions. Taking longer over the initial stages of problem solving, looking at problems in different ways, examining how problems came about and the context within which they exist, will encourage people to share their thoughts, analyses and judgements about the exact nature of the problems a partnership faces.

It will also help avoid the following type of scenario:

The people in charge of an employment programme in the USA were dismayed and disappointed when the jobs they had created for long –

¹ Two well – known techniques particularly suited to evaluating current issues and problems are Cause and Effect Diagrams and Force Field Analysis. For more information about these go to www.mycoted.com. Many of the techniques described elsewhere in this article will also facilitate the evaluation of current issues and problems.

term unemployed people from ethnic minorities failed to deliver the expected improvement in employment levels. A little more evaluation of the root causes of the unemployment within the ethnic minorities concerned would have revealed a lack of skills rather than jobs as the key problem to be addressed. The jobs had been created within the building industry and if you cannot work with bricks or wood you are not likely to secure a job!

3. Bring evaluation to life through stories

Whilst I was delivering a workshop dealing with the principles of effective partnership working, a very memorable incident occurred. We were talking about the evaluation of partnerships and the problems associated with it, when one of the participants started to tell a story.

His story, not unsurprisingly, was about a partnership with which he was involved. The principle partners were a large Government Department, for whom he worked, and a large private contractor with expertise in repairing and updating complex electronic communications equipment. The focus of his story was a very advanced and expensive ship. It had collided with a dock, in the process seriously damaging some complex communications equipment. The person telling the story had the responsibility of co-ordinating the overall effort to get the repairs underway. This involved working in close collaboration with the private contractor.

The above situation involved many issues and problems and the story – teller described them all in rich, relevant and engaging detail. He relived the set backs, challenges and eventual successes. He spoke with increasing enthusiasm, showing his personal commitment to the partnership and what it could and did achieve.

He described how he had managed personal and professional relationships so that they contributed positively to the problems at hand. He explained the logistical and resource issues involved and how he and the contractor overcame them with a mixture of flexibility and pragmatism.

As he spoke and warmed to his subject, those listening became wrapped up in his story, waiting for the next rich nugget of anecdotal detail, or asking questions to gain clarification or even more detail. As the storyteller spoke the session took on a life of its own, with everybody listening intently, lapping up the stream of practical wisdom that was issuing forth.

The above example illustrates how stories can convey the details of a situation or event in an interesting, engaging and inspiring way. Stories help us identify and capture the qualitative, almost ephemeral type of knowledge that can tell us so much about what has worked, what has not worked, and what is in need of improvement.

Encourage yourself and others to take on the roles of storyteller, audience and critic. Build into the evaluation practices of your partnership opportunities to share, listen to and analyse stories. Encourage people to take ownership of their stories and tell them from their own viewpoints. Also encourage those that listen to offer their own perspectives in response. Discuss the differing perspectives on the stories and where appropriate act upon any new knowledge, learning or wisdom that is gained as a result.

Ask yourself how you capture the day to day stories of the people toiling at the work face. Do you have simple, accessible, quick ways for people to submit their stories and anecdotes about what has/has not worked? Have you created opportunities for the partnership's people to come together to share and review them? Have you bound these stories together into an attractive, accessible and ongoing chronicle of the life and significant events of the partnership? Can and do people consult this chronicle for practical wisdom about what to do, avoid or improve in the future?

Making evaluation a personal experience through the capturing, sharing and exploration of true, accessible and significant stories will bring the process of partnership evaluation to vital, engaging life.

4. Make evaluation creative and stimulating

Telling stories about personal partnership experiences will bring evaluation to life and make it engaging and accessible, but we can go further and make it a creative, stimulating and integral part of a partnership's problem solving process. We can do this by incorporating into our evaluation processes many of the tools and techniques used widely within the fields of creative thinking and management consultancy. Try some of the following:

PMI Thinking

When evaluating the ongoing work of a partnership encourage people to explore what has been **positive** about its work, what the **minuses** have been and what has been **interesting**. Most of us are used to thinking in a binary way, looking only for the positives and minuses in a situation and then making decisions about how to maximise the one

and minimise the other. The PMI technique encourages people to think about the day to day activities of a partnership in an additional way. What aspects are neither good nor bad but interesting and/or unique about a partnership's activities and results so far? What can we learn from these and how can we make use of them?

