5 Measures, Methods and Planning an Evaluation Project

Learning objectives

- ☐ Be able to determine the data needed and appropriate data collection methods for evaluation.
- ☐ Know the meaning and uses of indicators and key performance indicators.
- ☐ Understand the need for both quantitative and qualitative methods and measures.
- ☐ Know the evaluation approaches or models that are available.
- ☐ Be able to plan a simple evaluation.
- ☐ Be able to plan a complex evaluation employing theory or logic models.

5.1 Introduction

Measures and methods become critical considerations when planning an evaluation project. Following from the discussion of a process model (paradigms, contexts, purposes and uses) this chapter looks first at measures, including the development and use of key performance indicators, than methodological issues and evaluation models. The final part provides step-by-step guidance on how to plan both simple and complex evaluations, with emphasis on the 'logic model'.

5.2 Measures

5.2.1 Indicators and key performance indicators

It is not always possible to measure something directly. For example, how do you measure quality, or sustainability? Evaluators employ indicators that reflect the essence of the concept, so when we need evidence of quality we can measure customer satisfaction or employ expert judges. In the case of sustainability, numerous indicators have been developed to measure everything from carbon emissions to habitat loss (see: http://www.sustainablemeasures.com). Here is a definition and criteria from that website:

"An indicator is something that points to an issue or condition. Its purpose is to show you how well a system is working. If there is a problem, an indicator can help you determine what direction to take to address the issue. Indicators are as varied as the types of systems they monitor. However, there are certain characteristics that effective indicators have in common:

◆   *Effective indicators are **relevant**; they show you something about the system that you need to know.*

◆   *Effective indicators are **easy to understand**, even by people who are not experts.*

◆   *Effective indicators are **reliable**; you can trust the information that the indicator is providing.*

◆   *Lastly, effective indicators are based on **accessible data**; the information is available or can be gathered while there is still time to act."*

Of all the possible indicators, some are considered to be critical. These can be called critical indicators or, when they are intended to measure performance (as in progress towards attaining goals) they can be called *key performance indicators* (KPIs). Since they will be situation specific, and subject to change, each organisation or event will have to formulate their own.

From a business perspective here is a definition of key performance indicators:

"Key business statistics such as number of new orders, cash collection efficiency, and return on investment (ROI), which measure a firm's performance in critical areas. KPIs show the progress (or lack of it) toward realizing the firm's objectives or strategic plans by monitoring activities which (if not properly performed) would likely cause severe losses or outright failure."

Source: http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/key-performance-indicators-KPI.html

In this book I use 'KPI' to describe both direct measures, as in the key business statistics, and indirect indicators of concepts like sustainability. Terms that are more or less equivalent are performance measures and objectives.

KPIs are needed for all management functions, and there are five general types:

1 **Effectiveness**: implements the mission/mandate; goal attainment; priorities

2 **Efficiency**: use of resources; justifying costs; consider alternatives

3 **Relevance**: conformity to policy; perspectives of target groups and other stakeholders

4 **Sustainability** of the event, including its financial viability

5 **Impacts**: changes caused; totality of effects; distribution of costs and benefits.

KPIs can be categorized in several ways that will help determine which ones are key, and which are merely metrics to monitor. Some are *short-term* in nature, intended to deal with immediate objectives like: are we achieving our ticket-sales targets? When do we reach the break-even point?" Others are *longer-term* in orientation, such as: "do our satisfied customers become repeat visitors? Do residents continue to support our event?"

It will also be useful to determine which metrics (i.e., how things are measured) produce definitive answers, or merely provide some evidence towards reaching a conclusion. If most customers say they dislike the event experience and say they will not recommend it or return, those could be interpreted, collectively, as *definitive indicators* of failure!

Another categorization relates indicators to the three evaluation phases of formative, process and summative. *Formative indicators* will help plan the event or improve it in the future, such as monitoring trends in repeat versus first-time customers. The logic here is that if you only attract loyal repeaters your future audience is not being developed. You also want *early warning indicators* that might suggest future problems, such as a rising level of dissatisfaction, or declining visitor expenditure.

In the process evaluation phase, while the event is up and running, key indicators will be those that immediately identify problems to fix (e.g., accidents, complaints) or opportunities, such as increasing sales of merchandise or pleasantly surprising guests. Summative evaluation requires a set of KPIs related to each area of the triple bottom line, from economic impacts to meeting green or sustainability standards.

5.3 Methodology and methods

Methodologies can be understood in the context of paradigms, as previously discussed.

1 A body of rules and postulates that are employed by researchers in a discipline of study

2 A particular procedure or set of procedures

3 The analysis of the principles of procedures of inquiry that are followed by researchers in a discipline of study.

(source: what-when-how.com/social-sciences/methodology-social-science/)

*Method***:** The strategies and tools used to obtain and analyse data or evidence. These might follow from evaluation theory, the paradigms, or disciplinary preferences. They range in sophistication and difficulty from laboratory experiments to monitoring energy consumption. Methods have to fit the evaluation problem at hand, and when we incorporate various research or data collection methods into an evaluation project we are really creating an evaluation model.

There is no *a priori* reason to exclude any qualitative or quantitative method from evaluation, and a range of each has to be part of the evaluator's 'toolbox'. When evaluation project planning is discussed later in this chapter we will look at some specific qualitative and quantitative methods.