**Strategia Netherland**

Diploma Course in Monitoring and Evaluation

**Assignment Three**

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1. **Why is choosing the right question important in Monitoring and Evaluation?**

You know why you’re running your program. Evaluating it should just be a matter of deciding whether things are better when you evaluate than they were before you started, right? Well, actually. Wrong. It’s not that simple. First of all, you need to determine what ‘’things’’ you are actually looking at (remember the school lunch example) second, you will need to consider how you will determine what you’re doing right, and what you need to change. Here’s a partial list of reasons why choosing questions beforehand is important.

**In participant evaluations, evaluation involves stakeholders in setting the course of the program, thus making it more likely that it will meet community needs.**

**It determines what needs to be recorded in order to gather data for evaluation.** A clear choice of evaluation questions makes the actual gathering of data much easier, since it usually makes obvious what kinds of records must be kept and what areas need to be examined.

**It guides your future choices.** If you find that your program is particularly successful in certain ways and not in others, for example, you may decide to emphasize the successful will change the emphasis of future evaluation as well.

**It helps you understand what effects different parts of your effort are having:** By framing questions carefully, you can evaluation different parts of your effort. If you add an element after the start of the program, for instance, you may be able to see its effect separate from that of the rest of the program, if you focus on examining it. By the same token, you can look at different possible effects of the program as a whole. (Do adult basic education learners read more as a result of being in a program? Are they more likely to register to vote? Do their children improve their school performance?)

**It highlights unintended consequences.** When you find unusual answers to the questions you choose, it often means that your program has had some affects you didn’t expect. Sometimes these effects are positive not only did people in the heart-healthy exercise program gain in fitness, but a majority of them report changing their diet for the better and losing weight as well-sometimes negative-obese children in a healthy eating program actually gained weight, even though they were eating a healthier diet and sometimes neither. Like the side effects of medication, the unintended consequences of a program can be as important as important as the program itself. (In the case of the exercise program, the changes in diet might do as or more than exercise to maintain heart health, for instance, and may point toward changing the focus of the program in some way).

**It makes you clearly define what it is you’re trying to do** what you decide to evaluate define what you hope to accomplish. Choosing evaluation question at the start of a program or effort makes clear what you’re trying to change, and what you want your results to be.

**It provides focus for the evaluation and the program**. Choosing evaluation questions carefully keeps you from becoming scattered and trying to do too many things at once, thereby diluting your effectiveness at all of them.

**It shows you where you need to make changes.** Carefully choosing questions and making them specific to your real objectives should tell you exactly where the program is doing well and where the program isn’t having the intended effect.

**In Summary**

Choosing evaluation questions, the areas in your work you’ll examine as part of your evaluation of your program- is key to defining exactly what it is you’re trying to accomplish. For that reason, those questions should be chosen carefully as part of the planning process for the program itself, so that the questions can guide your work as well as your evaluation of it. The more those stakeholders can be involved in that choice and planning, the more likely you are to create a program that successfully meets its goals serving the community.

Choosing those questions well entails understanding the context of the program-the community, participants, the culture of any groups involved, the history of the issue and of the social structure of the community and the organization-and ( if you’re an outside evaluator without ties to the program) establishing trust with administrators, staff members, and participants. That trust will enable you to conduct a participatory evaluation that draws on the knowledge and talents of all stakeholders, and to plan an evaluation that fits the goals of the program and accurately analyzes its strengths and weakness. With that analysis in hand, you’ll be able to make changes to improve the program. Then you’re ready to start the whole process again, so you can evaluate the effects of the changes you’ve made.

1. **Using Archival data has its own bottlenecks. Name five and explain how to overcome them**

Archival data refer to information that already exists in someone else’s files. Originally generated for reporting or research purposes, it’s often kept because of legal requirements, for reference, or as an internal record. In general, because it’s the result of completed activities, it’s not subject to change and is therefore sometimes known as fixed data.

**Using Archival Data**

It’s difficult to imagine evaluating a program or approach without actually collecting your own data on participants. You might be able to find data on those participants from an earlier time, which you can then use as a baseline. You might be able to find appropriate data on a similar group that you can use as a comparison or control. But you can’t find data elsewhere on what those participants are currently experiencing, and that’s what you’re evaluating in almost every case.

