
Glossary of terms

After-Action Reviews: A structured review on what happened, why and how it can be done better e.g. for use in interviews, debriefs and workshops.

Agent-based Modelling: A tool for understanding mapping rules: the nature of the relationships shared by agents operating in complex adaptive systems.

Appreciative inquiry (AI): Appreciative inquiry involves framing questions to stakeholders in order to strengthen the system's capacity to understand and anticipate growth. AI focuses on positive attributions e.g. what is working well, by drawing on case examples which are examined for key themes and emerging patterns.

Backward Engineering: Provides a top-down description of how initiative outcomes are connected to activities after systems change has occurred. This method is utilised in outcomes harvesting in order to determine the relationship between the network structure and the network function.

Bellwether interviews: Interviews conducted with 'bellwethers' or thought leaders who carry significant influence over the policy arena. Interviewees are not told the specific policy focus for the interview, believing that it will cover a range of policy issues.

Collaboration Assessment: A group interview style that brings stakeholders together to work on problem-solving an issue which jointly affects them.

Contribution Analysis: Assessment of the contribution an initiative is making to a result, by way of verifying a theory of change and building a credible contribution story.

Critical Incident Reviews: A method of collecting direct observations from stakeholders on the factors and behaviours that lead to successes and failures within a system. Critical incident reviews determine the critical requirements that have influence on the systems functioning.

Design Labs: To accelerate and generate emerging innovation, stakeholders are engaged in a range of workshops, to provoke thinking about the key elements of an initiative, often underpinning big questions about the existing system and connecting them with the needs and interests of different end-users.

Dialogue Interviews: Open-ended, personal approach to understanding motivations, particularly when evaluating new initiatives or programmes of work. Interview content is then synthesised.

Digital Storytelling: Stakeholders develop personal narrative accounts of systems, recording and illustrating this narrative, with images or photographs which culminate in a short film

Future Search – large-scale meetings that loosely address the past, present, future, common ground and action planning, in small groups before engaging in whole system dialogue.

Geographical information system (GIS): Used to capture and store images and graphic data. GIS enables images of a system at different points to be stored, overlaid on one another and evaluated in terms of the model.

Historical Context Time Lining: Maps out the events within the system and related context that have led to the conditions, patterns and qualities of the existing system.

Key informant surveys: Key informant surveys are in-depth interviews with 15-35 stakeholders with first-hand knowledge of the system, utilised in Developmental Evaluation. The interviews have an open structure. Conversation leads the flow of information and the evaluator spontaneously frames questions in order to probe emerging themes.

Learning Groups: Small groups of stakeholders are formed to support learning from an initiative. Learning groups members bring forward personal leadership enquiry questions that are currently of relevance to their work. The group helps to answer these questions, providing reflection and support through next steps for action.

Learning Memos/Workshops: The intention of each learning group session is clearly defined at the start and what success looks like. Notes from the session are captured and synthesised as insight developments and stored in a central location.

Meta-Horizon Mapping: A tool to address areas of ‘movement and stuckness’ in system dynamics by identifying the relative political, organisational, cultural and economic perspectives present.

Media Tracking: Publicity, communications and social media are analysed in order to evaluate local levels of interest in changes and developments to the system or initiative e.g. the extent to which changes being implemented through evaluation are having effect on the relevant interconnected systems and context.

Most significant change: Similar to key informant interviews, most significant change stories are formulated from in-depth discussion with key stakeholders.

Open Space Technology: A method for hosting large-scale summits with stakeholders. The session takes a self-organizing format, beginning with an open agenda. The working agenda is designed by the group and issues are addressed in-depth through breakout sessions.

Outcome Harvesting: A top-down method used by evaluators in order to synthesis information from reports, personal interviews, meetings and workshops, in order to determine how initiatives have contributed to outcomes. Closely related to backward engineering.

Participatory Impact Pathway Analysis: Obtains personal accounts on how actors in a system impact dynamics and contribute the outcomes or activity. Stakeholders co-create the impact pathway, a form of logic model, which describes how a chain of outcomes will lead to eventual impact.

Rapid reconnaissance: Process of assessing of testing the result of different approaches on a system.

Rapid review/assessment: Occurs in real-time to ensure learning obtained from developmental evaluation is implemented into system processes, providing support to the system and decision-making processes.

Reflective practise conversations: A method of engaging stakeholders in discussion around the key themes and patterns that have arisen from interviews within Development Evaluation.

Ripple effects mapping: Uses elements from Appreciative Inquiry and mind mapping to engage stakeholders in retrospective visual mapping of the stories have resulted from a program or complex collaboration, reflecting on intended and unintended outcomes.

Simulations: Simulations set out stakeholder expectations of what change might unfold, answering questions such as “What will happen if we change this? Multiple pathways are assumed and with each of these multiple potential outcomes.

Snap Shot Surveys: A method for assessing levels of interest and engagement with the initiative of related individuals, and the influence of social/political context.

Social network analysis: The mapping of nodes: people, groups, organisations, knowledge sources, drawing connecting using links which describe relationships between the nodes.

Spatial analysis/mapping: Mapping actors and systems dynamics using data from questionnaires, interviews, observations and archival information.

Systems Change Efforts: Interviews with stakeholders that aim to determine how changes in the initiative are related to observed results e.g. how efforts at systems improvement have brought about change.

Systems mapping: A method of graphically displaying a system, including all components, actors and connections, which are continually reviewed for changes. Causal loop connections are used to provide detail on areas of influence, where evaluation can then be focused, Systems mapping is drawn up in collaboration with stakeholders to ensure credibility of interpreted relationships and provide a basis for conversations on systems dynamics.

Time Series Designs: A measurement of the same variable is taken across different time points and levels of a system for comparison.

Time trend analysis: The collection of quantitative data over time to assess trends in dynamics and systemic change.

Visual Language: The use of diagrams supports systems thinking and applies a systems lens to explaining active processes, aiding decision making in complex situations. These diagrams can be used for both reporting and facilitating group sessions.

World Café: A conversational process used for open ended discussion and ‘conversations that matter’ at large-scale events. Stakeholders move between stations over a series of small group rounds addressing different questions on each round. Insights from conversations are then harvesting, as members share the results of their conversations with the larger group.