

Monitoring and evaluation

Key questions and methods

Mary McKaskill, 20 July 2021



- **Check in**
 - **Making evaluation meaningful**
 - **Setting evaluation questions**
 - **Types of data**
 - **Common evaluation methods and choosing the right ones**
 - **Discussion and close**
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Which cat does monitoring and evaluation make you feel like?



What makes evaluation meaningful?

Discuss in breakout rooms



A 'meaningful' approach to evaluation

- **It is embedded into the fabric and culture of the organisation**, not 'bolted' or 'layered' on
 - **Goes with the grain and enhances practice** rather than detracting or undermining it
 - **Generates actionable insight** rather than extracting data to be passed on
 - **Promotes ownership amongst practitioners** instead of outsourcing all evaluation to the 'experts'
 - **Prioritises learning and reflection** over 'proving' and defensiveness
 - **Asks 'evidence of what and for whom?'** rather than applying blanket standards or rigour
 - **Starts with asking good questions**, not trying to deflect questions of others
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Starting point: Asking the right questions



Core elements:

Aim – The thing that gets you up in the morning; the impact that individuals (young people) and communities *achieve for themselves*

Outcomes - the *knowledge, skills and assets* that your provision develops amongst people and communities (and for which you are held accountable), that in turn enable them to achieve impact for themselves

Mechanisms of change - the process through which young people engage and benefit; *what people experience ‘in the moment’* that creates or affects change. Where you can, be explicit about assumptions and context; and reinforce what high quality looks and feels like

Activities: what you do, with whom and in what context, again define high quality

Outcomes: Optimal and functional skills

Optimal skills

- What can be achieved is high-quality supportive environments
- Skill growth can be seen in the short term
- Often expressed as behaviours, indicative of mental skills growing

Functional skills

- What can be achieved in less supportive environments
 - Skill growth seen in the longer term
 - Requires sufficient mental skills to support behaviours
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- **Setting out clear questions is essential to your evaluation being a success**
 - **Measure what's meaningful – it should enhance your work**
 - **All elements of your theory of change should be defined enough so that they are measureable, but that doesn't necessarily mean you should measure everything at a given time**
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Types of data and methods