Although you’ll probably collect information on the participants in the program you’re evaluating, there are a number of ways you might use archival data:

* **To act as a control or comparison group.** One of the best ways to learn whether or not your program had an effect is to compare the participants you’re working with to those in another group that received no program or a different one. The best alternative here is to create a group from the same population as participants- so that all participants will have approximately the same background, environmental influences, cultural norms, etc. – and to conduct the same observations on both groups at the same times, so that the only difference between them is the program that one of them is exposed to. In practice, creating or finding a perfect control group is often difficult. Archival data may be able to provide a reasonable alternative, in the form of data collected on a comparison group or population similar to that of participants in your program.

* **To establish a baseline against which to measure your results.** For this purpose, you’d need recent information about where the population you’re working with stands on the dependent variable or outcomes you’re concerned with. That would tell you where the participants started from (on average), so that you could see from the measures you used in your evaluation whether and how much they might have improved as a result of your work.
* **To establish a standard of comparison against which to measure your efforts**. There are two ways that you could use archival data for this purpose. One is to use census, statewide, and/or community-wide data to compare with that of the population you’re working with. That comparison can give you a sense of how serious the issue is for your group, compared to the general public. The second way is to use similar data to compare your outcomes with the data on the larger population. This might work especially well when you’re using community-level indicators (e.g., rate of injuries, percentage of girls completing different education level).
* **To identify already-existing trends that may affect the results of your evaluation study.** The fact that there’s been a change in participants between the beginning and end of your evaluation doesn’t necessarily mean that you’ve caused it. Among other things, it may be part of an ongoing trend toward change that started well before your program did, and may continue after it. Archival data might show such a trend over a number of measures of your dependent variable in the population your participants come from.
* **To provide data for a longitudinal study.** If you think your program might have a long-term effect, or if you think it will interact with the effects of past events, circumstances, or programs, you might want to conduct a longitudinal study-one that looks at participants over a longer period of time- for your evaluation. You may have the time or resources to collect data over a period of years, but you may be able to find archival information that allows you to draw some conclusions about long term effects.

**In Summary**

Most government agencies and departments, community-based health and human service provide, advocacy organizations, universities, and many other entities keep archival records of information. You may able to use these as part of the data for your evaluation, saving time and trouble. Especially for small organizations with limited resources, the use of archival data can make it possible to produce an evaluation that provides the information needed to accurately assess a program’s effectiveness and make the changes necessary to improve it.

1. **Why is research important component in monitoring and evaluation? Give and explain four.**

Monitoring and Evaluation systems require twelve main components in order to function effectively and efficiently to achieve the desired results. These twelve M&E components are discussed in detail below:

**Human Capacity for M&E**

An effective M&E implementation requires that there is only adequate staff employed in the M&E unit, but also that the staff within this unit have the necessary M&E technical know-how and experience. As such, this component emphasizes the need to have the necessary human resource that can run the M&E function by hiring employees who have adequate knowledge and experience in M&E implementation, while at the same time ensuring that the M&E capacity of these employees are continuously developed through training and other capacity building initiatives to ensure that they keep up with current and emerging trends in the field.

**M&E frameworks/Logical Framework**

The M&E framework outlines the objectives, Inputs, outputs and outcomes of the intended project and the indicators that will be used to measure all these. It also outlines the assumptions that the M&E system will adopt. The M&E framework is essential as it links the objectives with the process and enables the M&E expert know what to measure and how to measure it.

**Organizational structures with M&E Functions**

The adequate implementation of M&E at any level requires that there is a unit whose main purpose is to coordinate all the M&E functions at its level. While some entities prefer to have an internal organ to oversee its M&E functions, others prefer to outsource such services. This component of M&E emphasizes the need for M& unit within the organization, how elaborate its roles are defined, how adequately its roles are supported by the organizations hierarchy and how other units within the organization are aligned to support the M&E functions within the organization.

**Partnerships for Planning, Coordinating and Managing the M&E System**

A prerequisite for successful M&E systems whether at organizational or national levels is the existence of M&E partnerships. Partnerships for M&E systems are for organizations because they complement the organization’s M&E process and they act as a source of verification for whether M&E functions align to intended objectives. They also serve auditing purposes where line ministries, technical working groups, communities and other stakeholders are able to compare M&E outputs with reported outputs.

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