Take an Indicator to Lunch:
Successful and Unsuccessful Evaluations & What Makes the Difference

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Introduction: Terminology – Results, Outcomes, Impact & Indicators

- **Results – short term work 'outputs' –** A description of what you have achieved. In the short term, probably not all you wanted to achieve, but required to achieve it.
- **Outcomes – longer term results –** Closer to what you wanted to achieve with your objectives.
- **Impact – significance or meaning of results–** Ramifications of your outcomes and achievements for the intended beneficiaries, taking into account the sustainability of those achievements
- **Indicator –** A description of performance – a specific, observable, and measurable characteristic or change that reflects the concept you are wanting to measure – **Note, not all indicators are equal** – e.g. an indicator is a:
  - Reflection, central element illustrating the change
  - Visible finding, strongly suggesting, validly and reliably standing as a
  - Proxy for, showing the results, outcomes, and/or impact you are claiming.

Why Lunch?

With this title you're being invited to consider how to demonstrate the impact of your work and benefits of the strategy on achieving your objectives and ultimate goals. This is a good lunch discussion topic.

- **There usually is not just one result, but multiple; Not just one way to recognize them, but multiple. Not all are equal.**
  - Some 'results' have higher priority
  - Some 'results' have higher likelihood of success
  - Some 'results' are less directly attainable
  - Some 'results' are more visible than others
- **Discussing what results you want to focus on is a crucial element of demonstrating the output of the work you do and its impact on your long-term goals. It requires:**
  - Making decisions. There are many results you could focus on, which ones are the most important and viable to focus on.
  - Posing questions. There are many issues about what your work means for your organization and the 'field' at large; which ones are most important?
- **Key Project Task**: Making decisions about which results to focus on.
- **Key Evaluation Task**: Asking the right questions and determining how you will recognize the results if you saw them.

Key Project Task: Developing Focus

- What results from your work (short term and longer term)?
- How do the short term results from your work transform themselves into longer term outcomes and impacts?
- How can you best show the results of your work, and what it has taken to achieve them?
- What can show your progress in achieving the needed outcomes?

The Logic Model: A Key Tool

- **Clarifies** the inputs, outputs, and intended beneficiaries of your work or treatments
- **Identifies** the factors that affect the success of your work,
  - Interdependencies on others' work
  - Expectations for specific behavior by intended beneficiaries
- **Identifies** critical junctures, when you should look at progress
- **Maps** the (multiple) strands of activities and linkages among them designed to achieve your objectives and goals

What is a Logic Model?

- A road map, a picture of organization objectives, activities, processes, and the links among them showing the pathways designed to achieve your objectives and mission.
- Illustration of the theory and assumptions underlying your ‘program’ & the reasoning behind its processes.
- Depiction of the links between outcomes (both short- and long-term) and program activities/ processes, showing the principles organizing your program work.

One View of the Underlying Logic

Input

- Staffing
- Training
- Materials

Immediate Results/Outputs

- 95% Staff follow protocols
- 95% increase in accuracy
- 95% use appropriate tests

Outcomes

15% increase in timely outreach to high risk targets

Impact

More Effective Surveillance

Reduced Incidence of TB

A Closer Look at Indicators

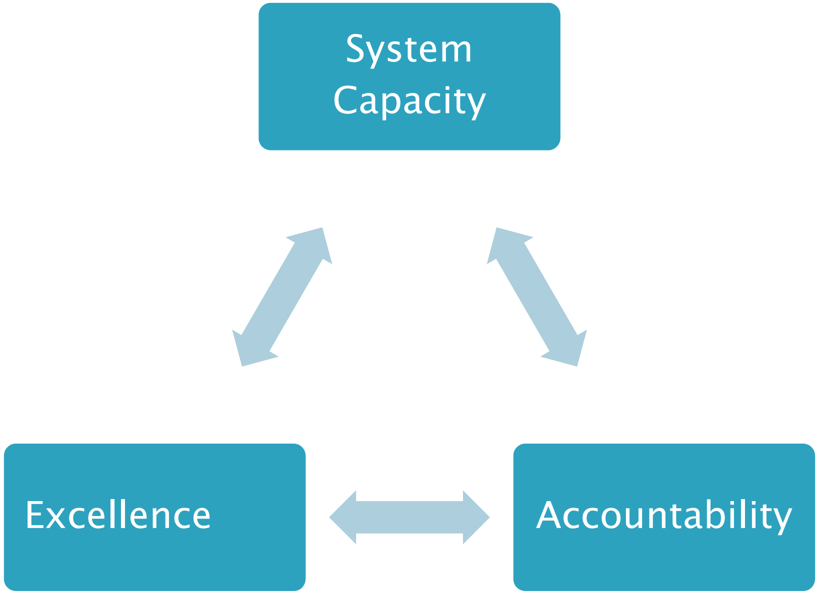
1. How should an indicator perform?
2. Where do they fit in the research/ evaluation/ monitoring process?
3. What do they do?
4. Criteria for selecting indicators
5. Characteristics of good indicators
6. Let's consider some indicators
7. Summary: So who is our lunch partner, and would we invite them again?

