

WELLINGTON EVALUATION GROUP
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THE ROLE OF EVALUATION
IN
HELPING
ORGANISATIONS
LEARN

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INTRODUCTION TO THE WORKSHOP

This workshop is designed to allow us to explore the relationship between organisational learning and evaluation.

The important word here is “explore”.

We are not going to tell you what organisational learning is any more than we are going to tell you what evaluation is. As with evaluation there will probably never be a single universally accepted concept of organisational learning.

However to simplify the workshop we have pulled together and clustered some themes from the organisational learning literature that in our view are relevant to evaluation.

THE THINKING BEHIND THIS WORKSHOP

Essentially this workshop seeks to resolve three questions :-

1. What evaluation approaches are consistent with organisational learning ?
Activity One.
2. What factors help and hinder these evaluation approaches ?
Activity Two
3. What strategies can evaluation adopt to deal effectively with these factors?
Activity Three

THIS WORKBOOK

This workbook provides an opportunity for you to have a permanent record of this workshop.

The idea of “reflection” is a critical one in organisational learning. Consequently we have also provided space for you to record your observations and reflections. We have included some questions which might help those reflections.

ORGANISATIONAL LEARNING AND EVALUATION

WHAT IS ORGANISATIONAL LEARNING ?

Tricky question that. Despite the burgeoning literature, there is no universally agreed definition. However, in general the stress is not on learning per se, but on the *nature* of that learning, *how* it occurs and *what* happens as a result. In m

In order to give this workshop some starting structure we have done two things.

We have picked some concepts in the organisational learning literature that appear to be relevant to evaluation ...

... and clustered them together in a way that we think evaluators will find useful.

They are :-

- 1. Understanding the whole as different from the sum of its parts**
This includes the fact that you can only understand the system in the context of its environment.
- 2. A spirit of enquiry and reflection**
There is an energy and curiosity, which allows difficult and challenging questions to be asked, and to be deeply reflected on. There is a desire and willingness to learn skills that allow better enquiry and reflection.
- 3. A conscious appreciation of the mental models being used**
A “mental model” is the particular framework we bring to our analysis of what is going on. Different people will interpret the same event in different ways because they see the world through different eyes. Organisational learning occurs when these models are surfaced rather than remaining hidden, unstated or unconscious.
- 4. Co-creation**
Investigation, enquiry, discussion, problem solving and strategising is done jointly
- 5. Organisational memory is acknowledged**
An organisation moves forward in full knowledge and acknowledgment of the past and present; both good and bad.
- 6. Open dialogue and communication**
In this context, “dialogue” is most frequently defined in two ways. One is the ability to hold strongly one perspective but value the worth of another view. The other is an ability to dive deeply into the meanings of a conversation. In order to achieve these organisations need to be able to handle successfully power relationships, and seek to have a “no blame” approach to actions.

ACTIVITY ONE

WHAT EVALUATION APPROACHES ARE CONSISTENT WITH ORGANISATIONAL LEARNING ?

You are now focussing on one of those clusters.

The name of the cluster is

On your own, write below how evaluation can contribute to this aspect of organisational learning :-

Discuss these in your groups and then identify the major contributions that evaluation can make to this aspect of organisational learning

REFLECTION

What was interesting about this activity ?

What was surprising about this activity ?

ACTIVITY TWO

WHAT EXTERNAL FACTORS HELP AND HINDER THESE EVALUATION APPROACHES ?

OK so evaluation can make a major contribution to organisational learning. But how often does it ? This section explores what may help and hinder evaluation contributing to organisational learning.

Focussing on the major contributions your group identified, think about an evaluation that attempted to do this.

What *external* factors *helped* the evaluation contribute to this aspect ?

By “external” we mean factors that were not part of the evaluation method. For instance, “good interview technique” is not an external factor, but “free access to all stakeholders” is an external factor

What *external* factors *hindered* the evaluation from contributing ?

At the end of this exercise we will ask you to prioritise the most important external factors. Please write them below :-

REFLECTION

What was interesting about this activity ?

What was surprising about this activity ?

ACTIVITY THREE

WHAT STRATEGIES CAN EVALUATION ADOPT TO DEAL EFFECTIVELY WITH THESE EXTERNAL FACTORS ?

If evaluation is to contribute most effectively to organisational learning it is going to need to strategise wisely. Strategies are essentially about how you handle the friendly and unfriendly aspects of the external environment

QUESTION ONE

How can you reduce or get around the major forces you identified that hinder organisational learning ?

QUESTION TWO

How can you promote or exploit the major forces you identified that help organisational learning ?

REFLECTION

What was interesting about this activity ?

What was surprising about this activity ?

FINAL ACTIVITY - REFLECTION

Periods of structured reflection are an important aspect of organisational learning. This part of the workshop allows you to reflect on what you have observed during this workshop and your reactions to it.

Here are some questions for this session :-

What happened in this workshop that you expected to happen ?

What happened in this workshop which was unexpected ?

What have been the similar views expressed within the workshop ?

What have been the different views expressed in this workshop ?

As a result of this workshop, what will you do in future evaluations that you have done in the past ?

As a result of this workshop, what will you do *differently* in future evaluations compared to the past ?

Overall what is it that you have felt you have learned from this workshop, and how does this compare with what you expected to learn ? Any observations on this ?