

Outcomes monitoring and IT - finding the best solution for your organisation

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Avan Wadia Presentation Notes

In this session Simon and I are going to look at what your organisation needs to have in place before you even start thinking about your IT.

I will be expanding on some of the issues in terms of getting your organisation ready and Simon will be focussing more on what you need to have in place before you start developing your IT.

In terms of getting your organisation ready, there are some key points that you need to think about:

First of all, it's about having a vision – as Jean has already pointed out, having a clear sense of what you want to achieve through developing an IT system that helps you to monitor your outcomes is absolutely crucial. It is helpful to have a document that outlines what the organisation wants from your new system. It is often the point at which people articulate what they want from an IT system that different views emerge. So it is about developing a shared vision.

Support from the top – this is vital because money and time will need to be allocated by the organisation. For many organisations, moving to an IT-based outcomes monitoring system can radically change the way it works so there has to be support from CEO/mgt team/trustees - they need to understand that and value it. It's not just about buying an IT system. It will take time and they need to appreciate that and it may require additional resources eg support from an expert. It's recognising that they are investing in moving the organisation forwards.

Money – clearly very important – have you worked out a budget that includes staff training, staff time. The important point here is to make sure you have included everything, not just the cost of the system. Simon will expand on this in a minute.

Involvement – You need to have someone who is spearheading the work so that it doesn't lose its way but at the same time, you can't just have one person doing it on their own. You need a small team of people who will get involved in the planning process – this team needs an implementation plan and a timetable. This team also needs to have the relevant skills and experience internally. They don't all need to be

IT experts but they do need to understand about your outcomes monitoring and work processes. So need to bring together a group from different teams and different levels. You do also need some IT expertise - may need external input.

Buy-in – again as Jean has talked about – getting people on board is absolutely crucial. It may take time to ‘sell’ the idea internally – you will find some people are resistant to change – you need them on your side too. Its also about helping them to see that this isn’t just about a computer system. As you move down the line, it’s then about regular communication to keep people updated with progress and how they can be involved. It is an opportunity for consultation. This is absolutely crucial. If people aren’t on board, they won’t use it or not use it properly. Make them see how it will help them eg frontline staff who are going to input data – show them the benefits to them and work with clients – more efficient.

Another aspect of getting ready is in terms of your outcomes monitoring... Have you clearly identified your key outcomes? Sometimes people think that the system will sort out their outcomes for them, but in fact, you need to be very clear what your outcomes are before you choose an IT system so that you end up with a system that fits your way of working and your outcomes rather than the other way around. Developing your outcomes takes time and you may need some support and training to get to this point.

Then it’s about knowing how you are going to monitor your outcomes - ie what you want to record on your system to tell you that you are achieving them.

Knowing what methods you are going to use to collect this information is absolutely crucial to finding the right system. Eg if you are going to be using pre and post questionnaires, your system will need to be able to record this information for each client. Or if you want clients to complete a self assessment directly onto the system, this has implications on how the system is set up eg security issues, what training you give them. Particularly useful for organisations working with young people. Collecting information – it helps if have already begun to collect some of your monitoring data as it will give you a sense of how it is working, what is needed in terms of collating the information and then analysing it.

Effective reporting – finally, being clear about how you will use the data you are collecting and analysing is very important. Is it for funders, your AR, internal use, planning etc? It is useful to draw up a list of reporting requirements – not just your funders but other stakeholders too.

So that you end up with a system that allows people to put the right information in, in the right way and get the right information out.

As you can see, one organisation who have implemented an outcomes-based IT system said.....

Many of you will already have your outcomes monitoring in place and be ready to move on but if you haven’t, now’s the time! And bear in mind, it can take anything

from 6 – 18 months, depending on the size of your organisation, to go through the process of setting up your outcomes monitoring.

So to summarise, it boils down to four critical success factors:

Clarity: Are you clear about the outcomes you want to monitor. Are staff clear on their own monitoring and evaluation responsibilities? Do you have a plan and timetable?

Culture: do your staff at all levels see the value in monitoring outcomes? Is the organisation ready for change?

Capacity: do staff have the skills and time, resources and support to monitor/evaluate their work? Will your organisation have the resources to manage and utilise the information collected? Do you have the capacity to take this on at this particular time – not having other things going on eg moving premises, going through a merger, restructuring...

Commitment – is there a real commitment to see this work through?

As another organisation who has been through the process said...

ICT workbook goes into a lot more detail... Also workshop this afternoon about key stages involved in implementing an outcomes focus.