1a. How an Indicator should perform?

An indicator should:

- Describe variability in performance.
- Take into account conditions which 'drive' performance excellence, accountability, system capacity and quality.
- Reflect the work you did.
- Be clear, measurable.
- Provide useful information for key stakeholders, comparable with others'

1b: Is the Indicator a Good Performance Metric –
In what context?



1c Test: Good, Tolerable, or Intolerable

Test Case: the Migraine	
Program Goal:	Reduce Migraine

- Observe & document patient stress, diet, activity levels.
- Engage Rs in regular self-reflection and proactivity protocols
- Supervised medicine
- Debrief patient on incidence
- Measure brain patterns

Which of these, if any, is a good indicator?

- # Patients improved
- # Patients happy
- # Patients following medication schedules
- Time spent with patients
- # of activities overall
- Number of customized treatment plans
- Other? What?

Response Clues

- Is it oriented to accountability, quality, excellence, quantity, quality, system failure?
- Does it focus on outcomes, process, infrastructure or inputs?
- Will it provide helpful, important information?
- Does it describe key components of treatment success?

2. Where do indicators fit? Terminology

Performance Analysis Strategy

Goal What you're trying to achieve	**Activity** Actions to meet the objective	**Results** What you make from the outputs	**Measure** Data source, Instruments, analysis strategy for determining Impact
Objective	Outputs Indicators	Standard	Outcomes Indicators
Strategic focus for attaining that goal	Quantification of what you achieve	Benchmarks to meet in results statements	Longer term Results

Impact*

*The meaning of Outcomes related to changes in the phenomenon you're focusing on

3. What do indicators do?

They run the show – i.e. they focus attention through

- Structuring the data you gather
- Directing your attention to what counts as “a job well done”
- Identifying resource priorities
- Determining how you think about:
  - Outcomes—success and failure
  - Values of organizational arrangements
  - What you notice or don’t notice
- Allowing comparison, for example among different
  - Implementation and deployment strategies
  - Levels and types of staff, material, and financial inputs
  - Conceptions of the task
  - Barriers faced and strategies for addressing them

A Test Case:
Public Meetings: Indicators at risk of failure

- Proposition: An informed public is a public that can help prevent the spread of TB, then the following model makes sense –
- Goal: To prevent TB
- Objective: Talk to public
- Activity: Hold hearings
- Indicators one group used:
  - Outputs: # Meetings
  - Results: # People at meetings who remember they were there
  - Outcomes: # People who agree TB is an important problem

What will you be able to say from this? Is this what you want to say?

The stakes are high:

Do the indicators reflect your goal, and the linkage between it, your activities & objectives? The process by which your treatment is going to work; and the risk factors for failure? How your strategy has worked compared to others', what will it do for you; what won't it do for you?

–

Stay tuned

Analysis of the Test Case, Public Meetings

- **Focus of Indicators selected: Poor**
  Do not relate to intent of work done – they are oriented to superficial accountability not to treatment performance.
- **Usefulness of indicators to guide change: None**
- **Impact found, using those indicators: None**
- **Result on measurement strategy: Negative**
  Result would be to discount or undermine public outreach
- **To improve the Indicators: More directly embrace the key treatment element – Public Engagement, e.g.:**
  - Communication is with High or At Risk public
  - 'Public' has knowledge about what to do; and is able
  - 'Public' aspires to do it, does it, and does it right
  - 'Public' recognizes the success of their actions, and follows through with all required action

4. Criteria for Selecting ‘it’ (the S*M*A*R*T Indicator)

Specific
Measurable
Accurate
Relevant
Trustworthy

Quest for the elegant indicator:
one which is widely agreed and understood inside and outside your organization to be a direct reflection of the power of your work, while being inexpensive, not burdensome and reliable.

- Is it important?
- Is it needed?
- Is it explanatory?
- Is it easily understood?
- Is it easily collected?
- Is it a valid measure?
- Is it cost-effective?
- Is it SMART?

More about S*M*A*R*T Or, what is that, an elephant? And, is it really coming toward us?!#?

• Specific?	> Clearly representative of the intervention you are implementing
• Measurable?	> Data yielded are reliable and valid sources for informing the decisions you need to make
• Accurate?	> Data yielded provide an accurate representation of the whole phenomenon
• Relevant?	> Information synthesized are relevant to the context for your work in the field and in your organization and theory status
• Trustworthy?	> Indicators you used are believable and agreed upon as sound reflections of impact.