OWNORS Analysis

This is an extension of the above technique that incorporates traditional **SWOT** analysis. What are the **opportunities** presented by the work and activities of a partnership and how could they be made the most of? What **weaknesses** have been identified so far and how could they be overcome? What aspects are **novel**, unique or unexpected about a partnership's work and how could they be exploited to a partnership's advantage? What specific **obstacles** has a partnership experienced so far and how have they/could they be overcome? What **risks** have been identified to a partnership's work and how could they be managed effectively? What **strengths** has a partnership displayed as it goes about its activities and how could they be maximised.

PINC Filter

This technique builds upon the PMI approach. It seeks to gain an effective balance between logical, rational binary thinking and intuitive, hunch based thinking. What has been **positive** about the work of a partnership so far and how can it be built upon? What has been **intriguing** and/or unexpected about a partnership's work and what additional insights and lessons does it provide us with? What has been **negative** about a partnership's work so far and how can these things be dealt with effectively? What feels **concerning** about a partnership's work so far and where does this concern come from? What needs to be done about it?

Force Field Analysis

This is a very popular consultancy technique. It is usually used in connection with managing change, but it could also be incorporated into a partnership's evaluation processes. You would need to look in detail at the work done so far by a partnership and think about those aspects that have helped it to be effective. These are the aspects that are driving a partnership forward towards achieving its objectives. You would then turn your attention towards those aspects that have hindered its effectiveness. These are the aspects that are pushing a partnership back or acting as 'resistors' to a partnership's ongoing effectiveness. You would then look to identify how the drivers could be maximised and the resistors minimised.

You can also analyse the drivers and resistors identified and decide which are the most significant and/or strongest. These can then become the priorities for attention.

When using Force Field Analysis to evaluate a partnership's current situation or performance it is important to differentiate between significance and strength. A driver or resistor may not be perceived as strong, but it could be of great significance. For example, a very important stake - holder's support could be identified as a weak driver. Obviously this is likely to be of great significance, perhaps even endangering the ultimate effectiveness of a partnership. In such a case immediate action would need to be taken to strengthen the stake - holder's support.²

The Delphi Technique³

This technique is especially useful for partnerships that are widely spread geographically. An e - mail is sent to all those involved in the partnership asking them to evaluate the effectiveness of the partnership so far and identify those aspects that they think are of most significance. Then all the replies are collated and put into list form. These lists are then sent out to the same people as before, asking them to reply with their top ten most significant items. These replies are again collated and listed. These lists of 'top ten' items are sent out to the same people again, with an additional request that they reply with their top three items - and so on.

For maximum effectiveness, this exercise needs to be followed by a meeting or conference that brings together all those who have contributed their ideas. They can then discuss and analyse the results in detail and think about ways to address the key issues identified.

Hold 'Discovery in Action' sessions

This is an attractive way of repackaging evaluation work that can stimulate people's curiosity and motivate people to become involved.

The words we use to describe something determine how we think about and respond to it. The word 'discovery' has a stimulating and engaging ring to it. It implies an exciting, wide-ranging journey of exploration. The word 'Action' emphasises activity, energy and immediacy.

² For a full description and illustration of the Force Field Analysis technique please go to http://creatingminds.org/tools/force_field.htm

³ This technique is named after the 'Oracle at Delphi'. It is designed to tap into the collected wisdom of the community, in this case those working in and around a partnership.

Discovery in Action sessions do not have a specific methodology. They tend to be structured around many of the tools and techniques mentioned above and elsewhere in this article. Anyone who is interested in or affected by a partnership's work can attend.

