Impact Assessment - Theory of Change

Purpose

Students have shown difficulty initially understanding why and how the Impact assessment is vital with the work that is conducted in country. One solution to this was to attempt an impact assessment using the pomodoro technique[1] and one impact assessment tool. The impact assessment tool used was the Theory of Change (ToC)[2]. The activity is called the Impact Pomodoro Session (IPS, very witty I know, open for suggestions).

Using the method of activity, you are sparking the problem solving skills required to finding patterns in the information through their own investigation and analysis. The IPS is used to spark thoughts about the impact the their current project is creating in country.

The Theory of Change is essentially a foundation Impact tool which backward maps out the 'missing middle' section from the project's long term goals down to the activities the project is currently conducting. The Theory of Change does get messy due to mapping out all the necessary pre conditions of the long term goal which aren't all initially visible. The Theory of Change is easiest using a methodical approach, however, don't expect to answer all the steps in a short period of time, it is a tool that is ongoing and will adapt to your business model.

The Pomodoro Technique is used to put the student under pressure with the use of time. The Pomodoro Technique holds you accountable for a specific task which is discussed with everyone when the timer finishes.

Collaborating the teams whilst conducting the IPS will help build insights and ultimately be more productive. Teams will have common activities (e.g. engaging the community via interviews) along the timeline of their projects, which is why collaborating will identify trends in the impact assessment which another project may have not picked up on.

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[1] Pomodoro technique - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pomodoro_Technique, Jan 24 2017

[2] Theory of Change tool - http://www.theoryofchange.org/what-is-theory-of-change/, Jan 24 2017

Materials

- Pomodoro timer - you can download an app or use an online timer called Tomato Timer[3]
- Theory of Change Development Steps[4] - image of steps provided in the appendix below or follow the link in the footnote to acquire an extensive 'Theory of Change Tool Manual'.
    - A laptop - viewing documents
- Pen and Paper
- Headphones (optional - for pomodoro if you are productive listening to music whilst working)
- A group of trekkers/leaders (2-4 people for individual work or 4-10 people for paired work)

Procedure

1. Identify who is participating. Try to aim to get at least one person from each project. If the IPS is for individual work (one person from each team), Pomodoro will operate with complete silence between all participants. If the IPS is for paired work, the Pomodoro will operate with silence between pairs but within the pairs the individuals can collaborate and communicate.

2. Set up a controlled work space, preferably a separate table, where everyone outside of the workspace can not disturb anyone at the table. [insert picture]

3. Make sure everyone has a pen, paper (approx. 5 A4 sheets) for writing the impact assessment (or they can type if they are more efficient with their laptop) and a separate piece of paper for idea dumps, a laptop with an internet connection.

4. When everyone is ready, explain what the Theory of Change is. Could get the trekkers to read a short article on ToC as well. Be aware they may still be in confusion before you start the activity.

5. Explain to the group that the IPS is about to start and it will run for 25 minutes (Pomodoro session), following with a 8 minute discussion for each individual/team. So four impact

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assessments will result in a 32 minute discussion. Strict timings were introduced for participants attenti

6. Get everyone to have the 'Theory of Change Development Steps' visible on their laptop for the entirety of this activity and explain the structure of the tool. Every participant starts from the 'Mission' box and writes the aims and values of their project and follows the steps from there. It is important to clarify that they can revert back to a previous step, this tool will trigger plenty of pathways from the long term goal down to the activities that are being performed currently. Also from experience, the more effort that is put into Step 5 'Who/what will be impacted?' the more pathways that will identified thus greater coverage with assessing the impact.

7. The Pomodoro timer starts now, make sure you turn the volume up so everyone with headphones on will be able to hear the timer finish.

8. Every participant follow the steps until the timer runs out.

9. Once the timer finishes, get someone to read through their assessment. Read the step question, then read the answer quickly. Encourage all participants to write ideas/thoughts onto their assessment whilst the assessment is being read.

10. Provide feedback and ask if anyone has feedback.

11. All participants record results in a document on the drive and the trekker accountable for the impact assessment shall summarise and insert it into the impact assessment detailed template.

Appendix

PROJECT EVEREST

Mission

Assumptions

Step 1: What is the problem that you want to address?

Step 2: What do you see as the underlying causes of the issue or problem?

Step 3: At what depth or level do you want to work?

Step 4: What impact do you want to achieve? What would a solution to the issue/problem look like?

Target Groups

Step 5: Who/ what would be impacted?

Step 6: How could you reach/ influence/impact the identified groups/ structures? What vehicles could you use?

Strategies

Step 7: What tools or processes would you need to impact /influence the identified groups/ structures?

Step 8: What resources (financial, time, skills and knowledge) would you need to employ these tools and processes to effectively influence the target groups?

Step 9: Which resources do you already have?

Step 10: What skills, knowledge and other resources do you need to develop? How can you capitalise on the resources of people who have/are involved in the issue or problem?

Step 11: Who else is working in the field? Are there opportunities for cooperation and partnerships? Is there likely to be competition with others?

Step 12: Can you/do you want to work in partnership with others? Which skills and resources could you 'borrow' from others?

Outcomes

Step 13: How will you know when you have succeeded? What would count as progress/success after 1 year, 2 years, 3 years, and so on? What indicators will you use to measure your achievements/ impact?

Reflections

Step 14: Is this something the Organization could work with? Will the Organization be comfortable and in agreement with this proposal as a reasonable and accurate analysis? A viable plan of action?

Step 15: Once you have determined your Theory of Change, you are well on your way to creating a strategic plan for your organization or updating your current plan to reflect this new thinking. By completing this exercise, you've done much of the hard work that goes into a plan.