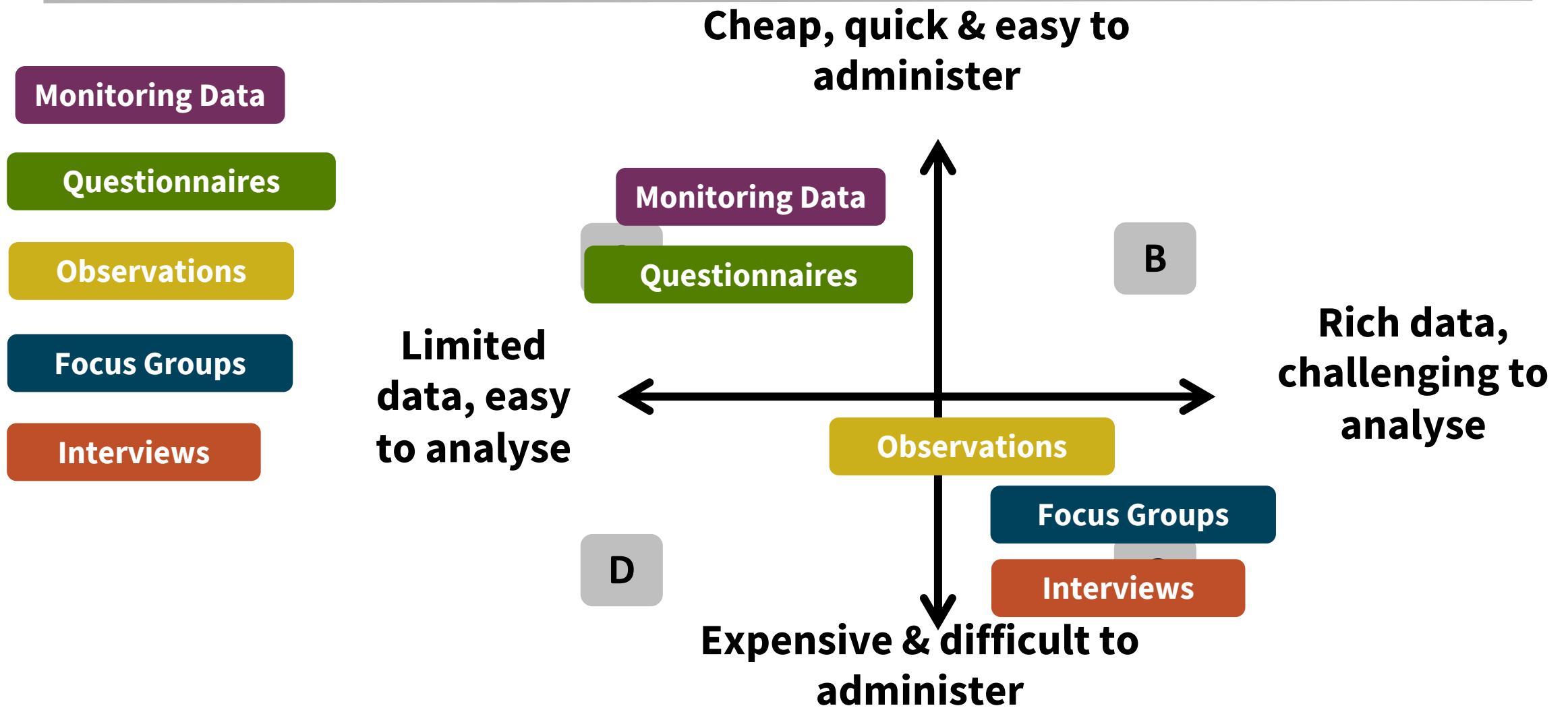


Types of data and building confidence



Adapted from NPC's 5 Types of data <https://www.thinknpc.org/blog/5-types-of-data-for-assessing-your-work-an-explainer/>

Deciding which methods to use



How do you use different methods in your M&E practice?

Discuss in breakout rooms



Using different methods together

The Centre for Youth Impact approach to evaluating social and emotional learning (SEL)

Quality Staff SEL practices

Young people's mental engagement

Young people's SEL skill growth

Structured,
reflective
practice



Listening to
young people's
feedback



Observation
and/or self-
reported
outcomes
measurement

*Youth Programme Quality
Intervention (YPQI)*

Youth Engagement Survey

*Adult Rating of Youth Behaviour
and/or Youth Report of Skills
Survey*

- **No method is inherently better or worse than another – they all have their strengths and limitations**
 - **Be led by the questions you seek to answer when deciding which methods to use**
 - **Systems, skills, and habits can take time to embed and refine**
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Additional practical content



What makes a strong questionnaire?

Valid: measures what it intends to measure

Reliable: the same type of information is obtained from using the method on repeated occasions

Both of these lead to confidence in the evidence

Validated tools are designed to measure well specified changes.

They have been tested by academics, and are widely used. This means they are perceived as reliable and credible.

Benefits

- Well known and data from them is generally accepted as robust and reliable
- Available off the shelf and ready to use
- Often there is clear guidance for how interpret results, including benchmarks

Limitations

- Not always a perfect fit for the context of your project
 - Staff buy-in can be challenging
 - If modified or adapted, they lose their validity
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Styles of Interviews and focus groups

Unstructured

1. Identify themes you want to explore. The fewer themes, the greater depth of info you'll receive

As a general rule, you need around 10 – 15 minutes to explore a theme well.

Semi
Structured

2. Draft questions for each theme. 3 – 5 questions works well

Fully
Structured

3. Consider probes you might use.
Questions may be closed and data analysed like a questionnaire

Benefits

- Mapping out a range of experiences by talking to different people
- Getting an in-depth understanding of individual perspectives and/or sensitive subjects

Limitations

- Time consuming
 - Can be intimidating for people who feel put on the spot
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Benefits

- Understanding points of debate, similarities and contrasts in people's experience
- Generating ideas for changes or improvements
- Lively and interesting discussion

Limitations

- Results cannot be analysed at the individual level
 - Discussions move fast so difficult to get into detail
 - Not good for sensitive topics and can be dominated by the most vocal participants
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Styles of Observations

Unstructured

1. Identify themes you want to explore / questions you want to answer

Semi Structured

2. Create a framework for recording observations.
Semi structured observations have space for free text.

Fully Structured

3. Use scales to record the frequency and type of behavior.
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Benefits

- If looking for a change in behaviours, observing people is generally more reliable than self-report
- Good for understanding context
- Access to situations and people where questionnaires and interviews aren't appropriate

Limitations

- Can be viewed as too subjective – training and clear guidance for the observer is a must to mitigate this
 - Overt vs Covert
 - **Overt:** may affect the situation and thus validity of findings
 - **Covert:** ethical principles could be violated
 - Potential for role conflict for practitioner evaluators
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