5. Make evaluation ongoing and involving

Emphasising that evaluation is something that is ongoing through the life of a partnership, not just something tagged onto its end, is of immense importance. Creating regular, meaningful and high profile opportunities to involve people in ongoing monitoring and evaluation of a partnership's activities are a powerful way of achieving this. Here are some specific approaches that you could use:

Debugging sessions

These can be most useful when a new process or approach has been introduced into a partnership, but they can also be used at any other time that seems appropriate. They serve to evaluate how well something has been implemented. They look at what was planned and agreed in terms of actions and activities, what actually happened and what needs to be done to address any difficulties or maximise any unexpected advantages. Using a simple implementation log⁴ can enhance the effectiveness of Debugging Sessions.

Scouting meetings

Scouting meetings entail inviting people who are potential stakeholders or partners in a partnership to sessions where they are given an update about a partnership's activities, what it has achieved, how problems have been overcome and what problems still remain. Those attending are then asked for their views about what they have heard and how they think they could contribute to a partnership's work in the future. They are also asked to identify additional problems and issues that a partnership might face in the future, evaluate their potential impact and think of ways to pre-empt or overcome them.

Scouting sessions are good for two reasons. Firstly, they encourage new blood into a partnership that can infuse its thinking with new perspectives. Secondly, they encourage people to evaluate not just what a partnership has done, but also what it might do in the future and what the implications of this might be. This emphasises evaluation

⁴ An example of an implementation log can be found at http://www.ceismc.gatech.edu/MM_Tools/IL.html

as an ongoing activity that not only runs through from the past to the present of the partnership, but also travels onwards towards its future.

Scouting sessions encourage people to perceive evaluation as a past, present and future orientated activity.

Hold 'Evaluation into Action' sessions

The key characteristic of these sessions is that any actions arising out of evaluation of a partnership's activities are identified, agreed and allocated to people before they finish. People walk away from these meetings and literally put 'evaluation into action'.

By the end of these sessions there needs to be explicit, recorded agreement about:

What needs to be done?
 Who needs to do it?
 When it needs to be done by?

'Evaluation into Action' could be the final part of a 'Discovery in Action' session (Discovery in Action sessions are described in the previous section of this article).

Achievement mapping sessions

Achievement mapping sessions are about identifying, appreciating and building upon those things that a partnership is doing well. They focus on achievements and positive aspects only, making them a good way of encouraging people to feel confident about their partnership and the work that it does. A simple tool that can be used to structure an achievement mapping session is 'SOAR'.

SOAR stands for Strengths, Opportunities, Appreciations and Results. To utilise SOAR during an achievement mapping session, those attending need to focus their discussions around the following types of questions:

- What **strengths** have been demonstrated by a partnership and how can they be maximised?
- What **opportunities** have been created by a partnership's activities and how can they be exploited fully?
- What has been **appreciated** about the way a partnership has gone about its work? This differs from those things identified under strengths by being qualitative and subjective rather than quantitative and objective. It is about capturing the positive

opinions and feedback that are sometimes taken for granted and/or only partially expressed. Once fully recognised and acknowledged, these aspects can be exploited to a partnership's advantage.

- What **results** have been achieved by a partnership and how can they be built upon. Also, how can a partnership ensure that it gets credit for them?

'Day in the life' and 'Moments of Truth' sessions

This is a variant of the story telling technique mentioned previously in this article. There is no better way of getting people involved in evaluation than encouraging them to speak about their own work and experiences. So, during 'Day in the Life' sessions people are encouraged to talk through a typical day in their partnership working lives. Or, if it is more relevant they can talk through the 'day in the life' of someone else who interacts with the partnership, be it a colleague, stakeholder, client or some other user of the partnership's services.

The people offering the descriptions are encouraged to emphasise specific critical incidents or 'Moments of Truth' that can either make or break a person's day in terms of their experience of the partnership and its work. It is very important that people are as specific as possible when describing their days and 'Moments of Truth', giving personally experienced or witnessed examples as often as they can.

Whilst the descriptions are being given they are mapped out along time lines and the 'Moments of Truth', together with their associated outcomes, are highlighted. These time lines are then analysed and decisions made about how to improve areas in need of attention and/or build upon areas that are working well.