The Thing about Being SMART

If your indicator isn't

- specific,
- able to be quantified, and both
- an accurate representation of the whole of the phenomenon, and relevant to your work,

Your accomplishments won't be able to be measured the same way, over time, by different people, and, likely….

Someone's going to be looking at the right hind leg of the elephant, and someone else at its right ear... Watch out for that trunk; the elephant will outwit you.

5. More about Good Indicators

Good Indicators are:

- **Direct** – Closest to the resulting behavior you want to see
- **Objective** – Widely accepted and uni-dimensional
- **Able to differentiate** – Explain differences in performance or incidence, in different contexts
- **Adequate to describe the complexity** – The relationship between the indicator in context, the objective and goal is clear, and captures key components of the activity
- **Adequate to Support Management** – Focuses on the issue of concern, helps explain how the system works and how it breaks down. It should help you support system capacity priorities for change.
- **Operational and Practical** – Structured to facilitate data collection and availability.

Further Analysis of the Test Case – Public Meetings

In the Test Case, indicators

- **Did not represent behavior at all** – Rather they represented accountability for designed activity format
- **Were neither accepted widely nor unidimensional** – Some meetings were 5 minutes; others much longer. Communication does not imply understanding or acceptance.
- **Did not differentiate among participants.** 93% held 4 meetings, with 5 people attending; and couldn't tell about amount of information actually communicated.
- **Poorly represented the phenomenon necessary to prevent the spread of tb.** – e.g. whether the intended participant attended, learned, accepted the role of tb prevention activist, and their intent.
- **Not adequate for their purpose.** Represented process accountability not quality performance (adequate communication to the intended required audience, people at high risk for spreading tb) or excellence (people attending actually committing to change their behavior and implement new behavior.

6. Let's Consider Costs and Benefits

Burden – Given the

- Time to collect,
- Time to prepare the data for analysis
- Time to analyze,
- Time to review results
- Time to report
- Cost – $, time, resources

Is it worth it?

- Will the analysis tell you enough? – Does it inform the people who need to know what they need to know about (e.g. policy makers, local health officials…)?
- Is it simple enough? Can you get the information reliably and consistently, on time? Does it get key information that a simpler one wouldn't do?
- Is it flexible enough? – Does it fit into your own reporting and strategic planning cycle and that of your stakeholders and partners?
- Is the information good? SMART, useful and important contribution?

7. Summary: So who is our lunch partner really, and would we invite them again?

A good evaluation:

- yields reliable, valid, and useful data
- is cost-effective at all levels
- helps you understand how your system works and how it could work better to achieve your goals
- is interesting to and accepted by colleagues and collaborating agencies, and
- fully captures your project/program accomplishments, including barriers faced and overcome, and
- demonstrates why what you did was important, significant, did or did not have impact

For an assessment to be good

The Assessment has to focus on

- interesting and important questions, and
- measure the things (factors, phenomena, behavior, practice) that can be levers for accomplishing the end outcomes.

Note: the assessment will fail to be cost-effective, if:

- everything is (thought to be) known already, or
- nobody cares about the questions or what is measured, or
- the indicators are poorly constructed so nobody believes in them,

A Less Desirable Lunch Partner

Poor choice of Indicators and a poor M&E or Research Methodology:

- uses an instrument that is not customized to meet your particular program objectives and strategy
- yields questionable data, which cannot be compared to others'
- yields data which do not relate to your true bottom line
- is burdensome to conduct, and the results are already known before you analyze the data
- is not interesting in terms of the questions it answers or the information it provides about them and
- cannot be used to effect needed changes (if any are needed)

Some Concluding Thoughts…

There are rarely absolutely good or bad Monitoring strategies, Research or Evaluations

Differences between more or less useful evaluations, monitoring strategies or research often rests with:

1. understanding what you want to measure,
2. creating indicators that truly measure it,
3. selecting or modifying a data form to collect the data you need to answer your questions, and then
4. collecting data in a reliable and efficient way, and then
5. thoughtfully analyzing the results and what accounts for variation in them.

There's a lot that can be done with statistics; but statistics do not substitute for thought.

So Bon Appetite! – and have a good, provocative lunch!

Best wishes, Jo Ann Intili, jintili2@gmail.com, 2008

P.S.
The Goals of this Presentation Were to Foster:

1. A common language in which we can talk about indicators
2. An understanding of the different kinds of indicators that exist
3. An understanding of the criteria for and characteristics of a good indicator; and
4. An understanding of the value of caring about what indicator you use.
5. Understanding that enabling data comparison across projects does not mean you have to destroy the utility of the data for project improvement purposes.

Application to your own situation is an art and takes some thought. If you need help, please don’t hesitate to ask for it.