Evaluate the involvement, attitude and relationships between stakeholders

One other very important aspect that needs to be considered here is whose involvement you want and need and whose involvement could, if not managed and influenced in some way, prove problematical.

Also, a stakeholder's involvement with a partnership will be affected by its perception of and relationships with other stakeholders. If, for instance, a stakeholder is perceived as powerful, credible and worth getting to know, and they are showing strong signs of being positive about a partnership's work, it would not be surprising to see other stakeholders follow suit by adopting similar attitudes.

Mapping out a partnership's stakeholders and their relationships upon an Involvement/Attitude/Relationship Graph⁵ will encourage people to share, analyse and evaluate all they have heard, seen and experienced (both formally and informally) concerning a partnership's stakeholders. It will help to pin point:

- Tensions and conflicts between stakeholders.
- Good relationships between stakeholders.
- Relationships between stakeholders that are weak or non-existent.
- Stakeholders that have a clearly negative attitude to a partnership's work.
- Stakeholders that have a clearly positive attitude to a partnership's work.
- Stakeholders who are neutral or 'sitting on the fence' with regard to a partnership's work
- Stakeholders who are hovering nearer to one or other side of the fence in terms of their attitude towards the partnership's work.
- The level of involvement or interest stakeholders have in the work of the partnership
- The importance of each stakeholder to the partnership.
- The significance and importance of each of the stakeholders to each other.

Once a partnership has mapped out the above information and relationships, it can then decide upon what actions it needs to take in order to enhance its relationships with stakeholders and maximise the support and positive involvement it receives from them. It can also take action to facilitate those relationships between stakeholders that could be of benefit to it.

6. Make evaluation challenging

For evaluation of partnerships to be effective it needs to be challenging. It needs to encourage people to confront difficult questions and issues and to appreciate and act upon perspectives

⁵ An explanation of an Involvement/Attitude/Relationship Graph is provided at Appendix A

different from their own. It needs to encourage people to work hard at maximising both their own and the partnership's potential. The following techniques will help achieve this:

The Doughnut Technique⁶

This technique can be used to ensure that a partnership's goals are relevant, innovative and set at a stretching, ambitious but also realistic level.

It can be used at the start of a partnership initiative and also at various times during its life. Using the technique at the beginning of a partnership's work will encourage people to set ambitious and innovative goals. Using it to review goals at key stages of a partnership project will help ensure that they remain relevant and stretching.

Reviewing a partnership's goals is particularly important. Partnership working is dynamic and ever changing. Different partners come and go and this inevitably affects the ways and means available to a partnership whilst it goes about its work. Also, new partners can sometimes bring knowledge, insights and perceptions with them that can radically affect the overall approach and direction of a partnership. For this reason partnership goals should not be 'set in stone'. They should be reviewed, evaluated and if necessary amended on a regular basis.

Insider/outsider teams

When evaluating the processes and results of a partnership it is important to keep an open mind and be willing to be challenged by differing opinions about what is or is not effective.

One simple approach for encouraging this is the use of insider/outsider teams. An insider/outsider team consists of at least two people, one from within the partnership and one from outside, perhaps from another partnership, organisation or area of activity that is related to or has an interest in the work of the partnership being evaluated. Both people work together to analyse and evaluate the work of the partnership, acknowledging and using the differing perspectives they bring to the task.

Obviously, the evaluation could be reciprocal, the two people swapping insider/outsider roles and evaluating each other's organisations or partnerships.

⁶ The Doughnut Technique is described in detail at http://www.tallistraining.co.uk/the_partnership_doughnut.htm

Use the co-counselling method

Use the co-counselling method as outlined at appendix B to constructively challenge each other to think about partnership issues and ongoing difficulties in new ways. This technique works because it encourages people to analyse difficulties identified through evaluation in a collaborative, creative and challenging way. Its important characteristics are its methodical, systematic and time bound nature, which concentrates people's minds, and the fact that the person who owns or identified the issue must keep silent whilst those that are new to it discuss their thoughts about it and how they would approach it. This makes those that are familiar with the issue listen to differing views that may stimulate fresh approaches and solutions.

This latter aspect of the technique is crucial. Very often the important messages latent within evaluation findings can be overlooked because the people analysing the information have let familiarity breed if not contempt then non-imaginative, habitual thinking. New eyes looking at information in new ways can uncover significant lessons from which a partnership can benefit.

Make evaluation public

One of the bravest and most challenging things a partnership can do is open itself up to public scrutiny. Creating a panel of clients or users of the partnership's services and giving them the opportunity to visit partnership activities and meetings and then submit comments about what they see and hear can be a great lever for change and increased effectiveness.

For example, Aberdeen City Council has set up a Citizens' Panel that can comment on the activities of the City's Community Partnership. Members of this panel can access any part of the partnership's activities and they are encouraged to report their findings to the main Partnership Board. In addition, representatives from the Citizen's Panel attend the Partnership Board meetings, adding even greater transparency and accountability to the partnership's processes and decision making.

Partnerships also need to be innovative in how they promote their services and encourage the public to contribute their comments. Access to online comment boards and novelties such as online and touch screen voting will capture people's interest and encourage them to give their opinions. Arranging fun events and activities that showcase a partnership's work will also encourage people to engage with a partnership and share their views about it.

In order to go truly public, however, a partnership needs to reach physically into the areas where their work is carried out. Mobile services, information points and outreach staff can act as the spokes radiating out from a partnership's hub, visiting the areas where the partnership does its work and gaining people's comments at first hand.

For example, an initiative in Fife, Scotland, that wanted to evaluate the effects of regeneration upon health and well being created pairings of local experts and residents. These became the spokes that communicated local views about the effects of regeneration back to the hub of the initiative.⁷

7. Uncover and strengthen the golden Chain that leads to success

A partnership's 'Golden Chain' consists of those activities that when linked or combined can be seen to be both supporting and leading clearly in the direction of a partnership's high level aspirational outcomes.⁸ A clearly observable, uncluttered golden chain of activities indicates that a partnership's activities are well chosen and aligned with its overall purpose.

The Scottish Government has adopted this principle of the Golden Chain. It has introduced a system of 'Single Outcome Agreements' to which local authorities and strategic and local partnerships are expected to adhere. Local Authorities and partnerships consider the high level, aspirational outcomes described by the Scottish Government and then identify those that are priorities for their areas. They then set local outcomes to address these priorities and select and align activities that will support their achievement. The emphasis is on creating the strongest and clearest golden chain possible between the local authority's/partnership's activities, outputs and local outcomes and the high-level national outcomes set by the Scottish Government.

Key skills and approaches that can encourage the identification and development of a partnership's golden chain are:

⁷ Interestingly, to stimulate creativity and involvement the pairings were encouraged to contribute rich pictures representing their views and feelings about the projects and their effects rather than the usual written narrative. Most of the pairings responded well to this, gaining confidence from the fact that they could express themselves in their own personal, unique ways.

⁸ High level aspirational outcomes relevant to partnership working could include improving quality of life, making neighbourhoods safer, making people healthier etc.

Process⁹ mapping and walking through

Training a partnership's people in the skills of process mapping and holding workshops throughout the life of a partnership to map out its processes and activities and identify to what extent they lead toward key outcomes is both a problem solving activity and an evaluative one. The outputs from a process mapping day can lead to action points to improve activities. The process maps themselves can be kept as part of a partnership's evaluation record, proof of the ongoing development of its golden chain.

Sometimes a physical walk through a partnership's activities and processes can be a useful supplement to process mapping. This may be particularly the case when a partnership's work is stretched geographically and involves many people and partners, both formally and informally. This type of walk through exercise can be made stimulating, engaging and memorable if the activities visited are not only mapped in the usual way, but also filmed or photographed. If appropriate, short interviews with the people that carry out the various activities could further enhance the mapping process.

This type of multimedia record, together with a narrative script, will not only pinpoint areas of weakness and/or strength, but also contribute compelling and memorable evidence of the ongoing creation and development of a partnership's golden chain. It will help illuminate the audit trail between the resources a partnership consumes, the activities it carries out, the specific outputs it delivers and how these contribute to a partnership's aspirational outcomes.

Value analysis

This technique is a development upon process mapping. People are encouraged to analyse a process and identify whether each of its discrete activities add either positive or negative value. Positive value adds efficiency and effectiveness to a process, so helping it achieve its outcomes. Negative value subtracts efficiency and effectiveness from a process, so hindering its achievement of outcomes.

Moment of truth and day in the life

These two techniques have been described previously. Outputs from sessions using these two tools can be kept as evidence of the ongoing development of a partnership's golden chain of activities.

⁹ A process is defined as a sequence of activities that produces something, transforms an input into an output, adds value in some way.

Make a clear link between a partnership's deliverable outputs and high level aspirational outcomes by creating interim outcomes

In Scotland, Local Authorities and Community Partnerships are encouraged to create an additional link in the golden chain ending in aspirational outcomes by creating interim outcomes. For example, a high-level aspirational outcome may be about increasing life expectancy in a particular region. Interim outcomes leading to this could be:

- Less alcohol related diseases and admissions to hospital
- Less obesity related diseases and admissions to hospital
- Less drug related diseases and admissions to hospital
- More people taking regular exercise
- More people eating healthily
- More people taking advantage of preventative tests etc.

The above type of interim outcomes could, in the medium to long term, lead to the fulfilment of the high level final outcome.

Notice that all the above intermediate outcomes and the high level aspirational outcome are under the control of the people who do or do not choose to alter their lifestyles. A partnership can only support the achievement of these outcomes through its various initiatives and activities. These initiatives and activities are a partnership's outputs, the things they are able to control and deliver. Outputs a partnership could deliver that might reasonably be expected to lead to the above interim outcomes could be:

- Awareness raising campaigns
- Exercise classes and advice
- Healthy eating/cookery courses
- Mobile health check facilities
- Pub watch schemes
- Alcohol support groups
- Drug support groups
- Free syringe provision
- Free gym membership schemes
- Family advice centres
- Greater and quicker access to GPs
- Alcohol free zones
- Access to parks and jogging tracks

Adding the additional step of interim outcomes makes the audit trail leading from what a partnership can deliver to its high level aspirations clearer to follow. This makes the attribution of cause and effect less arguable.

Use patch partnering to tighten and strengthen the golden chain

When a partnership's processes have been mapped through from inputs to final outcomes and the various activities analysed as to their value and their contribution to the golden chain, certain choke points or areas lacking in clarity of contribution or effectiveness will probably be identified. A way to address these, so defining and brightening the golden chain of activities leading to outcomes, is to use patch partnering.

Patch partnering entails moving the partners and expertise within a partnership up and down the chain of its activities to address issues and problems that need additional resources, new insights, differing expertise and an enhanced appreciation of the overall context and work of a partnership. For example, those at the inputting of resources end of a partnership may benefit from the insights and views of someone at the delivery or outputs end, and vice versa.

This fluid use of partners, encouraging them to travel up and down the chain of activities of a partnership, linking and improving processes as they go, can act as the lubricant of the partnership machine. It can ease the journey of the golden chain through its various gears towards the final achievement of outcomes.

Identify monitor and record your key indicators of achievement

There are specific key indicators in the work of any partnership that can tell us a great deal about whether or not a partnership is likely to achieve its goals and aspirations. Monitoring performance in these areas can act as a partnership's credibility health check, flagging up where a partnership is fit for purpose and working well towards its goals and where unhealthy habits may be eroding its effectiveness.

These achievement indicators go beyond measuring activity, how much of what has been delivered, towards indicating whether an activity, for example a certain amount of people completing a training programme (the output) is likely to result in the relevant higher level outcomes being achieved. For example, are those completing the fore mentioned training likely to gain employment and improve their standard of living and that of the surrounding area?

Here are some example indicators of achievement for a partnership's skills training programme designed to help people gain employment and raise the standard of living of the local area:

- Drop out rates from the training programme
- Absentee rates

- Percentage of the target population showing interest and applying for programme places
- Amount of referrals from past participants
- Percentage of people gaining employment after attending programmes
- Percentage of people using follow up support and programmes
- Percentage of past participants that sign back onto the dole immediately after and some time after attending the training programme
- Sales figures for local retailers and businesses
- Numbers of people still in employment 6 months after completing a training programme
- Percentage of local people hired by local businesses

The above type of indicators do not in themselves prove that a specific activity will result in a particular outcome, in this case a training programme leading to improved employment and standard of living. However, when taken together as a basket of indicators they can either support or cast doubt upon a partnership's claim that its skills training programme is likely to make a positive difference in the areas required.

If monitored regularly, indicators of achievement are a partnership's invaluable early warning system, highlighting problems that could endanger their ultimate effectiveness.

8. Encourage everyone to champion the achievements of the partnership

Although focused upon presentation, this last principle is none the less crucial to effective evaluation. One of the purposes of evaluation is to identify successful aspects that can be applied elsewhere, but these will not be applied elsewhere unless they are communicated effectively and 'championed' by those that know about them.

Firstly, if everyone involved in a partnership has been engaged in the evaluation of its work, they will be very aware of its achievements and successes. This will help them to speak with credibility and confidence when describing the work of their partnership to others.

Secondly, providing training and development in the following areas will strengthen this credibility and confidence even further:

Presentation skills

As well as giving people training in making formal presentations, people also need advice about how to present their ideas clearly and concisely in informal and one to one situations. This is because many opportunities to inform and influence within the context of partnership working occur 'ad hoc' and people need to be able to make the most of these situations.

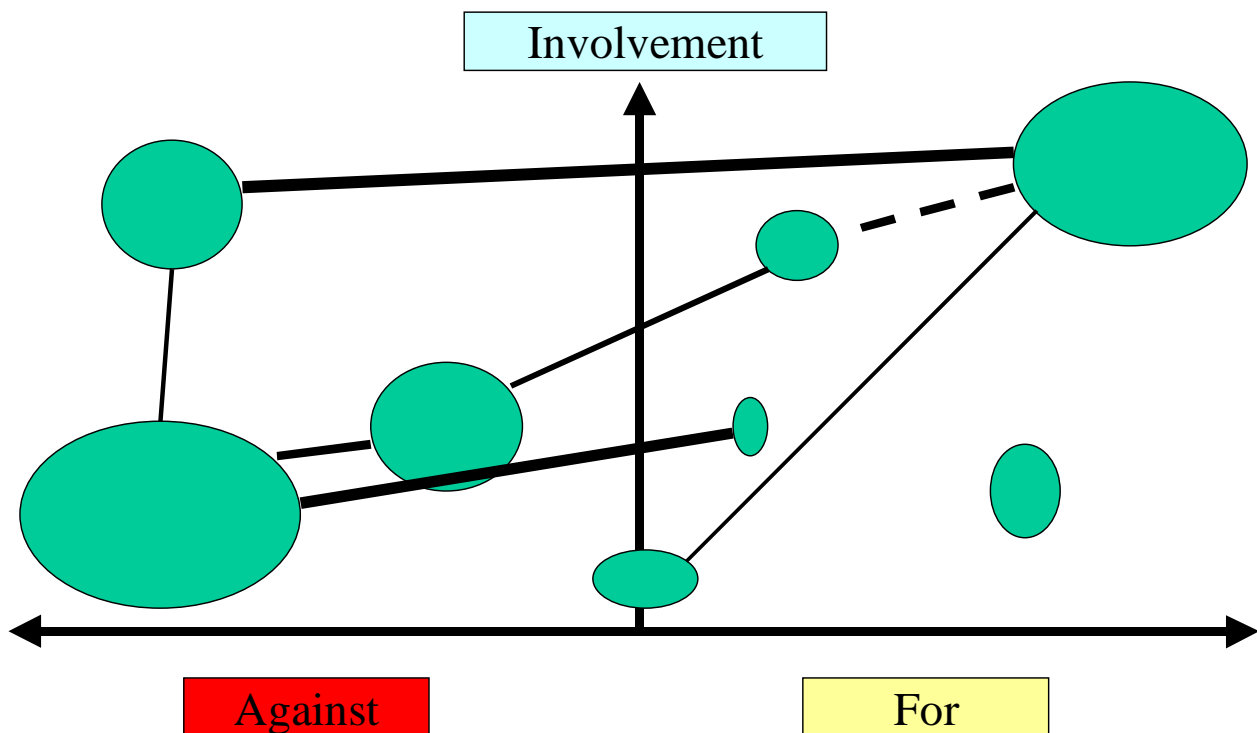
Contributing effectively to meetings¹⁰

Being comfortable with the structure, style and etiquette of business meetings is vital if people are to feel confident whilst attending and contributing to them. People also need advice on how to hold their own within the cut and thrust that almost always takes place within such meetings, so that they can make their contributions and inform others of a partnership's achievements and activities assertively, clearly and concisely.

¹⁰ For more information about contributing effectively to meetings go to http://www.tallistraining.co.uk/contributing_to_meetings.htm

Appendix A

A Stakeholder Involvement, Attitude and Relationship Mapping Graph



- Firstly, brainstorm all your stakeholders
- Then position them on the graph according to their level of involvement and to what extent they are for or against the partnership's work. The higher they are on the graph the more involved they are. The further left the more 'Against' they are. The further right the more 'For' they are.
- The size of the shapes denotes the importance of the stakeholder to the partnership. The bigger the shape the more important the stakeholder.
- The lines map relationships between stakeholders. Thick lines denote strong positive relationships between stakeholders. Thin lines denote weaker relationships. Dotted lines denote negative relationships. No lines denote the lack of any relationship at all.
- You can vary the thickness of the lines as much as is useful to denote varying strengths of relationship. You can also use colours to denote relationships as well as/rather than varying the thickness and type of line.
- Once the relationships are mapped a partnership can then analyse the results and decide how they are going to manage key stakeholders and, where necessary, try to improve relationships between stakeholders.

Appendix B

The Co – Counselling Method

The issue holder presents their issue/dilemma/problem
(5 minutes)

Others help the issue holder to clarify the issue by being curious and asking questions
(10 minutes)

The issue owner confirms the issue
(2 minutes)

Others analyse the issue and brainstorm possible ways forward
(The issue holder **remains silent**.)
(15 minutes)

Others present a summary of their findings to the issue holder
(5 minutes)

Issue holder responds
(5 minutes)

Individual and group reflection on process
(5 minutes)

Extra value can be gained from the above process if the 'others' make notes of the issues and ideas as they arise, and then give this note to the issue owner at the end of the session.

Summary

Partnerships perceive evaluation as important, but also as complex and distant from day – to – day activities.

For evaluation to be helpful to a partnership, its people need to understand how to make it effective. They also need to be involved in and stimulated by it.

To achieve this, a partnership needs to apply the following eight principles:

1. **Adopt an open – minded approach to evaluation:** evaluation can come from anywhere at anytime.
2. **Emphasise the important role evaluation plays during the problem solving process:** investing time in analysing and understanding the problem will lead to better solutions.

3. **Bring evaluation to life through stories:** people engage with and learn from others' experiences.
4. **Make evaluation creative and stimulating:** using specific creativity techniques will unlock people's imaginations and help a partnership perceive its work and other related issues in new ways.
5. **Make evaluation ongoing and involving:** creating regular, high profile and meaningful opportunities for people to participate in reviewing a partnership's work will encourage people to value evaluation and motivate them to contribute their thoughts and feelings about a partnership's work.
6. **Make evaluation challenging:** opening a partnership up and welcoming in diverse and conflicting views will make a partnership more inclusive and stronger.
7. **Uncover and strengthen the golden chain that leads to success:** concentrating upon developing and linking the key activities of a partnership from inputs, through processes and outputs, towards outcomes will make a partnership more effective and provide an audit trail in support of its achievements.
8. **Encourage everyone to champion a partnership's achievements:** ensuring that a partnership's people are well versed in its achievements and giving them training in presentation and meeting skills will encourage them to champion a partnership's work effectively and confidently.

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